

This open letter was sent to Mr. Irwin Cotler on July 23, 2019

Mr. Irwin Cotler

Chair, Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights

Montreal

Dear Mr. Cotler,

I am editor of the weekly blog [Canada Talks Israel Palestine](#), whose mission is to help Canadians better understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through objective analysis and raising awareness for a just and reconciliatory solution.

Let me start by recognizing that you have for many years been very active in several important struggles in Canada for human rights and in particular the struggle against anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is a scourge that should be defeated and I support that struggle wholeheartedly.

However, I do have some concerns about your recent efforts, along with CIJA, B'nai Brith and other groups to [lobby the Canadian government](#) and various [municipal governments including Vancouver](#) to adopt a "new" definition of anti-Semitism, promoted by the "International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance" and referred to as the [IHRA definition](#).

The basic IHRA definition, as you know, is not very different from existing definitions to be found in any dictionary. But it also refers to a number of "examples" of what it describes as anti-Semitism, some which refer specifically to the State of Israel.

I would like clarification regarding two of the "examples" which, according to the IHRA document would constitute "anti-Semitism.

I cite from the [IHRA "working definition" document](#):

"To guide IHRA in its work, the following examples may serve as illustrations (ed. note: i.e. of anti-Semitism):

- "Claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor."
- "Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis."

With these IHRA proposed "examples of anti-Semitic acts or behaviours" in mind, I would like to ask you for clarification on which, if any, of the following ten statements you would classify as "anti-Semitic". I believe them all to be true:

1. "In Israel as in Nazi Germany, (and unlike Canada), "Jewishness" is determined not by individual choice but is a civil status determined by the state. It forms the legal basis for discriminating among different categories of citizens."

2. "Gaza, where Palestinian refugees from all over southern Israel have been concentrated since 1948, and which has been described by a former British Prime Minister as an "outdoor prison", has a striking similarity to the Warsaw ghetto where Nazis concentrated Jews."
3. "The contemporary Israeli policy of forcing Bedouin citizens of Israel off their lands and concentrating them into small areas is very similar to Canada's own historic racist policy toward its indigenous peoples."
4. "According to Bishop [Desmond Tutu](#) Israeli policy toward the Palestinians is "worse" than Apartheid."
5. "Leading Israeli politicians advocate for [ethnic cleansing](#) to achieve a pure society, as did the Nazis."
6. "The international community should bring peaceful, legal pressure on Israel through boycott or other sanctions, to force Israel to comply with international law."
7. "Supporting UN Resolution 194 (which Canada voted for in 1949) calling for the Palestinian right of return."
8. "Israel's policy of [systematically destroying Palestinian houses in East Jerusalem](#), while building new homes for Jews is, in fact, a form of ethnic cleansing reminiscent of the Nazi objective of a ["judenrein"](#) Germany (i.e. free of Jews)".
9. "With the passing of the ["Nation State law"](#) Israel has become an officially discriminatory state based on religion, just as Nazi Germany was."
10. "During the 1948 Nakba, Zionist militias confiscated [millions of dollars of private property from Palestinians](#), just as the Nazis stole art, silver, paintings from Jews."

Mr. Cotler do you agree that these statements, all of which appear to be extremely critical of Israel and current Israeli policy, are factually correct, ? If they are true statements, is it anti-Semitic to repeat them? If not true, I would be happy to have my misunderstandings corrected.

If you would like to send me an answer, I would be happy to publish it for the edification of our readers.

Yours truly



Peter Larson, Ph.D.

Chair, Canada Talks Israel Palestine