



June 24, 2021

VIA EMAIL

Dear University President:

We are 30 national organizations across the religious and political spectrums that share a deep concern about rising antisemitism in the U.S. and around the world, including on American college campuses. There is a critical and much-needed step you can take to help tackle this alarming problem: adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism. The IHRA definition is a useful tool for understanding the hatred of Jews in all of its manifestations so that this problem can be effectively addressed.

Antisemitism is at Historically High Levels

Recent statistics and reports about antisemitism in the U.S. are disheartening and illustrate why we must all come together to understand how this age-old hatred is expressed today. For more than 40 years, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has tracked incidents of antisemitic harassment, vandalism and assault in the U.S. In 2018, the ADL reported that antisemitism was at [“near-historic levels.”](#) The single deadliest attack on Jews in American history occurred in October of that year, when 11 Jews were murdered at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and six other individuals were wounded.

In 2019, the ADL reported that antisemitism [“hit an all-time high,”](#) and there was a frightening 56% increase in assaults on Jews. In April 2019, a man claiming that Jews “are trying to destroy all white people” opened fire at the Chabad of Poway in California, killing one congregant and injuring several others.

In 2020, which we spent mostly in lockdown or with restricted access to schools, synagogues, and other places of people-gathering, incidents of antisemitism nevertheless remained high. In fact, 2020 was still the [third highest year on record](#) since the ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979. Antisemites found new ways to express their hatred of Jews during the pandemic, including by falsely [blaming Jews and Israel](#) for the spread of COVID-19.

Israel’s recent efforts to protect its citizens from rocket attacks launched by the U.S.-designated terrorist group Hamas in Gaza, and from other Palestinian Arab attacks on Jewish civilians, synagogues, and businesses in Israel, have wrongly fueled antisemitism in Europe and the U.S. In [Germany](#), for example, anti-Israel demonstrators shouted antisemitic slogans, burned the Israeli flag, and threw rocks through the windows of synagogues across the country. In [London](#), individuals in a convoy of cars emblazoned with Palestinian Arab flags blasted their horns and screamed vulgar anti-Jewish obscenities through a loudspeaker. Over a recent 10-day period, the United Kingdom saw a [438 percent increase](#) in antisemitic incidents, mostly related to Gaza and Israel.

In Illinois, someone [smashed](#) the window of a Skokie synagogue and left behind a flag and a pro-Palestinian Arab sign. In Los Angeles, a caravan of men waving Palestinian Arab flags [physically attacked](#) a group of Jewish diners outside a restaurant, shouting antisemitic slurs. In [Manhattan](#), pro-Palestinian Arab demonstrators yelled “f**king Zionist” and similar expletives and a woman was burned when fireworks were thrown from a car.

The recent surge of hatred and violence against Jews engenders anxiety and even fear in Jews everywhere, including on our college campuses.

Understanding and Identifying Antisemitism is Crucial to Effectively Addressing It

Recent studies illustrate the importance of having a guide for understanding and identifying antisemitism, including for college administrators, faculty, and others who comprise our university communities in the U.S. Last October, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) released an important [survey on the “State of Antisemitism in America.”](#) The survey revealed “a disturbing lack of awareness among the general public about the severity of antisemitism in the United States.” Almost half of all Americans say that they have either never heard the term “antisemitism” (21%) or they are familiar with the term but are not sure what it means (25%). Furthermore, 72% of Americans say that if a Jewish person or organization considers a statement or an idea to be antisemitic, it would either not make a difference to them (65%) or make them less likely (7%) to consider it antisemitic. As the AJC aptly [put it](#), “The lack of awareness and refusal to enable Jews to define hatred against them create a dangerous breeding ground for anti-Jewish hostility.”

Lest any of us think that education is what makes people more tolerant and less hostile to Jews, another recent study shockingly suggests the opposite – that Americans with college and graduate degrees are more likely to be antisemitic than less educated Americans. [According to researchers at the University of Arkansas](#), “Contrary to previous claims, education appears to provide no protection against anti-Semitism, and may in fact serve to license it – in part by providing people with more sophisticated and socially acceptable ways to couch it.”

The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism is an Important and Needed Tool

That is why the [IHRA working definition of antisemitism](#) is such a crucial tool, even for well-educated college administrators, professors, staff, students and others. The IHRA definition includes a core description of antisemitism as “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews.” Importantly, it also includes the following contemporary examples of antisemitism:

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

The IHRA definition does not speak in absolutes. It expressly notes that in considering these contemporary examples, context is crucial. In addition, the definition makes it clear that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.”

The IHRA Definition’s Wide and Growing Acceptance in the U.S. and Around the World

The IHRA definition is gaining wide acceptance throughout the world. The U.S. government has adopted it. Secretary of State Antony Blinken confirmed that the Biden administration “[enthusiastically embraces](#)” the IHRA definition, including the examples of antisemitism that relate to Israel. [Approximately 30 other countries](#) have already adopted the definition, as have [U.S. states](#) and [cities](#) around the world.

Last October, the [Global Imams Council](#), comprised of Muslim religious leaders from all denominations, adopted the IHRA definition. Even the [sports world](#) has begun adopting the definition.

Colleges and universities are also joining this rising trend. Oxford University and Cambridge University are among the growing number of universities in the United Kingdom that have adopted the definition. In the U.S., numerous [student governments](#) at colleges and universities across the country have adopted the IHRA definition, and some [university administrations](#) have adopted it as well.

There is good reason for the IHRA definition's growing acceptance: It reflects the actual experience of members of the Jewish community.

Critics claim that using the definition will stifle free speech. But there is nothing in the definition that restricts speech. It is simply a tool for understanding how antisemitism can be expressed today. Knowing how to identify antisemitism is the first step to fighting this ugly problem.

That is why we urge your university to adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism. With the IHRA definition as a helpful guide, you will be supporting our country's fight against anti-Jewish bigotry. And you will help ensure that Jewish students are afforded the safe, tolerant and welcoming environment that every student deserves.

We are all counting on you and look forward to your response.

Very truly yours,

Alpha Epsilon Pi

American Values

Americans for Peace and Tolerance

B'nai B'rith International

Christians and Jews United for Israel

Christians' Israel Public Action Campaign

Club Z

Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA)

Endowment for Middle East Truth

Fuel For Truth

Gross Family Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust

Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America

Hillel at Florida International University

Institute of Black Solidarity with Israel

Israel365

Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey

Jewish National Fund-USA

Latino Coalition for Israel

Lawfare Project

Louis D. Brandeis Center For Human Rights Under Law

National Jewish Advocacy Center

Northeastern University Hillel

Orthodox Union

Proclaiming Justice to the Nations
Rutgers Hillel
Scholars for Peace in the Middle East
StandWithUs
StopAntisemitism.org
Students Supporting Israel
Zionist Organization of America