



A Watershed in Fighting Antisemitism: The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism

an·ti·Sem·i·tism

/,an(t)ē'semə'tizəm, ,an,tī'semə'tizəm/

noun

noun: **antisemitism**

hostility to or prejudice against Jews.



A SIMON WIESENTHAL CENTER REPORT
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The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism has been described by US Special Envoy on Antisemitism Elan Carr as a “watershed” in the fight against antisemitism. Outside of the 34 member nations of IHRA it has been further adopted or endorsed by over 25 countries and international organizations such as the UN. In the US it is used by the State Department, Department of Education and served as the basis of President Trump’s Executive Order on Antisemitism. In this report, Wiesenthal Center Director of Government Affairs Mark Weitzman who introduced and steered the Working Definition to adoption describes what this essential tool is, how it came into prominence and what its impact has been.

Since 2000 I have represented the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) and the Association of Holocaust Organizations (AHO) as a member of the official State Department delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). As a result, I was uniquely positioned to represent the US government and the SWC at the only intergovernmental body focused solely on the Holocaust and antisemitism.

The IHRA is an intergovernmental organization that consists of 34 member nations. Its mandate is to “Strengthen, advance, and promote Holocaust education, remembrance, and research” and to fight antisemitism and Holocaust denial.

IHRA experts include scholars, educators, and museum and memorial staff from across the world, along with diplomats and government officials familiar with issues related to the Holocaust, antisemitism, and human rights. As Chair of the IHRA’s Committee on Antisemitism and the Holocaust I was the lead author of a ‘Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion’ that was adopted under the Canadian Chairmanship in 2013.

“The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism and its examples have been a watershed.”

- ELAN S. CARR
Special Envoy to Monitor & Combat Antisemitism
February 4, 2020



L-R: Karel Fracapane, UNESCO; Kenote speaker Professor Irwin Cotler, former Justice Minister of Canada; Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief and author of the report on anti-semitism; and Mark Weitzman, SWC Director for Government Affairs.

In 2014, in the same capacity, I introduced the ‘Working Definition of Antisemitism’ to IHRA. In partnership with the late Ambassador Mihnea Constantinescu, the Romanian Chair of IHRA in 2016, we steered the definition to its adoption by the then 31-member countries.

The continuous rise in antisemitism over the preceding years created a sense of urgency within IHRA that it had to take an activist role in fighting these new outbreaks. Given the diversity of experts and diplomats involved, each representing different countries and perspectives, it was apparent from the onset that we needed common vocabulary to deal effectively with these complex and sensitive topics. Our intent was to create a legally non-binding tool that would offer a practical baseline in recognizing and defining antisemitism in all its forms. The “IHRA Working Definition” was the result. It consists of a clear definition of antisemitism along with specific examples to illustrate the forms in which antisemitism manifests in our time. These include both traditional themes and tropes, and newer forms related to Israel.



IHRA Plenary upon adoption

Here is the full text of the “IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism”

In the spirit of the Stockholm Declaration that states: “With humanity still scarred by ... antisemitism and xenophobia the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils” the committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial called the IHRA Plenary in Budapest 2015 to adopt the following working definition of antisemitism.

On 26 May 2016, the Plenary in Bucharest decided to adopt the following non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

To guide IHRA in its work, the following examples 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.
- 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.



Mark Weitzman speaking at IHRA Plenary, Ferrara Italy, Nov. 2011

- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

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.

Since its adoption by IHRA in May 2016, the following countries have adopted or endorsed the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism:

Austria (April 2017)	Lithuania (January 2018)
Belgium (December 2018)	Luxembourg (July 2019)
Bulgaria (October 2017)	Moldova (January 2019)
Canada (June 2019)	The Netherlands (November 2018)
Cyprus (December 2019)	North Macedonia (March 2018)
Czech Republic (January 2019)	Romania (May 2017)
France (December 2019)	Serbia (February 2020)
Germany (September 2017)	Slovakia (December 2018)
Greece (November 2019)	Slovenia (December 2018)
Hungary (February 2019)	Sweden (January 2020)
Israel (January 2017)	United Kingdom (December 2016)
Italy (January 2020)	Uruguay (January 2020)

In the United States, the Working Definition was adopted by the State Department, which posted it on its website stating: [“The United States now uses this working definition and has encouraged other governments and international organizations to use it as well.”](#) It is also used by the U.S. Department of Education and served as the basis of President Trump’s Executive Order on Antisemitism of December 2019, which refers specifically to the IHRA Definition. A number of American states (Florida, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Arizona and New York) have either passed legislation, or have legislation pending based on the definition, or had governors recognize the definition.

Both the European Commission and the European Parliament have recommended use of the Working Definition, with the Commission calling it “an essential tool (for) tackling antisemitism.”

The Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS) endorsed the Definition in the name of the OAS Secretariat.

ODIHR, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which is the human rights arm of the 57-member nations of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) has used the definition for both education and data collecting about antisemitism.

[UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the Definition](#) can, “Serve as a basis for law enforcement, as well as preventive policies,” while in his landmark report on antisemitism that was delivered to the United Nations General Assembly last fall, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Ahmed Shaheed, wrote that the Working Definition, “can offer valuable guidance” and “recommends its use as a critical non-legal educational tool.”

In the United Kingdom the Definition, adopted by over 150 localities, was recommended for training all Crown Prosecutors by the Crown Prosecution Service and the Judicial College endorsed it for training judges. It is also used by the United Kingdom College of Policing in its police training. In Germany, the Berlin judiciary and state police are also using the definition for training and similar efforts are being carried out in Austria.

Other British institutions that have adopted the definition include the Church of England, a number of universities and even the Chelsea Football Club intends to use the definition as part of its campaign against antisemitism in soccer.

The growing international acceptance of the Working Definition has drawn criticism, especially as relates to the examples regarding Israel. Some opponents falsely allege that examples citing Israel were not part of the IHRA definition. As stated by the IHRA Chair Ambassador Constantinescu and myself, the definition and illustrative examples form a single text that was officially adopted by the IHRA plenary in Bucharest.

Other critics argue that the definition and illustrative examples forbid criticism of Israel. This too is absolutely false since the definition explicitly notes: "Criticism of Israel similar to that level against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic." Hence, charges of attempted censorship of criticism of Israel is a deliberate misreading of the Definition.

Enemies of Israel, who seek the demise of the Jewish State are worried: A Canadian pro-BDS group says that the proposed Canadian law to adopt the definition is the "most dangerous" threat to the success of the BDS movement in Canada. Indeed, European countries who've adopted the definition have used it as the basis of legislation condemning anti-Zionism and BDS.

In the United Kingdom, the IHRA definition helped to clearly expose Jeremy Corbyn and Labour's patterns of antisemitism. After initially refusing to listen to the Anglo-Jewish communities' call to endorse the definition, the Labour Party finally did so over Corbyn's opposition. Having to force Labour to act exposed to all British voters just how deep the problem of Labour and antisemitism is, a fact that contributed to Corbyn's landslide defeat.

When the IHRA Working Definition on Antisemitism was adopted in 2016, I described it as a "Tool in the IHRA tool kit for combatting antisemitism." Its rapid and widespread use has clearly proven the value of the definition. As former Justice Minister of Canada and human rights icon, Irwin Cotler put it: "The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism which addresses both the old and the new forms of antisemitism does exactly what is needed."

This report was written by Mark Weitzman, Director of Government Affairs for the Simon Wiesenthal Center who is also Chief Representative of the Center to the United Nations in New York. Mr. Weitzman is a member of the official US delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Authority (IHRA) where he chaired the Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial and is currently chairing the Working Group on Holocaust Museums and Memorials.

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