

# Trudeau's 'IHRA handbook' Will Foster Persecution of Palestine Activism, Must be Withdrawn

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

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CJPME

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*Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) warns that the pro-censorship 'IHRA handbook' released today by Canadian Heritage will have a chilling effect on pro-Palestine speech and activism and demands it to be withdrawn immediately. Civil society, human rights groups, and faculty associations broadly oppose the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism (known as "IHRA") because it purposefully conflates criticism of Israeli policy with antisemitism and is frequently deployed by supporters of Israel to unfairly shut down Palestinians' perspectives. CJPME warns that this seemingly innocuous handbook will result in public institutions persecuting people who criticize systemic racism within Israel, rather than fighting discrimination.*

"After over a year of Canadians protesting Israel's genocide in Gaza, Trudeau has the audacity to publish a guide on how to crack down on pro-Palestine speech," said Michael Bueckert, Vice President of CJPME. "This anti-Palestine, pro-censorship handbook poses a direct threat to civil liberties and will target the critics of Israel's atrocities, especially Palestinians. We urge Canadian institutions to reject the use of the handbook," added Bueckert. More than [11,000 Canadians](#) have e-mailed the Prime Minister asking for the handbook to be shelved.

Based on a preliminary analysis of Trudeau's IHRA handbook, CJPME has identified several important ways that it maliciously and falsely labels pro-Palestine speech and actions as antisemitic. For example:

- The handbook claims that it is antisemitic to oppose the ideology of Zionism, which is defined only as support for Jewish self-determination in their ancestral homeland (ignoring the role of Zionism in the dispossession and oppression of Palestinians) (29). Case studies of antisemitic incidents include a social media post that says "you can't be antiracist and Zionist" and that "Zionism is a racist & violent settler-colonial project (29), and a social media post that says "Israel has no right to exist" (30). CJPME warns that this will be used to silence Palestinian experiences of Zionism, including the [Nakba](#).
- The handbook claims that it is antisemitic when Israel is "held to a double standard," cast in an "especially negative light," or when its "right to exist" is "question[ed]" (30, 47). CJPME notes that these are [entirely subjective arguments](#) that are routinely deployed by Israel's supporters against any and all forms of criticism and protest that they deem to be excessive or unfair.
- Other examples of supposed antisemitism in the handbook include the disinvitation of a speaker from an event because she had served in the Israeli

military (31); an Instagram post that said “Zionist genocide is the greatest act of aggression. It is the root cause of the violence” and did not recognize Israel’s “right to defend itself during a time of war” (31); the suggestion that Israelis are “colonizers” (31); accusing Israelis of being “child murderers” (31); the use of the term “Zionist,” which the handbook insists should be treated as a proxy for “Jew” (32); and comparing Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza to the Holocaust (34).

The handbook was produced under the leadership of Deborah Lyons, Canada’s Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism. Earlier this year, CJPME issued a report titled “[Defaming the Pro-Palestine Movement](#)” which revealed how Lyons was consistently spreading false and malicious claims about pro-Palestine activists – misrepresenting protests, slogans, and pro-Palestine positions as antisemitic – and routinely advocating for the suppression of nearly all types of pro-Palestinian protest. The report concluded that Special Envoy Lyons’ behaviour showed a pattern of anti-Palestinian racism and inappropriate collaboration with Israeli officials.

“Trudeau handpicked Lyons, the former Ambassador to Israel, to produce a guide on how to suppress Palestinians who are speaking out against Israel’s racist practices. At Trudeau’s behest, Lyons has worked with Israeli officials and pro-Israel groups to design a document which is intended to shield Israel from even the mildest criticism of its policies. With this handbook, Trudeau is choosing to protect the ideology of Zionism over the Charter rights of Canadians,” said Alex Paterson, Senior Director of Parliamentary Affairs of CJPME.

CJPME reiterates the view that IHRA is designed to suppress Palestinian perspectives, including critical scholarship on core legal concepts like apartheid and genocide, and should therefore be understood as a form of state-sponsored [anti-Palestinian racism](#). Last year, CJPME joined [more than 100](#) civil society organizations including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, as well as Palestinian and Israeli human rights groups, to warn the United Nations against adopting IHRA. In Canada, [groups that oppose](#) IHRA include Independent Jewish Voices Canada, the BC Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Association of University Teachers, the Canadian Federation of Students, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Confédération des syndicats nationaux, and over 40 [faculty associations](#) and academic unions. Instead of adopting IHRA, CJPME urges alternative definitions of antisemitism which do not reproduce these harms, such as the [Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism](#).

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*Free Palestine protest at Parliament Hill, Ottawa, July 2014. Photo: Flickr/Tony Webster*

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