



April 7, 2021

**The Honourable David Lametti
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada**

**The Honourable Steven Guilbeault
Minister of Canadian Heritage**

Dear Ministers Lametti and Guilbeault,

As organizations committed to the defence of human rights, civil liberties, and the eradication of discrimination, we know first-hand that online hate presents a growing threat to people in Canada. We have seen web-based platforms and social media applications become breeding grounds and organizing spaces for the most vile oppressive groups, consistently falling short of blocking blatantly racist, antisemitic, or otherwise hateful content.

We appreciate that the government of Canada is taking the problem seriously and tabling new legislation to address online hate. This is an important step that will help bring existing hate speech legislation into the 21st century. However, a clear line must be drawn between bona fide hate speech and legitimate forms of dissent and protest. We are particularly concerned with where that line may fall between clear instances of antisemitism, on one hand, and criticism of the state of Israel, on the other.

There is a concerted effort by some groups to blur this line. In lockstep with the [Israeli government](#), pro-Israel advocacy organizations in Canada are urging Canada to connect the [deeply flawed](#) and [widely rejected](#) International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism (IHRA-WDA) with this new online hate legislation. The IHRA definition represents a direct threat to protected freedom of expression because it conflates criticism of Israel and Zionism with antisemitism - for example, by [falsely branding as antisemitic](#) the claim that “the existence of a state of Israel is a racist endeavour”. Moreover, as [numerous cases have illustrated](#), the IHRA definition has been weaponized in several countries to attack or silence persons or organizations that dare speak out against Israeli human rights violations.

We note that the Jewish community is [deeply divided](#) on this issue. There are now [several other definitions](#) being proposed by Jewish organizations which make a point of carefully distinguishing criticism of Israel from antisemitism, in contrast to the IHRA definition. Several prominent individuals and organizations both in Canada and around the world have furthermore warned against adopting this definition and its accompanying list of illustrative examples, and/or codifying it into law, including the [Reform movement](#), the largest Jewish denomination in North

America; the [Canadian Labour Congress](#); the [Canadian Federation of Students](#); the [Ontario Confederation of Faculty Associations](#); over [600 Canadian academics](#); over [150 Jewish Canadian academics](#), 21 [Canadian academic unions and associations](#); 122 [Palestinian and Arab intellectuals](#), a [broad coalition of progressive Zionist organizations](#); and even [Kenneth Stern](#), the lead drafter of the definition himself.

In August 2020, several organizations, including the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the [BC Civil Liberties Association](#), the Centre for Free Expression at Ryerson University, and [Independent Jewish Voices Canada](#) were invited to participate in consultations with the federal Department of Justice to discuss the best methods for combating online hate. In their submissions to the Minister and Parliamentary Secretary, these organizations asserted that while it is imperative to rigorously condemn antisemitism in all its forms, the federal government must not do so by conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism.

Let's tackle online hate, but let's do so while protecting our Charter-protected freedoms of thought, belief, opinion and expression. We stand firm in this position and we urge you to do the same by not adopting the IHRA definition of antisemitism into online hate legislation or any accompanying interpretative guidelines and affiliated policies.

Signed:

Arab Canadian Lawyers Association
Canada Palestine Association
Canadian Arab Institute
Canadian BDS Coalition
Canadian Federation of Students
Canadian Foreign Policy Institute
Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)
Canadian Union of Postal Workers
Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice
Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East
Canadians United Against Hate
CanPalNet - Canada Palestine Support Network
Confédérations des syndicats nationaux (CSN)
Conseil régional FTQ Montréal métropolitain
Courage Coalition
Independent Jewish Voices Canada
Jewish Liberation Theology Institute
Just Peace Advocates
Justice For Palestinians, Calgary
Ligue des droits et libertés
Mennonite Church Canada Palestine-Israel Network
Mennonite Church Manitoba Palestine-Israel Working Group
Niagara Movement for Justice in Palestine-Israel (NMJPI)
Oakville Palestinian Rights Association

Ottawa Forum on Israel/Palestine
Palestinian Canadian Congress
Palestinian Youth Movement
Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network
The Association Of Palestinian Arab Canadians
The Canadian Palestinian Council
The Canadian Palestinian Social Society of London
The United Church of Canada
United Jewish People's Order (UJPO)
United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine-Israel
Coalition of Canadian Palestinian Organizations:
 Arab Palestine Association of Ontario
 Palestine House
 Canadian Arab Forum of BC
 Association of Palestinian Arab Canadians
 Canada Palestine Cultural Association (Edmonton)
 Canadian Palestinian Social Association
 Canadian Palestinian Council
 Humans Without Borders
 The Palestinian Association of Brantford
 Atlantic Canada Palestinian Society
 Canadian Palestinian Association of Manitoba
 Canadian Arab Society of London
 Palestinian Association of Hamilton
 Palestinian-Canadian Foundation of Quebec
 Run for Palestine, Edmonton
 The Canadian Palestinian Professional Association

Cc:

Arif Virani, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice
Iqra Khalid, Chair, Standing Committee of Justice and Human Rights
Scott Simms, Chair, Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage
Randall Garrison, NDP Justice Critic
Alexandre Boulerice, NDP Heritage Critic
The Honourable Rob Moore, Conservative Justice Critic
Alain Rayes, Conservative Heritage Critic
Rhéal Fortin, Bloc Québécois Justice Critic
Martin Champoux, Bloc Québécois Heritage Critic