

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE ALLIANCE (IHRA) WORKING DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

What is the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism?

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism provides a comprehensive description of antisemitism accompanied by a set of practical examples that can be used in context to determine whether something is or is not antisemitic. These include discrimination and hatred of Jews, conspiracy theories, Holocaust denial, and antisemitism as it can relate to Israel.

Why was it created?

In the early 2000s, antisemitism resurged in Europe. Jewish leaders reported a high level of anxiety among Jewish communities and identified that attacks on Jewish targets were coming from multiple sources. In addition to the more traditional far-right, xenophobic antisemitism, a different form of antisemitism emerged in which attackers alleged that Jews were “agents of Israel” and vandalized Jewish sites in response to events in the Middle East. Neither government officials nor law enforcement labeled these aggressions as antisemitic, as though anger toward Israel somehow justified harassing Jewish worshipers or threatening Jewish schoolchildren. Official hate crimes data were also limited and most of the monitors of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) lacked any definition of antisemitism that could guide their work.

As a result, the EUMC—working in partnership with American Jewish Committee (AJC) and with the assistance of other Jewish organizations and academic experts—drafted and adopted the Working Definition of Antisemitism in March of 2005. Government authorities and civil society organizations quickly implemented the definition in their work monitoring and responding to antisemitic incidents. By way of example, the United Kingdom incorporated the definition as an essential resource in police cadet training and the U.S. Department of State utilized the definition in its first report on global antisemitism. In May 2016, IHRA, an international organization of thirty-one governments at the time, formally adopted a slightly modified version of the definition. Today, the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism is recognized internationally as the clear, comprehensive, and authoritative definition of antisemitism.

Why is it important?

As antisemitism rises in the U.S. and around the world, we know we cannot properly fight what we cannot define. We also know that fighting antisemitism is a societal problem and not just a burden for the Jewish community alone. AJC’s 2022 *State of Antisemitism in America* report found that 91% of U.S. adults believe antisemitism is a problem for everyone and affects society as a whole.

How is it used?

AJC advocates for the adoption of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism as an educational tool for all those who have a responsibility to address antisemitism.

- It can help uncover a possible bias motivation behind a crime or incident and enhance the ability of police, prosecutors, and judges to respond.
- It can improve data collection of hate crimes by having a streamlined definition.
- It can help identify antisemitism when it appears in coded language that refers to Israel and help ordinary citizens to better draw the line between Israel-related antisemitism and legitimate criticism of Israeli policies.
- It is a valuable guide for civil society groups, universities, social media platforms, sports organizations, and others who want to encourage civil discourse and prevent racist, antisemitic, and other intolerant actions.
- It recognizes that the perspective of the affected community is key when addressing discrimination and hatred.

Who is using it?

AJC has successfully advocated for the endorsement of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism in the United States and around the world. As of January 2023, the definition has been endorsed by over 1,000 entities, including governments, universities, civil society organizations, and more.

- Over half of all U.S. states and dozens of local municipalities have formally adopted the definition, in many cases a result of AJC advocacy.

It continues to inform the State Department in its global fight against antisemitism and to guide the Department of Education when carrying out its responsibility to address antisemitism on college campuses.

- Nearly forty countries and dozens of cities and regional governments around the world have adopted the definition.
- The European Union has issued a handbook to instruct all of its member states on proper usage of the definition.
- Scores of universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, have adopted it.
- The English Premier League employs it to instruct its players and millions of fans on how to combat racism and antisemitism.

If you are interested in learning more about the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism and AJC's advocacy efforts to promote its adoption and implementation, please visit [AJC.org/antisemitism](https://ajc.org/antisemitism) or email us at antisemitism@ajc.org.