

Letter to DCGA to repeal the “Resolution to Address and Combat Antisemitism At Denison University”

On January 30, 2022, Denison Campus Governance Association (DCGA) passed “[Resolution to Address and Combat Antisemitism At Denison University](#)” (hereby referred to as DCGA-RACA).

This resolution is erroneous for several reasons and especially disturbing are conflation between the state of Israel and Jewish identity. This resolution also demands that the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s Working Definition on Antisemitism (IHRA-WDA) be institutionalized at Denison University. IHRA-WDA was never intended for policy or legislative purposes and has been widely critiqued as deeply problematic and ineffective.

This letter moves the Denison Campus Governance Association (DCGA) to repeal the “Resolution to Address and Combat Antisemitism At Denison University.” This document outlines some surface issues with the resolution while also constituting an extensive, yet non-exhaustive and very basic, reading list for any body of campus governance working on creating policy suggestions for the university.

1. Rejection of IHRA-WDA in Higher Education

As an institute of higher education, Denison University has a mandate to support and protect its students, educators, and staff. By asking Denison to adopt the IHRA-WDA, DCGA effectively ignores calls by major representative bodies in higher education, human rights organizations, and other collectives, activists, and scholars against the use and institutionalization of the IHRA-WDA.

American Association of University Professors (AAUP), one of the largest representative bodies of professors and other academics, has issued [a statement against IHRA](#) that details its problematic effects and intents, including its ties to the wider attacks to restrict “teaching about the history, policies, and actions of the state of Israel and teaching about the history and perpetuation of racism and other accounts of state-enabled violence in the United States.”

More than a 100 students, 23 professors, and 7 “C3” and other advocacy organizations at Denison University have signed an [open-letter](#) “against vague and overly broad redefinitions of antisemitism at U.S. colleges and legislatures that have been used to suppress activism, target faculty, deny students the right to organize and protest, and institute criminal penalties” in response to the DCGA-RACA.

The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) has sent a “[Letter to the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights urging it not to use the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism and its examples to formulate antidiscrimination regulations](#).” The organization contends that using “this flawed, indeed incoherent, definition of anti-Semitism [IHRA], and especially the egregious examples that accompany it, would constitute a serious threat both to academic freedom and to the First Amendment right of free speech at this country’s institutions of higher education.” Fifty-six scholars of antisemitism, Jewish history, and the Israel-Palestine conflict have called the IHRA definition “highly problematic and controversial,” noting that it privileges the political interests of the state of Israel and suppresses discussion and activism on behalf of Palestinian rights.

2. Problematically Reduces Jewish Identity

The DCGA resolution fails and should be repealed as it ignores the voices of Jewish organizations, collectives, and scholars. Furthermore, the DCGA-RACA conflates being Jewish with the State of Israel: this is extremely problematic as Judaism is an ancient and contemporary religious tradition and Jewish identity is not singular but complex and historical. Even from a very reductive and simplistic point of analysis, the DCGA-RACA does not hold as not all Jewish people are Israeli nor are all citizens of Israel Jewish.

The Association for Jewish Studies (AJS) has issued a useful brief, “[A Working Report from the AJS Task Force on Antisemitism and Academic Freedom](#),” urging universities to “resist campaigns pressuring them to codify one particular definition [of antisemitism]”.

The Reform Movement (the largest Jewish denomination in the USA), The United Jewish People’s Order, J Street, and a coalition of over 40 progressive Jewish organizations from around the world [have cautioned against adopting the IHRA, or opposed it outright](#).

3. Fails to Address Concerns of Jewish Organizations, Collectives, and Individuals

There has been a widespread pushback against the damaging and harmful IHRA-WDA and have prompted a variety of responses. By ignoring this context, the unresearched, incoherent, and factually incorrect language of DCGA-RACA does much harm. The resolution fails to meet any

criteria of rigor and thoughtfulness and sets a precedent that hinders and restricts solidarity and coalitional work against racism including antisemitism at Denison University.

In response to the IHRA, a group of scholars in the fields of Holocaust history, Jewish studies, and Middle East studies, issued the [The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism](#), which has now been signed by 350 scholars.

Yet, 17 progressive Jewish organizations [responded](#) by pointing out that JDA fails in many ways and have issued a set of principles for dismantling antisemitism including the useful reminder that “*defining antisemitism does not actually do the work of dismantling antisemitism.*”

The five principles are replicated in a shortened format below and these principles also bring into relief the multiple shortcomings of the DCGA resolution:

- Do not isolate antisemitism from other forms of oppression.
- Challenge political ideologies that foment racism, hate, and fear.
- Create environments that affirm and celebrate all expressions of cultural and religious life.
- Make undoing all forms of racism and bigotry both policy and daily practice.
- Practice safety through solidarity, not law enforcement.

4. Infringes Upon Basic Rights of Students, Faculty, and Staff

Importantly, the adoption of IHRA-WDA infringes upon the basic rights of Denison students, faculty, and staff including the right to free speech, freedom of association and inhibits the scholarly and pedagogical work of students and faculty. Furthermore, the IHRA has been a tool of censorship and a way to silence and penalize students and faculty (especially Palestinian and BIPOC students, faculty, and organizers).

Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) - Canada, has issued an extensive report on the IHRA: [A Critique of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism \(IHRA-WDA\)](#). The report includes useful background, a detailed breakdown and critique of the IHRA, a partial but [important list of cases where the IHRA has been used to suppress speech or activities at colleges](#), and their own alternative working definition of antisemitism. Among the many important points in the report, IJV states that “ultimately, the IHRA-WDA is a poor definition of antisemitism. The primary goal of those promoting it — and we fear its actual effect if it is adopted — is to ban or criminalize criticism of both Israel and Zionism, along

with support for Palestinian rights. As such it represents a threat to the struggle for justice and human rights in Israel-Palestine, as well as to academic freedom, freedom of expression and the right to protest.”

Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) “[unequivocally opposes the IHRA working definition of antisemitism](#)”.

Kenneth Stern, the author of the original definition that was taken up by IHRA, has opposed the IHRA and advocated against it being made policy or law. He has described the IHRA-WDA as “a tool to target or chill speech on a college campus.”

Palestine Legal, a U.S. based Palestine solidarity group working to safeguard civil and constitutional rights, has tracked and compiled decades of data on the way antisemitism is instrumentalized for censorship.

- *Distorted Definition: Redefining Antisemitism to Silence Advocacy for Palestinian Rights*

<https://palestinelegal.org/distorted-definition>

Backgrounder on Efforts to Redefine Antisemitism as a Means of Censoring Criticism of Israel

<https://palestinelegal.org/redefinition-efforts>

In light of the aforementioned inaccuracies and shortcoming of the “Resolution to Address and Combat Antisemitism At Denison University”, DCGA is urged to repeal this resolution.

Additional Resources:

Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP)

*JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE UNEQUIVOCALLY OPPOSES THE IHRA
WORKING DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM*

<https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/2021/02/ihra/>

*PROGRESSIVE JEWISH GROUPS ISSUE PRINCIPLES FOR DISMANTLING
ANTISEMITISM*

<https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/2021/04/principles-for-dismantling-antisemitism/>

Independent Jewish Voices

Independent Jewish Voices' own Working Definition of Antisemitism

<https://www.noihra.ca/our-definition>

“How Not to Fight Antisemitism: A Critique of the International Holocaust
Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism (IHRA-WDA)

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f52a48dcce98340e25350e2/t/5fff2d4e058b964b22eb8f33/1610558799440/IHRA+Report+v1.1.1+-+20201025.pdf>

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, new fact sheet describing protections that cover students who are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, or of another religious group.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocr-factsheet-shared-ancestry-202301.pdf>

Palestine Legal

*Distorted Definition: Redefining Antisemitism to Silence Advocacy for Palestinian
Rights*

<https://palestinelegal.org/distorted-definition>

*Backgrounder on Efforts to Redefine Antisemitism as a Means of Censoring Criticism of
Israel*

<https://palestinelegal.org/redefinition-efforts>

Joint Statement by the Council on American Islamic Relations, Jewish Voice for Peace and National Students for Justice in Palestine on AD/ IHRA

<https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/2022/05/sjp-cair-jvp-statement/>

American Association of College Professors (AACP) - Legislative Threats to Academic Freedom: Redefinitions of Antisemitism and Racism

<https://www.aaup.org/report/legislative-threats-academic-freedom-redefinitions-antisemitism-and-racism>

NWSA's resolution for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS)

https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.nwsa.org/resource/resmgr/other_documents/2015_member_recommendations.pdf

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/12/01/national-womens-studies-association-joins-israel-boycott-movement>

“To date, the following US-based academic associations have voted on whether or not to endorse part or all of the BDS campaign: [Middle East Studies Association (MESA),] “American Anthropological Association (AAA), American Studies Association (ASA), Asian American Studies Association (AASA), Modern Languages Association (MLA), National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA), Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA). All but the AAA and MLA passed resolutions endorsing the BDS campaign in part or in full.”

<https://mesana.org/news/2022/03/23/frequently-asked-questions-about-the-bds-resolution>

CANADIANS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

IHRA'S TRUE INTENTIONS: THIS IS THE SPEECH ABOUT ISRAEL AND PALESTINE THAT IHRA WANTS TO SILENCE

https://www.cjpme.org/ihra_intentions

“The most prominent human rights organizations in the world, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Israel-based B’Tselem, have issued reports detailing how Israel is practicing apartheid against Palestinians. See Amnesty International, “Israel’s Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity,” February 1, 2022,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/>; Human Rights Watch, “A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and

persecution,” April 27, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>; and B’Tselem (The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories), “A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid,” January 12, 2021, https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid.”

Performing Legality in the Service of Colonialism: ‘Anti-Antisemitism’ as Censorship, Lena Salaymeh at the Watson Institute
<https://www.youtube.com/live/uXucU5Vyh2c?feature=share>