

Taylor, Laura

From: Juliana Farha <juliana@twowords.ca>
Sent: October 22, 2020 3:37 PM
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: URGENT: Oppose Bill 168
Importance: High

Dear Standing Committee on Justice Policy Member,

As an Ontario citizen and Canadian voter living in the United Kingdom, I am writing this urgent letter calling on you to 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) 'working definition' of antisemitism, including its eleven examples. More than half of these examples do not relate to anti-Semitism or the Jewish people, but to the state of Israel.

As an individual who values justice, human rights, and freedom of expression, I am concerned that the IHRA definition of antisemitism will be used to suppress Charter-protected political speech, specifically related to criticism of Israel.

As Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) stated in its critique of the IHRA 'working definition', "Recently, the Israeli government and Israel advocacy organisations such as the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) and B'nai B'rith Canada have been attempting to exploit concerns about anti-Semitism by redefining anti-Semitism to include criticism of Israel and of the Zionist ideology that impels it. **Their purpose is to deflect and ultimately delegitimize criticism of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.**"

Indeed, while advocates for Palestinian rights are often accused of 'singling out Israel', in fact it is Israel's defenders who single it out. After all, there is no other nation-state on earth that is protected from criticism of its policies and practices in this way.

I am not alone in these concerns. The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association has opposed the 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, the 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. As Stern wrote of Jared Kushner in the UK's Guardian newspaper,

"I am a Zionist...But I suspect that if Kushner or I had been born into a Palestinian family displaced in 1948, we might have a different view of Zionism, and that need not be because we vilify Jews or think they conspire to harm humanity. Further, there is a debate inside the Jewish community whether being Jewish requires on to

be a Zionist. I don't know if this question can be resolved, but it should frighten all Jews that the government is essentially defining the answer for us."

Therefore, I ask that you consider this matter carefully. Antisemitism is intimately tied to other forms of hate. It increases when there is a failure of appropriate governmental response to racism, and its existence in our society is unacceptable. However, the IHRA definition is not the way to fight it. The IHRA definition jeopardizes the charter rights of Canadians to freely express their legitimate criticisms of Israeli human rights violations. I do not regard the silencing of free speech as an event to be celebrated, or success in progress and equality.

Please take a stand against antisemitism, but also support freedom of expression and a commitment to Palestinian human rights. As IJV put it, "the fight against anti-Semitism must be joined to the struggle for equality and human rights for all people in Canada."

I urge you either to vote against Bill 168 entirely, or to amend the Bill so that the 11 examples are removed from the definition.

Thank you for your consideration

Sincerely,

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