

Canada's CIJA Selective About Which Hate Crimes It Condemns

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The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs' response to the horrific attack on two mosques in New Zealand highlights tensions between promoting the most aggressive ongoing European settler colonialism and Jewish Canadian concern over hate crimes.

Forty-eight hours after the killings in Christchurch the *Toronto Star* published letters by the heads of CIJA and Toronto's Jewish Federation under the headline "[Jewish](#) Canadians stand with Muslims." CIJA's quick response to the mosque attack no doubt reflected genuine horror as well as an understanding that as a minority religious group disproportionately victimized by hate crimes Jews have an interest in building solidarity against such violence. But, it also represents a cynical 'get out ahead of the story' type of public relations from a group that regularly demonizes Muslims in defence of Israel's subjugation of Palestinians. CIJA, which is the lobbying arm of Canada's Jewish Federations, claims Israel is "[fighting](#) against the Palestinian shackles of international Islamism that has been wreaking absolute havoc all over the world."

CIJA regularly hypes "Islamic terror". In response to a 2017 truck attack in Nice, France, CIJA declared "[Canada](#) is not immune to... Islamist terror" and in 2018 they highlighted "[those strains](#) of Islam that pose a real and imminent threat to Jews around the world." At the time CIJA also aligned with the xenophobic [backlash](#) against the term "Islamophobia in [bill M-103](#), which called for collecting data on hate crimes and studying the issue of "[eliminating systemic](#) racism and religious discrimination including Islamophobia." In a BuzzFeed article titled "[Zionist Groups](#) in Canada Are Jumping On The 'Creeping Sharia' Bandwagon" Steven Zhou detailed CIJA, B'nai Brith and other pro-Israel groups backlash to M-103 and "how Muslim Canadians define Islamophobia."

In a bid to deter organizations from associating with the Palestinian cause or opposing Israeli belligerence in the Middle East, CIJA constantly targets Arab and Muslim community [representatives](#), [papers](#), organizations, etc. To prove that Muslim Canadians financed " Hamas terror", CIJA pushed to proscribe Muslim charity IRFAN (International Relief Fund for the Afflicted and Needy) as a terrorist entity because it supported orphans and a hospital in the Gaza Strip through official (Hamas controlled) channels. (The federal government considers Hamas a terrorist organization but Palestinians and [most](#) of the world consider it a political/resistance organization.) The Jewish group's press release about the first Canadian-based group ever designated a terrorist organization alludes to 'foreign Muslims taking advantage of Canadians'. It noted, "Canadians will not tolerate the abuse of their generosity by those who seek to bankroll terrorists." In 2017 CIJA [demanded](#) Ottawa rescind the charitable status of the Islamic Society of British Columbia because the Vancouver-area

mosque allegedly offered support for Hamas.

While quick to attack Arabs and Muslims' support for "terror" or "anti-Semitism," CIJA clams up when explicit Jewish Islamophobia is brought to their attention. In 2012, the Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-CAN) asked for CIJA's help with an aggressively anti-Muslim textbook used at Joe Dwek Ohr HaEmet Sephardic School in Toronto. It described Muslims as "[rabid fanatics](#)" with "savage beginnings," but [CIJA refused](#) to respond.

Last summer lawyer Dimitri Lascaris repeatedly called on CIJA to disassociate from a number of individuals it aligned with at a protest who made anti-Muslim remarks and death threats against mostly Muslim and brown politicians in a video about the rally. CIJA responded by orchestrating an [unprecedented](#) smear campaign against the prominent pro-Palestinian activist.

CIJA Québec failed to respond to my request for comment about the Jewish Public Library in Montréal, a constituent agency of the city's Jewish Federation it officially represents, [hosting](#) anti-Muslim activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali next month. Among a slew of extremist statements, Ali said "[violence is inherent in Islam](#)—it's a destructive, nihilistic cult of death. It legitimates murder."

CIJA has stayed mum about the recent scandal over the head of the Toronto Hebrew School Teachers Federation, Aviva Polonsky, escorting a class from the Community Hebrew Academy to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference in Washington. Polonsky posted photographs of her and students meeting with noted Islamophobe Sebastian Gorka and wearing "Make America Great Again" hats.

CIJA ignores Islamophobia by groups it defends or represents. It also stokes anti-Muslim sentiment as part of its bid to defend Israeli colonialism and violence. On the other hand, Canadian Jewry, which CIJA claims to represent, has a strong self-interest in building broad opposition to hate crimes.

Which side is this organization on? Is it always against perpetrators of hate-crimes, so-called "White nationalists" and governments that favour one religion or ethnicity over others? Or does it make exceptions for its supporters and Israel?

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