

Taylor, Laura

From: CDTPS Call to Action <cdtps.calltoaction@gmail.com>
Sent: October 22, 2020 11:04 AM
To: Baber, Roman; Triantafilopoulos, Effie; Bouma, Will; Collard-CO, Lucille; Gill, Parm; Yarde-QP, Kevin; Yarde-CO, Kevin; Tangri, Nina; Singh-QP, Gurratan; Singh-CO, Gurratan; Park, Lindsey; Parkco, Lindsey; Morrison-QP, Suze; Morrison-CO, Suze; Kusendova, Natalia; Standing Committee on Justice Policy
Subject: Vote no on Bill 168! The IHRA's definition is not the way to fight antisemitism

Dear Standing Committee on Justice Policy Members,

I am writing to you today to ask that you vote against Bill 168, The Combating Antisemitism Act. If passed, this bill could have serious consequences for freedom of expression and human rights advocacy in Ontario.

A number of organizations and individuals have been promoting, in Ontario and elsewhere, adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, including its eleven examples.

There is a growing network of Jewish organizations and allies around the world that are taking a stand against efforts to adopt this definition. One such organization which is active in many cities in Ontario is Independent Jewish Voices (IJV).

I agree that antisemitism is a serious problem, but I believe that adoption of this particular definition would be a grave mistake. I am concerned that the IHRA definition of antisemitism will be used to suppress Charter-protected political speech, specifically related to criticism of Israel. For instance, “claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor” is stated to be antisemitic. I am concerned that this will unfairly affect Palestinians and others who support their cause.

I am not alone in these concerns. The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association has opposed adoption of the IHRA definition. Recently, the definition was considered by Montreal, Vancouver and Calgary city councils: in all cases, councillors realized the question was far more complicated and controversial than they had initially believed and declined to adopt it. Even Kenneth Stern, original author of the IHRA definition, has strongly opposed its use as a legal or administrative definition of antisemitism, warning that such use will be a threat to both academic freedom and freedom of expression in general.

Therefore, I ask that you consider this matter carefully. Antisemitism is an age-old scourge which must be stamped out. But the IHRA definition is not the way to fight it. Antisemitism is intimately tied to other forms of hate, and it increases when racism, xenophobia and intolerance of all sorts are on the rise. For these reasons, I believe that the important battle against antisemitism is actually undermined when opposition to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians is branded antisemitic.

Please take a stand against antisemitism, but also support freedom of expression and a robust debate on Israel-Palestine. Please vote against Bill 168!

For more information, including a line-by-line critique of the IHRA definition, please consult the website www.noihra.ca.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.