

Canada's Special Envoy Must be Replaced After Spreading Misinformation to Defame the Pro-Palestine Movement

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

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A new report by Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) warns that a Canadian public official tasked with countering racism has demonstrated a harmful and malicious pattern of spreading misinformation against supporters of Palestine, and is calling for her to be replaced. Titled "[Defaming the Pro-Palestine Movement](#)," the report examines the public commentary of Deborah Lyons, Canada's Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism, and finds that her office has consistently spread false information to demonize Canadians protesting Israel's genocidal war on Gaza. CJPME's report recommends that Lyons should be replaced in her position with someone able to combat antisemitism in an intersectional manner, without reproducing anti-Palestinian racism.

"It is unacceptable for a public official responsible for anti-racism work to be consistently spreading anti-Palestinian racism," said Michael Bueckert, Vice President of CJPME. "We have no confidence in Lyons' ability to distinguish between criticism of Israel and genuine antisemitism, as she appears to see no difference between the two. Her actions embolden hatred and incitement against young people who are rightfully protesting genocide. It is clear that she cannot continue in this public role," added Bueckert.

On Saturday, Canada published its renewed federal anti-racism strategy without any mention of anti-Palestinian racism, thus failing to provide resources to combat the harm caused by the Special Envoy.

[CJPME's report](#) examines the social media commentary of Special Envoy Lyons between October 2023 and March 2024 to demonstrate how she has consistently spread false claims about pro-Palestine activists, misrepresenting protests, slogans, and pro-Palestine positions as antisemitic. For example, Lyons has often falsely alleged that pro-Palestine protests targeted Jewish individuals or institutions while ignoring the organizers' actual goals or rationale. Similarly, Lyons has misinterpreted the Arabic term "Intifada" and popular slogans like "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" to paint them as inherently and exclusively antisemitic, further suggesting that these forms of speech should be prosecuted by police. Lyons has even put forward the view that Canada's December 2023 vote for a ceasefire at the United Nations General Assembly was antisemitic, even though it reflected a mainstream political view against war.

The report also finds that a significant part of Special Envoy Lyons's role includes collaboration with Israeli officials. CJPME believes that this collaboration is particularly problematic at a time when Israel's genocidal actions are being investigated by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and as the International Criminal Court is about to issue arrest warrants against Israeli leaders for war crimes and crimes against humanity. This collaboration includes meeting with Israeli President Herzog, whose genocidal comments were [referenced](#) by the ICJ in its initial ruling, and with Israel's far-right Minister of Diaspora Affairs Amichai Chikli, who [leads a covert foreign influence campaign](#) targeting Canadians with racist and anti-Muslim content.

"As Parliament investigates foreign interference and influence, it is outrageous that the Special Envoy is simultaneously collaborating with the far-right Israeli Minister who is behind a covert op targeting Palestinian- and Muslim Canadians with racist messages and disinformation. This is completely unacceptable. Canadians are rightfully concerned that the office of the Special Envoy is using public funding to defend Israel's interests, rather than being used to combat domestic racism and white supremacy," said Bueckert.

CJPME's report concludes that Special Envoy Lyons' behaviour shows a pattern of anti-Palestinian racism. Not only has Lyons consistently conflated legitimate criticism and protest of Israel's structurally racist policies with antisemitism, but she routinely advocates for nearly all types of protest to be shut down or even prosecuted. CJPME argues that this behaviour is reproducing harm against Palestinian Canadians and their supporters, especially the racialized young people who are the most involved in pro-Palestine protests. CJPME is also troubled about Lyons' authorship of a pending IHRA guidebook, which threatens to further conflate criticism of Israel with antisemitism. As CJPME's report concludes, "An approach to anti-racism in Canada cannot prevent Palestinians and their supporters from advocating for their own rights or naming the forms of racism and oppression that they face, whether here in Canada or within territories controlled by Israel."

"Rather than fighting antisemitism, the Special Envoy is leading a McCarthyite push to force Canadian institutions to support Israel and Zionism, while discouraging Palestinians from speaking up about their experiences of systemic racism in Israel and Canada. Her push to force institutions to adopt IHRA is a clear threat to free expression and Charter rights in Canada," said Bueckert.

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