

IHRA WORKING DEFINITION RESOURCE TOOLKIT FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

WHY DO WE NEED TO DEFINE ANTISEMITISM?

[AJC's State of Antisemitism in America 2020](#) report showed that nearly half (43 percent) of American Jews aged 18-29 have either personally experienced an act of antisemitism on campus, or know someone who has. **A common, comprehensive definition of antisemitism** will help leaders at all levels of society understand and address this growing threat.

WHAT IS THE IHRA WORKING DEFINITION?

In 2005, the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) developed a “working definition” of antisemitism to help government and civil society monitors recognize and address hatred directed toward Jews. In 2016, the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#) (IHRA), an organization of thirty-one countries at the time, adopted the 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.”

Crucially, the Working Definition offers clear examples of antisemitism in varied forms, including some relating to Israel. The full definition, including examples, can be accessed [here](#).

More than a dozen student governments in the U.S. have passed resolutions condemning antisemitism and adopting Working Definition language since 2015. A full list is available [here](#).

WHAT DOES “ADOPTION” OF THE WORKING DEFINITION MEAN?

Adopting the Working Definition signals the university's and/or student government's **commitment to addressing the concerns of their Jewish community and to protecting Jewish students**. Utilizing the Working Definition as an educational tool ensures universities have clarity in addressing antisemitism across university departments and in codes of conduct.

According to AJC's [State of Antisemitism in America 2020 report](#), 85% of American Jews and 74% of the U.S. general public say the statement “Israel has no right to exist” is antisemitic. Adopting the Working Definition acknowledges what the vast majority of people easily agree upon: denying the Jewish people's right to self-determination is a form of antisemitism.

In recent years, some students have used anti-Zionism as a litmus test to exclude Jews from progressive circles. Demanding that Jewish students renounce an element of Jewish identity to participate in other causes they care about is antisemitic. No other minority group is asked to leave parts of their identity at the door. The Working Definition directly addresses and educates against this type of discrimination.

THE ‘SILENCING ANTI-ISRAEL SPEECH’ MYTH

- **Does the Working Definition silence criticism of Israel?**

The Working Definition explicitly defends criticism of Israel, stating “Criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.”

- **Does the Working Definition silence Palestinian voices?**

The Working Definition does not call Palestinian advocacy antisemitic; it distinguishes between criticism of Israel and antisemitic demonization of the Jewish state.

- **Would adopting the Working Definition give preferential treatment to Jewish Students?**

The Working Definition is meant to educate, not provide additional protections for Jewish students nor seek to penalize students who engage in anti-Israel campus activity. As British sociologist David Hirsh rightly notes, “the portrayal of the struggle against antisemitism as a demand for Jewish privilege is as old as antisemitism itself.”

HOW CAN I HELP — GETTING THE WORKING DEFINITION ADOPTED ON YOUR CAMPUS?

Here’s how you can get your university to adopt the Working Definition:

Present the Working Definition to your student government and/or school administration and ask for adoption, utilizing this document as a resource.

Identify institutions that have passed the Working Definition and ask student leaders on those campuses to share stories and the texts of their student government resolutions as a model for your campus.

Encourage alumni to send letters to university leaders encouraging adoption of the Working Definition.

Ask for your Jewish and ally peers to make adoption of the Working Definition a central piece of their responses to university-issued student satisfaction surveys and campus climate studies.

Reinforce the Working Definition’s value and use as an educational tool in your meetings, op-eds, and conversations about antisemitism.

Invite AJC experts to speak with you and your peers about combating antisemitism and advocacy on the Working Definition. Contact us at campus@ajc.org to get started.