

# **Reject the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism**

## **Defend free speech and human rights advocacy**

Antisemitism is real. It must be confronted and dismantled. But the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Definition of Antisemitism is not the way to do it. We call on our Massachusetts elected officials to reject H.1558, “An Act relative to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism”, an act that would codify this definition into law.



### **The IHRA definition is deceptive.**

The [IHRA definition](#) is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Although the definition looks innocuous at first glance, the examples accompanying the definition reveal its true purpose. Of the eleven examples, seven reference Israel. One, for example, says that calling Israel a racist endeavor is antisemitic (conflating political speech with religious speech). Another says that it is antisemitic to criticize Israel without also criticizing other countries. Its proponents explicitly state that one of its [main purposes](#) is to target human rights groups that defend

Palestinian rights. Rather than focusing on the root cause of antisemitism – white supremacy -- it focuses on protecting Israel from criticism, but does so by appealing to legitimate concerns about rising antisemitism, thus weaponizing claims of antisemitism to silence voices for justice and human rights.

### **The IHRA definition is damaging.**

The IHRA definition infringes on freedom of speech and perpetuates racism against Palestinian activism. Virtually all instances of invoking the IHRA definition punitively target advocacy for Palestinian justice.

The IHRA definition has been used to discipline, fire, and demonize academics and students who condemn Israeli attacks on Palestinians. Concerts and art exhibits have been canceled, politicians have been accused of antisemitism for speaking out on behalf of human rights for Palestinians, and global human rights organizations have been condemned for documenting Israeli apartheid. One of the main drafters of the IHRA definition, Professor Kenneth Stern, frequently speaks out against its codification, on the grounds that it is being used to silence legitimate debate, saying “[Rightwing Jews are weaponizing it.](#)”

"Those who seek to protest, boycott, or otherwise criticize the Israeli government are being silenced." ACLU

### **The IHRA definition is widely disputed and hugely controversial.**

The claim by its proponents that the IHRA definition is the “consensus” definition of antisemitism is patently false.

- More than 300 scholars (many Jewish) of Holocaust Studies, Antisemitism, Jewish History endorsed [a rejection](#) of the IHRA definition and [128 scholars](#) of antisemitism who urged the UN not to adopt it.

- [The American Association of University Professors](#) condemned it as a threat to academic freedom. The [American Bar Association](#) removed it from its definition of antisemitism.
- [More than 100 civil society groups](#), including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the ACLU, B'Tselem, and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights urged the U.N. not to adopt it.
- Dozens of U.S. Jewish organizations including [Union for Reform Judaism, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and Women of Reform Judaism](#) say it should not be codified into law.
- The [American Civil Liberties Union](#), the [Center for Constitutional Rights](#), the [National Lawyers Guild](#), and [Palestine Legal](#) call it a threat to free speech.

**The IHRA definition is part of a larger right-wing attack on protest and dissent.**

Members of the rightwing think tank, American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), are pushing for the codification of the IHRA definition. Former President Trump's 2019 [executive order](#) instructed government agencies to use the IHRA definition as guidance on anti-Semitism. In the context of rising white supremacy, the IHRA definition is a dangerous model for suppressing other forms of speech and protest.

**Codifying this definition in Massachusetts would create a legislative nightmare.**

There are no legally binding definitions for other forms of ethnic, racial or religious discrimination. Defining antisemitism by law would require defining all these other forms of discrimination as well. The IHRA definition was already defeated in Massachusetts in 2021.

**We call on our elected officials to reject codification of the IHRA definition and link the fight against antisemitism with fighting all forms of racism.**



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<http://waterjusticeinpalestine.org/>

<http://jvp-boston.org/>

<http://masspeaceaction.org>

**Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East (Boston Chapter)**