

Major Canadian academic group rejects Israel lobby's anti-Semitism definition

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[Nora Barrows-Friedman](#) [Lobby Watch](#) 1 December 2021



Israel lobby groups are pushing Canada to adopt measures to silence scholarship on Palestine. But many academics are pushing back.

Nick Lachance ZUMA Press

In a significant challenge to Israel lobby efforts, a major Canadian academic association has rejected a definition of anti-Semitism that conflates criticism of Israel with anti-Jewish bigotry.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers, which represents more than 70,000 academic faculty and staff around the country, voted on a motion to oppose the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) so-called definition of anti-Semitism during its

annual conference last week.

The IHRA definition has been pushed by Israel and its lobbies around the world to silence criticism of Israeli human rights violations.

It has been used against academics and activists in Canada since the government approved the adoption of the IHRA in 2019.

Israel lobby groups have even urged the Canadian government to use the IHRA as a political weapon to sabotage international aid funding.

Just weeks ago, B'nai Brith Canada, an anti-Palestinian lobby group that has long pushed for the formal conflation of Israel criticism with anti-Jewish bigotry, asserted that the government should only fund international humanitarian aid organizations that adhere to the IHRA definition.

In its motion, CAUT states that it “supports the academic freedom of its members and recognizes the need to safeguard the rights of scholars to critique all states, including the state of Israel, without fear of outside political influence, cuts to funding, censorship, harassment, threats, and intimidation.”

Human rights defenders across Canada have applauded the association's move.

BREAKING: The @CAUT_ACPPU just voted UNANIMOUSLY to oppose the flawed IHRA antisemitism definition at its national council meeting today. IJV applauds #CAUT for taking this strong position against academic censorship! Read our full release here: <https://t.co/ljiig2cHpW> #NoIHRA [pic.twitter.com/g7yPVIzWXb](https://t.co/g7yPVIzWXb)

— Independent Jewish Voices (@IndJewishVoices) November 26, 2021

Press Release: CJPME Applauds the Canadian University Teachers Association for Opposing IHRA, Supporting Academic Freedom on Palestine. @CAUT_ACPPU represents more than 70,000 faculty and academic staff in Canada. #NoIHRA #cdnpoli #cdnpse #canlab [pic.twitter.com/Dw7l2G1egf](https://t.co/Dw7l2G1egf)

— Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (@CJPME) November 26, 2021

Academics in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en, striking University of Manitoba faculty and big applause for @CAUT_ACPPU for passing motion against IHRA. @Gidimten @UMFA_FAUM #WetsuwetenStrong #ihra #cdnpse <https://t.co/fp6TgU8Aay>

— Min Sook Lee (she/her) (@minsooklee) November 28, 2021

“Pro-Israel groups have repeatedly pointed to the IHRA as a tool that can be used by universities to shut down various forms of student activism, and specifically boycotts of Israel and Israeli Apartheid Week,” Michael Bueckert, vice president of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, told The Electronic Intifada.

“They have also suggested that the IHRA should be applied to scholarship, and have tried to get professors fired for their criticism of Israeli policies or Zionism,” he added.

CAUT’s “principled opposition” to the IHRA definition, Bueckert said, “will present a serious challenge to those efforts, and will help to protect the right to engage in anti-racist, anti-colonial scholarship and protest on campuses.”

Series of defeats

CAUT’s motion is just the latest in a series of defeats for the Israel lobby’s push to use the IHRA to censor scholarship on Palestinian rights in Canada.

While top Canadian lawmakers have repeatedly pledged to support the IHRA definition – with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau even naming Irwin Cotler, an Israel lobbyist last year to lead the country’s IHRA implementation process – scholars, academic bodies and human rights groups have stood firmly in the way.

Today @IrwinCotler's role as Antisemitism Czar was renewed, with a mandate to impose the IHRA definition on universities. But on Friday, the @CAUT_ACPPU voted unanimously to reject the IHRA. If Cotler wants to bring the IHRA to campuses, it won't be without a fight. #NoIHRA <https://t.co/GV1E8VgwdF> pic.twitter.com/3eP5eV1liO

— Independent Jewish Voices (@IndJewishVoices) November 29, 2021

Last year, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, which represents 17,000 professors and academic librarians in more than 30 faculty associations across the country, publicly rejected the province’s unilateral move to adopt the IHRA, calling it an abuse of power.

University workers unions have also opposed the IHRA definition.

A letter renouncing the IHRA, authored by Independent Jewish Voices Canada, has gathered more than 650 signatures from academics and nearly 200 Jewish scholars have stated their opposition to the definition.

And governments of several Canadian cities – Montreal, Calgary and Vancouver – have rejected motions endorsing the IHRA.

The motion adopted by CAUT “is a crucial action to protect academic freedom and critical scholarship in Canada,” stated Corey Balsam, national coordinator of Independent Jewish Voices Canada.

“This definition has shamefully been used as a weapon against Palestinians and other people of color, rather than used to fight actual anti-Semitism,” Balsam added.

University of Toronto censure lifted

During the CAUT conference, the association also formally lifted its censure against the University of Toronto over the rescinding of a job offer to human rights scholar Valentina Azarova in April.

And it's unanimous--CAUT's 91st Council has lifted the censure against @UofT w/recognition of actions taken, including new language in uni policy to prevent donor influence. Huge kudos @utfaculty @censureutoronto +CAUT members for mobilizing to achieve this remarkable victory!

— CAUT (@CAUT_ACPPU) November 25, 2021

Azarova's hire was revoked after a donor to the college – with strong connections to the pro-Israel lobby – objected to her work.

Following the censure, which was widely supported by Canadian academics and human rights activists, the University of Toronto reinstated Azarova's job offer in September.

Azarova declined the offer, stating that in “light of events over the past year, I realized that my leadership of the program would remain subject to attack by those who habitually conflate legal analyses of the Israeli-Palestinian context with hostile partisanship.”

Though Azarova refused the position, faculty members who organized the censure say restoring it “was a pivotal demand of the censure and speaks to the impact of this movement.”

Tags

- Israel Lobby
- Canada
- Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)
- IHRA definition of anti-Semitism
- academic freedom
- B'Nai Brith Canada
- Michael Bueckert
- Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME)
- Independent Jewish Voices Canada
- Justin Trudeau
- Valentina Azarova
- University of Toronto

Comments



Academic freedom

[Permalink](#) Guy replied on Wed, 12/01/2021 - 15:08

Many thanks to all who have stepped up for the freedom of academic speech and voiced opposition to the definition of IHRA which is a tool to stifle discussion and promote prosecution for exposing criminal actions on the part of Zionist Israeli actions .

[Reply](#)



IHRA

[Permalink](#) Frank Dallas replied on Thu, 12/02/2021 - 19:25

The IHRA definition defines nothing. Its appended examples are merely that and most of them are logically flawed. There is a simple definition of anti-Semitism which we should fight for: "Irrational or abstract hatred of Jews because they are Jews." The hatred has to be there. There is no hatred involved in standing up for justice and equal rights. Criticism of a State, any State, can't be conflated with hatred of a people. This is a fine victory. It needs to be spread across the globe. The IHRA definition needs to be shredded and binned.

[Reply](#)



Definition

[Permalink](#) Guy replied on Fri, 12/03/2021 - 19:02

"Irrational or abstract hatred of Jews because they are Jews."

I totally agree and you have qualified very well .That being said though ,I disagree with your statement that the "IHRA definition defines nothing."

The debate is in the attempt to conflate the definition of Zionism ,the political definition ,as

hatred of Jews and used as a tool to prosecute in a court of law as hate speech . Why do we need a definition in the first place is a question that needs to be addressed .We already have hate speech laws .
Not being Jewish but I support jvp in Canada wholeheartedly in their endeavors to bring comprehension to the issue.
Cheers.

[Reply](#)



Trudeau towards right

[Permalink](#) El Che replied on Sat, 12/04/2021 - 20:04

Unfortunately number of right wing people such as Freeland in Trudeau government and liberal party have made the party more like conservatives which more and more is supportive of the apartheid zionist regime.

[Reply](#)



western democracy

[Permalink](#) El Che replied on Sat, 12/04/2021 - 20:40

western democracy: anything against Islam and Moslems: freedom of speech, against murderers apartheid zionists: anti-Semitism!

[Reply](#)

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Nora Barrows-Friedman

Nora Barrows-Friedman is a staff writer and associate editor at The Electronic Intifada, and is the author of In Our Power: US Students Organize for Justice in Palestine (Just World Books, 2014).

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