

May 06, 2026

Westmount High School
4350 St. Catherine Street West
Westmount, QC H3Z 1R1

Re: Concern Regarding Anti-Palestinian Racism in Presentation at Westmount High School

Dear Luigi Santamaria,

I am writing on behalf of the Anti-Racism Program of the CJPME Foundation (ARPCF) to express serious concern regarding a Holocaust education [presentation](#) delivered at Westmount High School, in which the presenter reportedly identified the Palestinian flag and watermelon emoji as examples of antisemitic hate symbols.

According to a recent media report, these symbols appeared on a slide titled “How Antisemitism Hides Online: Identifying Coded Jew Hatred,” alongside neo-Nazi and white supremacist references such as “88” and “14.” It is also reported that staff had raised concerns in advance about the risk of conflating Palestinian advocacy with antisemitism, and that the presentation was not supposed to address Gaza or contemporary politics.

While education about the Holocaust and other genocides is essential, it must not be delivered in a way that stigmatizes Palestinian identity, culture, or solidarity. Equating the Palestinian flag or the watermelon, both widely recognized symbols of Palestinian identity, history, and resistance to erasure, with antisemitic hatred is deeply harmful and pedagogically irresponsible.

This framing is a clear example of anti-Palestinian racism. As defined by the [Arab Canadian Lawyers Association \(ACLA\)](#), anti-Palestinian racism is a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames, or dehumanizes Palestinians and their narratives. It includes denying the Nakba, justifying violence against Palestinians, excluding Palestinian perspectives, pressuring others to exclude or punish Palestinian viewpoints, and defaming Palestinians or their allies as antisemitic or terrorist sympathizers simply because they express support for Palestinian rights. By presenting Palestinian national and cultural symbols as “coded Jew hatred,” the presentation collapses Palestinian identity into hate and teaches students to view expressions of Palestinian existence as inherently suspicious or threatening. This is especially damaging in a school environment, where students should be taught to distinguish between genuine antisemitism, which must be confronted, and legitimate Palestinian identity and human rights advocacy, which must be protected.

The Palestinian flag is not a hate symbol. It is the national symbol of the Palestinian people. The watermelon, similarly, has long been used as a cultural and political symbol of

Palestinian identity, especially because its colours mirror those of the Palestinian flag. To place these symbols in the same visual category as neo-Nazi codes and white supremacist references is not a neutral educational choice; it sends the message that Palestinian identity itself is equivalent to hatred. Recent reporting indicates that a Palestinian student who attended the presentation was deeply disturbed by seeing symbols associated with her nationality presented in this way. Such harm is foreseeable. Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and allied students should not be made to feel that their identity, family history, or calls for human rights are forms of extremism.

This incident is especially egregious in the context of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, as [recognized](#) by leading human rights organizations and UN experts. A presentation about one atrocity must never be used, directly or indirectly, to delegitimize solidarity with the victims of another. Doing so undermines the ethical purpose of genocide education itself. Holocaust education should deepen students' commitment to universal human rights, anti-racism, and the protection of vulnerable communities. It should not reproduce racist frameworks that portray Palestinian symbols, grief, or advocacy as inherently hateful.

The ARPCF urges Westmount High School to take immediate corrective action. This should include issuing a clarification to students and families that Palestinian symbols are not hate symbols; reviewing the presentation materials for anti-Palestinian bias; ensuring that future anti-hate and Holocaust education does not conflate Palestinian identity or advocacy with antisemitism; and providing staff and guest presenters with training on anti-Palestinian racism. Schools have a responsibility to teach students about antisemitism with accuracy and care, while also ensuring that Palestinian students and their peers are not made to feel that their identity, symbols, or history are forms of hatred.

Sincerely,

Jamila Ewais
Lead Researcher of the Anti-Racism Program
CJPME Foundation