

J-Link Coordinating Committee

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J-Link and the Definitions of Antisemitism

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Antisemitism and the rising number of antisemitic acts worldwide are an important and legitimate source of insecurity within world Jewry. The issue raises concern among other vulnerable groups who are against all forms of racism.

Both Jews and non-Jews who express criticism of Israeli policies and actions are concerned that these critiques will be interpreted as antisemitic. This poses a dilemma for everyone who values freedom of expression.

The IHRA definition is an attempt to provide clarity as to what constitutes antisemitism and includes examples of judgements about Israel that might constitute antisemitism. The intention is to provide guidance, not to legislate or create a criminal offence.

The IHRA definition, which is the outcome of an international, intergovernmental effort was welcomed by many Jewish organizations and approved by many governments and institutions in various countries. However, experience has shown that this well-meaning effort has created anxiety among those who feel that the IHRA definition is too vague, does not relate to other forms of racism and intolerance and has been applied inappropriately to stifle legitimate criticism of Israel.

Based on these experiences and aiming at addressing some consequences that flowed from misuses of the IHRA definition, two other definitions, the Nexus and Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, have been created by highly respected historians and specialists in Holocaust studies. The Jerusalem Declaration in particular distinguishes with precision expressions of antisemitism from legitimate criticism of Israel. None of these groups is looking to 'weaponize' the definition of antisemitism or to stifle freedom of speech.

J-Link is presenting all three definitions for your consideration. Our concern is that the divisiveness over which definition is preferred is creating unfortunate divisions between groups who should speak out as allies against all forms of racism. It is creating a chill about the cherished value of freedom of speech – even when the views expressed are distasteful – but not hateful. And most importantly, we do not support the codification into law of any definition – that is the role of our hate crimes legislation.

Yours respectfully,

J-Link Coordinating Committee,

Kenneth Bob (Ameinu, U.S.A.), Barbara Landau (JSpaceCanada, Canada), Alon Liel (Policy Working Group, Israel), Pablo Lummerman (J-AmLat, Argentina), Giorgio Gomel (JCall Europe, Italy), Gabriella Saven (The Jewish Democratic Initiative, South Africa).

J-Link is an international network of progressive Jewish organizations. We share a love of Israel and a commitment to democracy, human rights, religious pluralism, and a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We believe in the values enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence, which promise "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex." For more visit: www.jlinknetwork.org