



May 23, 2023

VIA FEDERAL EXPRESS

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On the eve of Passover 2023, you [assured](#) the Jewish community that you stand with them and that you are committed to the safety of the Jewish people. You recognized that the expression of Jew-hatred is “a stain on the soul of our nation” and you committed our nation to condemning antisemitism “at every turn.” It is therefore imperative that your forthcoming action plan to combat antisemitism recognize the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism as the one and only official definition of antisemitism that will be used by the federal government.

The IHRA definition is accepted around the world. Approximately 40 countries have adopted it and, as of December 2022, [a total of 1,116 global entities](#) have endorsed it. More than half of the states in the U.S. have also adopted the definition, as have numerous cities, towns and counties across our nation. In October 2020, 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.

The IHRA definition has been used in its current or similar form by the past several administrations, including yours. Shortly after your inauguration, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that your administration “[enthusiastically embraces](#)” the IHRA definition, including the examples of antisemitism related to Israel.

Most significantly, the IHRA definition is embraced by the American Jewish community. Last Friday, more than 550 rabbis from all three major Jewish denominations [urged](#) your administration to adopt the IHRA definition as “the official and only definition used by the United States government,” and to use the definition “as a training and educational tool,” similar to its use by the European Union countries. These rabbis emphasized that “IHRA is critically important for helping to educate and protect our congregants in the face of this rising hate.”

Furthermore, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations – the umbrella group for more than 50 American Jewish organizations across the political and religious spectrums and of which the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) is a proud charter member – unanimously approved the adoption of the IHRA definition. Not a single organization voted against it.

For years, the ZOA has been helping students in schools and on college campuses who have been harassed and discriminated against because they are Jewish and support their ancestral homeland, Israel. We know firsthand that the IHRA definition is vital to our efforts to protect the rights of these and all Jewish students to a learning environment that is physically and psychologically safe.

The IHRA definition has garnered wide acceptance in the United States and around the world for good reason: It is an excellent and crucial tool for understanding how antisemitism is expressed today, including when the hatred of Jews is masked as criticism of Israel. The 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 contemporary examples of antisemitism, including relating to Israel, which reflect the actual experiences of the Jewish community. The IHRA

definition does not characterize all criticism of Israel as antisemitic; it expressly states that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.”

Groups of academics and activists have created other definitions of antisemitism, including the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA) and the Nexus Document. These definitions are deeply flawed, minimizing and even denying the fact that hatred of Jews is often expressed today as hatred toward the Jewish state of Israel. Including either one of these definitions in your action plan together with the IHRA definition would be a huge mistake, creating confusion instead of clarity about what constitutes antisemitism. Conflicting definitions of antisemitism in your action plan would hinder, not help our nation’s important and necessary battle against all forms of Jew-hatred.

The JDA and the Nexus Document are also dangerous, wrongly shielding antisemites who try to mask their hatred of Jews by expressing it as hatred for the Jewish state. For example, the Nexus Document states that opposition to Zionism – i.e., the right of the Jewish people to self-determination and to live as a nation-state in their religious and ancestral homeland – is not necessarily antisemitic. The Nexus Document fails to appreciate that for many if not most Jews, their connection to their religious and ancestral homeland is an essential part of their Jewish identity.

The Nexus Document also states that “disproportionate focus on Israel and treating Israel differently than other countries cannot necessarily be considered antisemitic.” But if Israel – the one and only Jewish state in the world – is singled out for criticism and punishment, then there can be no doubt that antisemitism is at play.

The JDA is even more problematic. It does not even recognize that anti-Zionism, i.e., denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, is antisemitism.

The many flaws in these two definitions demonstrate why they, unlike the IHRA definition, lack wide acceptance around the world. The IHRA definition is the best resource for understanding the many ways that antisemitism is expressed today, which is the first step to effectively addressing this ugly bigotry. To protect the safety of the Jewish people and the soul of our nation, and to condemn antisemitism at every turn, we respectfully urge you to recognize the IHRA definition as the one and only official definition of antisemitism to be used by the federal government.

Respectfully,



Morton A. Klein
National President



Susan B. Tuchman, Esq.
Dir., Center for Law & Justice



Elizabeth Berney, Esq.
Dir., Special Projects

cc: Susan Rice (via email)
Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall (via email)
Alexander Pascal (via email)
Melissa Rogers (via email)
Shelley A. Greenspan (via email)
Cynthia R. Bernstein (via email)