

2021

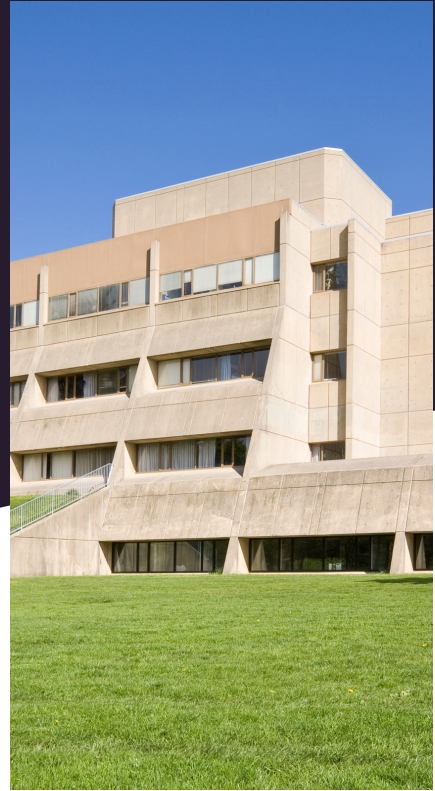
# ***TACKLING ANTISEMITISM***



---

Practical guidance for  
universities in Ontario

# INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND



Antisemitism — a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews — is wrong and should be condemned, whether it occurs on or off the university campus. This guide seeks to provide practical steps that universities in Ontario may adopt in order to tackle a rising tide of antisemitism that has been witnessed in Canada and around the globe.

The recommendations contained within this guide have been developed in consultation with numerous Jewish organizations and Jewish student groups. It has been created to give university administrators the tools needed to ensure that their campuses remain free of antisemitism and a safe space for all students.

Defining antisemitism in a modern context is often challenging, sometimes requiring great knowledge

of Jewish history, classical antisemitism and even modern geo-politics. On a purely practical level, however, antisemitism cannot be combatted unless it is recognizable. Fortunately in Ontario, there exists a definitional framework which provides for its identification.

On October 26, 2020 the Government of Ontario formally adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism by order in council. This made Ontario the first province to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism. The definition was previously adopted by the federal government in June of 2019.

Unfortunately, few government agencies or bodies have understood how to make use of this definition. Many are not even aware of its existence as a potential tool for identifying and responding to antisemitism.



# ANTISEMITISM IN CANADA



It is important to get a sense of the scale of the problem, and to understand the actual landscape of antisemitism. According to Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, 2019) the number of hate crimes targeting the Jewish population increased by 68%, from 221 in 2016 to 372 in 2018.

B'nai Brith, an advocacy organization which has been tracking antisemitic incidents in Canada for over 30 years, reported 2,207 incidents of antisemitism across Canada in 2019 (B'nai Brith, 2019).

In the city of Toronto, which is home to the largest concentration of Jews in Canada, the Jewish community makes up less than 3% of the population. Despite this, Jews have been the most targeted for hate crimes, when compared to any other identifiable group for the past 13 years (as far back as data was available).

In 2020, there were 63 hate crimes committed against the Jewish community, according to the Toronto Police Service's Hate/Bias Crimes Report (Toronto Police Service, 2020).

Globally, it would be difficult to make a case that antisemitism isn't a rising epidemic. From multiple synagogue shootings and regular violent physical assaults in the United States, to the undeniable antisemitism on display in the Labour Party during the 2019 British election, it's clear that Canada is simply experiencing the same rise in anti-Jewish sentiment as the rest of the Western world.

## University Campuses

While the practical guidance offered throughout this document is aimed at tackling antisemitism, many of the recommendations will be additionally relevant not only to Jewish faculty members who may experience antisemitism, but to the broader student population. A university committed to forcefully combatting antisemitism is an institution that takes seriously its responsibility to ensure a welcoming environment. One which promotes education, dialogue and understanding and is free of harassment or intimidation.

While it is hoped that many institutions will adopt the recommendations immediately, it is understood that combatting antisemitism may also be viewed by administrators and institutions as part of their mission to combat racism, discrimination and harassment more generally. The goal of this guide is to offer practical steps towards that goal.

Lastly, the role that university campuses play in fomenting particular brands of antisemitism cannot, and should not, be understated. Antisemitism emanating from university campuses is often couched in the form of anti-Israel rhetoric. **While it must be stated that not all criticism of Israel can be labelled antisemitism, there is a point at which anti-Israel rhetoric devolves into antisemitism. When this rhetoric crosses that threshold, it must be condemned immediately and unequivocally.**

*"There is rampant antisemitism that I've personally faced on campus and its normalized. I've been called a dirty Jew several times on campus by people in my social circle its really disheartening." - J.M. Trent University Student*

# JEWISH LIFE ON CAMPUS



## A lived experience

A key issue for the Jewish community is the overall atmosphere promoted (or enabled) at different institutions across the province, especially as it relates to antisemitism.

Although the majority of incidents on campus often fail to meet the legal threshold of a hate-crime — partly due to the fact that there are only three sections which deal with hate crimes in the Criminal Code — the experience of many Jewish students reflects a trend of increasing hostility.

Antisemitism can be promoted or encouraged (intentionally or not) by university staff, faculty or student union officials and representatives or by students themselves through abusive behavior or hateful comments directed at Jewish classmates.

One of the most common and growing forms of antisemitic harassment reported to various communal organizations involves intimidation, specifically around protest events on campus.

This harassment is often connected to broader political issues or debates (such as those concerning the Middle East, Israel or antisemitic conspiracy theories) and can be especially challenging for Jewish students.

However, the fact that much antisemitic harassment stems from broader political issues cannot be used to excuse it.

## Excusing antisemitism

As stated previously, under the formally adopted definition of antisemitism there is a clear point at which anti-Israel rhetoric or activity devolves into antisemitism. This often occurs when Jewish students face harassment or intimidation and are pressured by peers into either defending the actions of the state of Israel or condemning it.

In Ontario, holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel is a clear-cut case of antisemitism. Yet this fundamental premise, that antisemitism can be related to one's perceptions of Israel, seems to paralyze many institutions.

Antisemitism, regardless of its origins, must be condemned whenever and wherever it occurs. Administrators should not be allowed to excuse it under the premise that they do not wish to involve themselves in divisive foreign issues. Not only is this patently untrue (there is much activism surrounding foreign issues on campus) but seems to only apply to Jewish students with regards to Israel.

*"A professor accused me of being an Israeli spy."  
- A. B. University of Toronto Student*



# PREVENTION & RESPONSE

## Issue #1: Limited understanding of antisemitism

- There is a lack of understanding, not only at post-secondary institutions, but in broader society as to what constitutes antisemitism.
- In many cases, individuals or institutions are guided by incomplete or even inappropriate definitions of antisemitism, meaning that incidents are not always recognized as antisemitic.
- This lack of recognition and understanding is a structural barrier to combatting antisemitism.
- Social media has contributed to the spread of antisemitic beliefs and rhetoric and can be echoed (intentionally or not) at post-secondary institutions.

## Issue #2: Failure to understand/adopt the IHRA definition

- Few, if any, agencies, boards, commissions, ministries or other quasi-governmental or affiliated organizations or post secondary institutions are aware that Ontario has formally adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism.
- There is little understanding of how and when the IHRA definition can be used or applied as a tool or framework in combatting antisemitism.
- The definition continues to be misrepresented and a false narrative has been built around it.
- The removal of illustrative examples of the IHRA definition by some institutions (contrary to provincial directives and the Government House Leader's office) has made it difficult to provide real-world examples of antisemitism, undermining its usefulness.

### **Issue #3: Under-reporting/tracking of antisemitic incidents**

- Many incidents go un-reported as students fear suffering increasing intimidation after making a complaint.
- Repeated failures by college and university administrators to properly address antisemitism has lowered the level of trust students have in their institutions — a key factor in determining whether or not to report a complaint.
- Failure to properly implement Ontario's definition of antisemitism can mean that incidents may not be recorded as antisemitic.
- The lack of standardized data on antisemitism at Ontario post-secondary institutions makes responding to systemic antisemitism impossible.

### **Issue #4: Failure to acknowledge that anti-Israel rhetoric can devolve into antisemitic rhetoric**

- Attempting to draw distinctions between criticism of Israel and criticism of the Jewish people without a proper understanding of what constitutes antisemitism, either broadly or specifically according to the Ontario definition, can lead to increased anti-Jewish sentiment.
- According to Jewish students, attitudes at some university campuses have become increasingly hostile to many issues surrounding the State of Israel and, when combined with a lack of understanding of antisemitism, have contributed to increased antisemitic activity.
- A refusal to examine many positions promoted on campus which claim to be strictly anti-Israel in nature, emboldening those who wish to promote antisemitism under the guise of anti-Israelism.
- Failure to address clear and demonstrable lies and untruths when it comes to anti-Israel demonstrations (examples of antisemitism themselves), but also contributes to an atmosphere of permitted antisemitism on campus.



# THE IHRA DEFINITION



INTERNATIONAL  
**HOLOCAUST  
REMEMBRANCE**  
ALLIANCE

A false narrative has been built surrounding the IHRA definition of antisemitism. This narrative asserts that legitimate criticism of Israel will be conflated with antisemitism; free speech will be restricted; academic freedom may be restricted.

In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. Former Justice Minister and current Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism Irwin Cotler has stated repeatedly that the IHRA definition was created not only to help identify antisemitism but to allow clear room for criticism of the State of Israel and its actions.

The IHRA definition is the culmination of years of work on the topic of antisemitism by over 50 countries, dozens of parliamentarians from across the globe and numerous experts and non-governmental organizations. To date, 34 countries (including Canada) and countless jurisdictions, NGOs and corporations have formally adopted the IHRA definition.

The framework provided by the definition serves as an invaluable resource for detecting antisemitism. In drafting this definition its authors worked laboriously to craft a nuanced but clear framework which strikes a fair balance between free speech and hate speech.

Further, the IHRA definition itself does not mention Israel at all. In fact, the only place it is mentioned is in a section of theoretical, but still integral, examples of antisemitism such as blaming Jews as a whole for the actions of the State of Israel or

accusing Israel of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust. **Given the vagueness of the definition and the fact that it makes no reference to Israel, one might ask what, precisely, do its detractors want to say that in their view would unfairly be characterized as antisemitic?**

It is in this vein that it recognizes that anti-Zionism is far too often a mask for antisemitism, such as when the right of self-determination is denied to the Jewish people but accepted or even promoted for other groups, such as the Palestinians.

Additionally, it also addresses the so-called 'partial boycotts of Israel' — mainly organized around the larger *Boycott Divestment and Sanctions* (BDS) movement — for the anti-Jewish character of the movement's philosophy.

Specifically, it highlights statements which have removed any Jewish connection to portions of the Land of Israel. This includes advocating boycotting of some Jewish businesses or asserting that there is "nothing anti-Semitic in criticizing the State of Israel for building settlements in territory occupied during previous conflicts."

These types of statements remove the Jewish connection to the areas in question, and assume that Israel — and by extension the Jewish people — has no claim to the land, otherwise. This includes portions of Jerusalem, such as the Old City and its Jewish Quarter, cities referenced in the Torah like Hebron and Shechem and even the Judean hills where the famous Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

# THE IHRA DEFINITION: EXAMPLES



INTERNATIONAL  
**HOLOCAUST  
REMEMBRANCE**  
ALLIANCE

The following examples taken directly from the IHRA website may serve as illustrations.

Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for “why things go wrong.” It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
  - Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
  - Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
  - Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
  - Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
  - Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
  - Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
  - Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
  - Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
  - Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.

**Antisemitic acts** are criminal when they are so defined by law (for example, denial of the Holocaust or distribution of antisemitic materials in some countries).

**Criminal acts** are antisemitic when the targets of attacks, whether they are people or property – such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries – are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Jewish or linked to Jews.

**Antisemitic discrimination** is the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others and is illegal in many countries.



# ***RECOMMENDATIONS***



- Post-secondary institutions in Ontario should immediately act to incorporate the provincial (IHRA) definition into their policies and procedures as a tool in detecting and combatting antisemitism.
- Institutions should, in consultation with staff and student communities – especially groups representing Jewish students – define antisemitic activity such as harassment or intimidation using clear examples.
  - Jewish student voices **MUST** be allowed to lead the discussion in what they feel is an acceptable understanding of campus antisemitism.
- Conduct a review to determine which staff are most likely to benefit from a detailed understanding of antisemitism, with a special focus on those responsible for handling complaints or enforcing anti-discrimination policies.
  - These staff should then be provided with appropriate training and education.

- Consider adopting or amending guidelines on how to respectfully discuss difficult political issues, especially those relating to Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East, without engaging in antisemitism.
  - Make clear that anti-Israel rhetoric which rises to the level of antisemitism will be addressed swiftly, in the same manner as any other form of racism or antisemitism.
  - Demand groups engaging in anti-Israel rhetoric be honest and truthful in their criticism, and penalize those groups which consistently use false narratives or unsupportable claims in their dialogue about Israel.
- Ensure that any complaints of harassment, intimidation or discrimination are dealt with in a timely manner. This should be done using standardized policies and procedures which provide equal treatment of all harassment, intimidation or discrimination complaints, regardless of victim, perpetrator or motivation.
  - Adequately inform all parties when expected timelines cannot be met due to unforeseen circumstances in order to build trust in the system.
  - Ensure that allowances and protections are made for the reporting party in cases where there exists a power imbalance such as in a student-educator relationship.



- Improve or build relationships with Jewish groups on campus by ensuring a welcoming environment for Jewish students and staff.
  - This can include ensuring support for access to kosher food or arrangements to avoid exams taking place on Jewish holidays
  - Consider partnering with these groups to raise awareness of antisemitism, and encourage Jewish voices to lead the discussion of combatting antisemitism and anti-Jewish sentiment on campus.
- Ensure that policies and procedures for handling racial harassment complaints include complaints of antisemitism and are enforced properly.
  - Provide regular training to staff dealing with complaints to ensure they are up to date on best practices.
- Work to ensure that academic lessons and discussions relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict are based on fact and not conjecture, much of which may, even unintentionally, fuel antisemitism.

## *SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS*



**HASBARA**  
FELLOWSHIPS  
C A N A D A  
*Empowering Advocates for Israel*



**LA'AD**  
CANADA

**CAEF**  
Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation  
*Dedicated to promoting tolerance and understanding*

***TACKLING  
ANTISEMITISM***

Practical guidance for  
universities in Ontario