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Orientation to Ontario

ANTISEMITISM

The working definition of antisemitism from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) is widely used in Canada and around the world:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property [and] toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

Today, examples of antisemitism in public life – such as in media, schools, the workplace and religious communities – can include, but are not limited to, the following:

Calling for, aiding or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.

Making untruthful, dehumanizing, demonizing or stereotypical allegations about Jewish people, or Jews as a collective — such as the myth of a global Jewish conspiracy or that Jews control the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.

Accusing all Jewish people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group or even for acts committed by non-Jews.

Denying the fact, scope, specifics or intentionality of the Holocaust, which is the genocide of the Jewish people by Nazi Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II.

Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.

Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.

Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, such as by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.

Applying double standards by requiring of Israel a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.

Using the symbols and images associated with historic antisemitism (such as claiming that Jews killed Jesus) to characterize Israel or Israelis.

Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.

Holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of the state of Israel.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANTISEMITISM

Hostility toward Jewish people has existed for over 2,000 years. This religious prejudice began in ancient times when Jews were often seen as outsiders. In Roman times, Jewish communities faced persecution for their religious beliefs, and this pattern of discrimination continued throughout history.

During the Middle Ages, antisemitism increased significantly in Europe. As outsiders, Jews were blamed for societal

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problems, such as the spread of diseases like the Black Death. Jews were often expelled from countries or forced to convert to Christianity. The Spanish Inquisition even targeted Jewish people who had converted but were still suspected of practising Judaism in secret.

In 19th-century Europe, there was a rise of more racial antisemitism, which characterized Jews as an inferior race. This laid the groundwork for extreme acts of antisemitism, such as the pogroms, or violent attacks and riots, particularly in Poland and Russia in the 19th and 20th centuries. The most horrific event in the history of antisemitism is the Holocaust, which occurred during World War II (1939-1945). Under Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime, six million Jews were systematically murdered in concentration camps. The Holocaust remains one of the darkest chapters in human history.

After World War II, antisemitism was widely condemned, but it did not disappear. Today, antisemitism continues to exist in various forms, from discrimination to hate speech and vandalism to violent attacks on Jewish communities worldwide.

ANTISEMITISM TODAY

Antisemitism takes on many forms today:

Online Hate: Both overt and more subtle antisemitic ideas and language spread quickly on the internet. Anonymity emboldens individuals to spread antisemitism unchecked, and the use of artificial intelligence has increased the spread of antisemitism online.

Holocaust Denial: Some people claim that the Holocaust, the genocide of six million Jews during World War II, either did not happen or is exaggerated. Holocaust denial is explicitly recognized as a form of antisemitism under the IHRA definition.

Violence Against Jewish People: In many parts of the world, Jewish communities face verbal and physical attacks and vandalism of synagogues (Jewish places of worship).

Scapegoating: This is unfairly blaming an individual or group for problems or adverse events, even if they are not responsible. Some common examples of this include arguing that Jews are responsible for the 9/11 terrorist attacks or for controlling media and banking.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1939, the Canadian government under Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King turned away over 900 Jewish refugees escaping Nazi persecution aboard the ship MS St. Louis. The ship was forced to return to Europe. Ultimately, 254 St. Louis passengers were killed in the Holocaust. In 2018, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau formally apologized for this dark chapter in our history.

DID YOU KNOW?

The "Days of Shame" refers to a deeply antisemitic event in June 1934 in Montreal, Quebec, where doctors at the Hôpital Notre-Dame staged a four-day strike. This strike was a protest against the appointment of Dr. Samuel Rabinovitch, a Jewish senior intern. The strike ended when Dr. Rabinovitch resigned from his position, allowing the doctors to resume their work without facing any disciplinary actions. This event, along with other instances of antisemitism, motivated Quebec's Jewish community to create their own healthcare institution, the Jewish General Hospital.