

October 14, 2021

ZFA STATEMENT

The Zionist Federation of Australia welcomes Prime Minister Scott Morrison's announcement that Australia will adopt the IHRA working definition of antisemitism.

"With this announcement", said ZFA President Jeremy Leibler, "the Government has reconfirmed its commitment to fighting antisemitism. I want to thank the prime minister for his very strong statement on this issue on Wednesday."

"Antisemitism is increasing around the world", continued Mr Leibler, "and the key to its reduction is education. The IHRA working definition provides the central plank to this educational endeavour. Antisemitism should have no place in our society. It should be defined, identified and rejected."

Mr Leibler also noted the role that Labor has played in this process. "Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese and Shadow Foreign Minister Penny Wong have publicly endorsed the working definition. The fight against antisemitism is not a partisan issue and we are extremely grateful to have support from the two major political parties."

Mr Leibler said its adoption should not be merely symbolic. "The government has led the way, but those fighting antisemitism in Australia should urge universities, institutions and businesses across the country to adopt it as part of their anti-discrimination policies."

Background

'Traditional' anti-Jewish tropes are blatant, but becoming rarer. Unfortunately, other forms of antisemitism—such as holding Jews in Australia responsible for Israeli actions—are increasing in Australia and around the world. This has dangerous consequences.

Some people don't know where the line between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitic commentary about Israel lies. Further, antisemitic attacks against individual Jews always spike in times of Israeli-Palestinian tension. For instance, during the Hamas-Israel violence in May 2021, the number of antisemitic incidents in Australia were double that of May 2020. During May this year, many Jewish students felt it was unsafe for them to be on Australian campuses, and so stayed away.

Where is the line between legitimate criticism and racism commentary when it comes to Israel?

In 2005, an EU agency developed a 'working draft' of antisemitism. This was later adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (or IHRA). The working definition includes a 38-word definition followed by 11 illustrative examples of antisemitism (you can read it [here](#)).

The examples include 'traditional' tropes of Jews having inordinate power over media, financial systems or governments, and more recent inventions, such as holding Jews collectively responsible for Israel's actions or denying Jews the right to self-determination. The definition does not aim to, nor does it actually stifle criticism of Israel. Indeed, it specifically says, "criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic."

Adoption

The working definition is being adopted across the world by countries and organisations with strong anti-racist mechanisms. So far, 40 countries and dozens of state and municipal governments have adopted it in one form or another. Over half of UK universities have adopted the working definition, as has the English Premier League and the Global Imams Council.

How it works

The working definition's main role is as a resource to help educate people as to what antisemitism is, and what is (and what is not) legitimate criticism of Israel. This is one of many anti-racism resources developed by government and non-government agencies for the same broad purpose—to allow the public to engage in free speech while being careful not to offend minority groups who have long been subject to discriminatory behaviour.

A subordinate role of the working definition is to act as a yardstick, to measure whether an action or cumulative actions amounts to antisemitism (whether intended or otherwise). The working definition does not recommend what should happen if someone is found to be antisemitic. Most businesses and organisations ban racist and bullying behaviour and provide appropriate sanctions if an employee is found to be racist or a bully. In this context, the working definition helps HR determine if alleged antisemitic behaviour was, in fact, antisemitic.