

WHAT IS ANTI-SEMITISM?

A Critique of the EUMC-FAR definition, and a suggested alternative wording

The document “Working Definition Of Anti-Semitism”

NOTE: Though this document has been endorsed by a number of bodies, including the National Union of Students and various UK student unions, it is not clear what they are endorsing, since its exact text is quite hard to find.

The following text is extracted from the document, on the website of the Fundamental Rights Agency, established by EU Council Regulation (EC) No 168/2007 of February 15, 2007 as the successor to the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), <http://www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/material/pub/AS/AS-WorkingDefinition-draft.pdf>. This Acrobat PDF file is encrypted and the following text has had to be extracted using optical-character recognition software. The bullet points in the original have been re-formatted as numbered points to allow easier reference within this critique.

The website <http://www.european-forum-on-antisemitism.org/working-definition-of-antisemitism/>, which contains some information on how the document came to be prepared, with references to a number of translations, does not appear to be functioning currently, though it has been cached by Google (<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.european-forum-on-antisemitism.org/working-definition-of-antisemitism/>). It is from this cache that [Appendix I](#) has been extracted.

It will be noted that the definition is described as a draft, but there is no information on how proposed amendments, addenda, corrigenda, or deletions may be proposed.

The EUMC definition

“The purpose of this document is to provide a practical guide for identifying incidents, collecting data, and supporting the implementation and enforcement of legislation dealing with anti-Semitism.

“Working definition: ***‘Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.’***”

“In addition, such manifestations could also target the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. Anti-Semitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for "why things go wrong". It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

“Contemporary examples of anti-Semitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

5. “Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
6. “Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective – such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
7. “Accusing Jews as a 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.
8. “Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
9. “Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
10. “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.

“Examples of the ways in which anti-Semitism manifests itself with regard to the state of Israel taking into account the overall context could include:

11. “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
12. “Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
13. “Using the symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
14. “Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
15. “Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

“However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic.

“Anti-Semitic acts are criminal when they are so defined by law (for example, denial of the Holocaust or distribution of anti-Semitic materials in some countries).

“Criminal acts are anti-Semitic when the targets of attacks, whether they are people or property-such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries-are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Jewish or linked to Jews.

“Anti-Semitic discrimination is the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others and is illegal in many countries.”

The Critique

Terminology

Though this document claims to define anti-Semitism, its terminology is itself problematic, since it does not attempt to define what it means by “Semitism”. It is not clear whether this is intended to refer to Jewishness in general, or in racial or religious terms.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term Semite refers to “A person belonging to the race of mankind which includes most of the peoples mentioned in Gen. x. as descended from Shem son of Noah, as the Hebrews, Arabs, Assyrians, and Aramæans. Also, a person speaking a Semitic language as his native tongue.”

According to the website, <http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Semitic>, “Though in genetic research no significant common mitochondrial results have been yielded, genetic Y-chromosome links between Near-Eastern peoples like the Palestinians, Syrians and ethnic Jews have proved fruitful . . . While population genetics is still a young science, it seems to indicate that a significant proportion of these peoples' ancestry comes from a common Near-Eastern population to which (despite the differences with the Biblical genealogy) the term Semitic has been applied.”

According to an [article in the *Jerusalem Post*](#), (November 19, 2001), “a substantial portion of Y chromosomes of Jews (70%) and Palestinian Muslim Arabs (50%) belong to the same chromosome pool. An additional 30% of the Muslim Arab chromosomes belong to a very closely related lineage... [because] part – or perhaps the majority – of Muslim Arabs in the Land of Israel descended from local inhabitants, mainly Christians and Jews, who had converted after the Islamic conquest of the 7th century A.D.”

On the other hand, a significant minority of Ashkenazi Jews in Israel appear to be descended from the Khazars, originally a Turkic tribe from Central Asia, who settled in southern Russia and eastern Ukraine and converted *en masse* to Judaism in the ninth century of the present era, as described by Yehuda Ha-Levi in 1140 A.D. (Dunlop 1954). According to Dr Harry Ostrer, director of the Human Genetics Program at the New York University School of Medicine, “the admixture [of Jews in Spain] with European people explains why so many European and Syrian Jews have blue eyes and blonde hair” (*The American Journal of Human Genetics* 69:5, November 2001).

(It will be recalled that blond and blue-eyed T.E. Lawrence passed as a Sunni Muslim Circassian behind the Ottoman lines during World War I.)

So while the genetic make-up of those Israelis considered to be Jews is sufficiently complex to indicate they cannot be considered to be a uniform Semitic group, the non-Jewish populations of the area have sufficient in common with them to make it clear that all the peoples of what was, in the days of the British Mandate, the region known as Palestine, have a common Semitic ancestry. Therefore any denigration of

any of these peoples must be considered to be anti-Semitism, or the restriction of this category solely to attacks on or criticism of Jews, either collectively or individually, makes no legal sense whatsoever.

As Yasser Arafat famously declared: “I am not an anti-Semite. How could I be against myself?”

Of course, in common parlance, what most people mean by anti-Semitism is attacks on Jews, but surely in a quasi-judicial document such as this, which is predicated upon an attempt to define anti-Semitism, a more rigorous terminology than common parlance should be employed.

Nevertheless, for simplicity’s sake we shall go along with the stance of the document, in restricting the term anti-Semitism to attacks upon Jews, for the remainder of our critique.

The document itself

In general, the woolliness of the Semitic terminology referred to above is also demonstrated in the body of the document. For instance, the working definition:

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

Why the reference to non-Jews in this definition? To whom is this intended to apply? A non-Jew like the Bedouin who drove his bulldozer over Rachel Corrie? Or the more than 200,000 non-Jewish contract labourers (from countries such as Romania, the Philippines, and China) who have replaced Palestinians at the lowest levels of the labour force since the virtual closure of the borders of Gaza and the West Bank?

Is it "rhetorical . . . anti-Semitism . . . directed toward Jewish . . . property" to condemn the Israeli settlements in occupied Palestine (illegal according to United Nations Security Council Resolution 446, adopted on March 22, 1979, which determined "that the policy and practices of Israel in establishing settlements in the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967 have no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East")?

Would the painting on the Israeli *Geder HaHafrada*, (the so-called security barrier) by the graffiti artist, Banksy, and the rock musician, Roger Waters (among many hundreds of others), constitute "physical manifestations of anti-Semitism" since the barrier is clearly Israeli property (albeit predominantly outside the frontiers of the Israeli state), which this definition would protect.

Anti-Semitic "manifestations could also target the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity". "Could"? In what circumstances? The use of the conditional tense suggests that criticism of the state of Israel might or might not be regarded as anti-Semitic, though clearly the effect seems to be to outlaw *all* such criticism.

Are the non-Jewish citizens of Israel regarded as part of this "Jewish collectivity"? Interestingly, it does not seem so, since their IDs or passports do not define them as Israeli citizens, but as Arabs, Bedouin, etc. There is currently a legal challenge going through the Israeli courts (and fought vigorously by the Israeli establishment) to this weird suggestion that there is no such thing as Israeli nationality. The Israeli interior ministry has adopted more than 130 possible nationalities for Israeli citizens, most of them defined in religious or ethnic terms, with "Jewish" and "Arab" being the main categories. There are even two laws – the Law of Return for Jews and the Citizenship Law for Arabs – defining different rights and responsibilities for these two main ethnic groups in the country. (Interestingly, the English language wording on Israeli passports does not admit these distinctions, since the Hebrew wording is

mistranslated into English to grant the holder Israeli nationality, which definition is not in the original Hebrew.)

However, immigrants whose status as Jews is questioned by the Israeli rabbinate, including more than 300,000 arrivals from the former Soviet Union, are typically registered according to their country of origin. (It is notable that some of these immigrants are neo-Nazis, such as Patrol 35 in the city of Petah Tikva, made up of teenage immigrants from the former Soviet Union; would a critique of their hate slogans constitute “anti-Semitism”, since they are Israeli citizens under the Law of Return?)

According to the **first bullet-point**, “calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion” is proscribed. It is a pity that this does not extend to racist Jewish websites (such as [The Virtual Medinat Yehuda](#)) which call for the extermination of “Ishmaelites” (ie Muslims, a reference to Abraham’s son Ishmael, the Biblical ancestor of the Arabs) and of Israeli *Shalom Achshav* (Peace Now) activists. Even-handedly, it ought to. Subjective terms like “a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion” beg the question about how radicalism or extremism may be defined. Would the 19 times the Jews are defined in the Bible as a “stiff-necked” people count as “an extremist view of religion”?

The **second bullet-point** outlaws suggestions of “Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions”, such as, presumably, any analysis of the activities of lobby groups like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the Anti-Defamation League and Christians United for Israel, the American Jewish Congress, the Zionist Organization of America, the Israel Policy Forum, the American Jewish Committee, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Americans for a Safe Israel, American Friends of Likud, Mercaz-USA, Hadassah, and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, whose self-described mission includes “forging diverse groups into a unified force for Israel’s well-being” and working to “strengthen and foster the special US-Israel relationship”. So the City University of New York’s professor of journalism, Eric Alterman, is being anti-Semitic when he says the US media “is dominated by people who cannot imagine criticising Israel”. In 2002, he listed 56 columnists and commentators who can be counted on to support Israel reflexively and without qualification. Other consistently pro-Israel columnists include the *Washington Post*’s Jim Hoagland, Robert Kagan, Charles Krauthammer and George Will; the *Los Angeles Times*’ Max Boot, Jonah Goldberg and Jonathan Chait; and the *New York Times*’ William Safire, A.M. Rosenthal, David Brooks, and Thomas Friedman.

But to point this out is to be guilty of anti-Semitism, even though AIPAC itself boasts that “For more than half a century, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee has worked to help make Israel more secure by ensuring that American support remains

strong. From a small pro-Israel public affairs boutique in the 1950s, AIPAC has grown into a 100,000-member national grassroots movement described by *The New York Times* as ‘the most important organization affecting America's relationship with Israel’.”

Among the achievements listed on its website are influencing US legislators:

- “Securing critical security assistance to Israel each year to ensure that Israel remains capable of facing increased threats.
- “Supporting America's efforts to help Israel achieve peace while upholding the principles that hold the best prospects for Israeli-Arab peace in letters to the president signed by 328 House members and 76 senators.
- “Passing legislation requiring the administration to evaluate all future military sales to Arab states in the context of the need to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge over potential adversaries.
- “Passing multiple resolutions affirming congressional support for Israel's right to self-defense.
- “Strengthening U.S.-Israel energy cooperation by passing legislation that establishes a grant program that funds joint projects between U.S. and Israeli entities in the field of alternative energy.
- “Strengthening U.S.-Israel homeland security cooperation by passing landmark legislation creating an office within the Department of Homeland Security to support joint research and development projects between the United States and key allies such as Israel.
- “Prohibiting U.S. aid and contacts with a Hamas-led PA.”

(These are actual quotations from the AIPAC website, http://www.aipac.org/about_AIPAC/Learn_About_AIPAC/26832.asp) Do the website's claims to have had an effective influence over United States' legislation and policy constitute anti-Semitism?

And do not these claims lend credence to the accusation, outlawed in **bullet-point six**, that organisations like AIPAC are “more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations”?

Bullet-point three: It is hard to understand the logic of the reference here to “acts committed by non-Jews”.

Regardless of the weaknesses cited above, it is when, in the bulleted points numbered seven to eleven, the document proceeds to apply its definition of anti-Semitism to any analysis or criticism of the actions of the state of Israel, that the real danger of its formulations becomes apparent. Not only do they sweepingly outlaw any such criticism under the general heading of anti-Semitism – nonsensically tarring such

internationally renowned figures as Desmond Tutu with the same brush as self-confessed Holocaust-deniers like David Irving – but, in fact, by identifying the interests of Jews throughout the world with a single nation state, actually fuelling fascist attacks upon Jews.

Bullet-point seven targets claims “that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor”, which means that no examination of institutional racism in that state (such as the different status for Jews and non-Jews enshrined in the Law of Return for Jews and the Citizenship Law for Arabs) would be possible. If that criterion were applied in UK, it would outlaw the charges of institutional racism which emerged after the death of Stephen Lawrence.

As we have seen above, the “double standards” referred to in **bullet-point eight** could be held to apply to the way in which Israel is accorded special status: while criticism of any other state in the world – Iran, for instance, or even the United States – is permissible, even if the criticism is totally wrong-headed, Israel is above such criticism, regardless of how justifiable it might be.

In **bullet-point ten**, the document descends into illiteracy, when it outlaws “[d]rawing *comparisons* [sic, my emphasis] of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis”. One assumes they mean analogies rather than comparisons, for as worded here it would even outlaw any attempt to *deny* any similarities between Nazi policies in occupied territories and actions of the Israeli Defence Force in the West Bank and Gaza. However, this is something of an Aunt Sally, or red herring, since such analogies are rare, if not totally non-existent; more usually, analogies are drawn (for instance, by Desmond Tutu) with the apartheid regime in South Africa. Thus, by omission the document (correctly) does not label such analogies as anti-Semitic.

Bullet-point eleven appears to conflict with the constitutional status of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, as enshrined in the Law of Return. Of course, many Jewish citizens of the state criticise and campaign against Israeli government actions, and the statement that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic” is to be welcomed.

Summary

In summary, therefore, the document is full of semantic and grammatical irregularities, illogicalities, and contradictions. It is significant, perhaps, that the term “racism” does not appear anywhere in the document, which is bizarre, since anti-Semitism is a specific manifestation of the more general “prejudice and antagonism towards people of other races, esp. those felt to be a threat to one's cultural or racial integrity or economic well-being” (Oxford English Dictionary).

It makes the common assumption that anti-Semitism applies only to Jews, and not to all Semitic peoples (though in a number of cases, it applies the term to attacks or criticism of non-Jews, without explaining the circumstances when this would apply).

Ironically, by outlawing comparisons with Nazi racism, it prevents any denial of any such similarities.

It denies the influence of powerful pro-Israeli lobbies like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and defines as “anti-Semitic” any analysis of the way they abuse their power.

And, most importantly, by identifying the interests of Jews with a single Middle Eastern state, it actually fuels anti-Jewish racism.

On the positive side, it does not outlaw comparisons or analogies with apartheid South Africa, and concedes that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic”.

Publication of this document is to be welcomed, however, if it provokes a full and frank debate about the issues it raises, and is available for amendment or correction.

A proposed alternative

In that spirit, the following alternative wording is offered. Comments and criticisms are welcomed.

Anti-Semitism – a specific form of racism

Anti-Semitism is a specific form of racism, targeting those of Semitic ethnicity, but also attacking practitioners of specific religions, such as Judaism or Islam. Though often confined to anti-Jewish statements or actions, its application is much wider than this and must be combated wherever it may appear.

Contemporary examples of racism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

1. Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of the members of any racial or religious group.
2. Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about any racial or religious group.
3. Accusing any racial or religious group of collective responsibility for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by any single person or group.
4. Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (eg gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of an estimated eleven million people, including six million Jews; two million Poles; Soviet prisoners of war; Roma and other “non-Aryans”; the mentally ill, physically disabled, and mentally retarded, homosexual and transsexual people, political opponents, and religious dissidents at the hands of the German Third Reich and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).

5. Denying the historical truth of this Holocaust.
6. Accusing the members of any racial or religious group of being more loyal to any other state than to the interests of their own nations.

Examples of the ways in which racism manifests itself, taking into account the overall context could include:

7. Denying any people their right to self-determination.
8. Applying double standards by requiring of any state a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
9. Using racist symbols and images (such as swastikas) in attacks upon any racial or religious group.
10. Drawing analogies between the policies of any nation state with those of the Nazis. This should not be held to outlaw legitimate comparisons between the policies of any state with that of another, for instance with apartheid South Africa.
11. Holding the members of any racial or religious group collectively responsible for actions of any other state, whether it be Jews and the state of Israel, Muslims for the Hamas government in Gaza, Hindus for Indian government occupation of parts of Kashmir, etc.

Nothing in the foregoing should be held to restrict the freedom of debate or academic, political, religious or any other controversy.

This document is offered as a draft, and is subject to amendment or correction following the widest possible discussion of its contents.

KARL DALLAS, November 10, 2010, Bradford

Appendix I: Background

Extracted from the cached website,

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.european-forum-on-antisemitism.org/working-definition-of-antisemitism/>.

In 2004 the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) released its first comprehensive study of anti-Semitism in the EU. Although it relied heavily on its focal points in the then fifteen member countries for its information, a majority of those focal points had no working definition of anti-Semitism and of those that did, no two were the same.

As a result the EUMC, in collaboration with key NGOs and representatives of the newly-formed Tolerance and Non-Discrimination section of the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) drafted a single, comprehensive definition for use in the field. It employs plain language to enable the definition to be easily accessible to a wide range of law enforcement, justice and government officials, as well as to NGOs and experts who assist in the monitoring process.

This “working definition” was adopted in 2005 by the EUMC, now called the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and disseminated on its website and to its national monitors. Units of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) concerned with combating anti-Semitism also employ the definition. The US State Department’s report, Contemporary Global Anti-Semitism, released earlier this year, makes use of this definition for the purpose of its analysis.

Many Jewish community and NGO leaders involved in monitoring anti-Semitism remain unaware of the working definition or have been hampered by its existence to date only in English. To encourage additional usage of the definition, the European Forum on Anti-Semitism has commissioned translations of the working definition into numerous European languages, as well as non-European languages widely spoken in Europe. The translations were written by Jewish community leaders and/or experts in the field.

While monitoring of anti-Semitism has improved in a number of countries in past years, reporting remains erratic. The comparability of data is also difficult without the use of a common definition. The stronger the statistical basis, the more likely it is that public responses to anti-Semitism can be improved. Please feel free to circulate the definition, with the relevant translation, to authorities and experts in your own countries.

List of translations

© Translations by EUROPEAN FORUM ON ANTISEMITISM

[العَرَبِيَّة \(Arabic\)](#)

[Bosanski \(Bosnian\)](#)

[български \(Bulgarian\)](#)
[čeština \(Czech\)](#)
[Dansk \(Danish\)](#)
[Deutsch \(German\)](#)
[eesti keel \(Estonian\)](#)
[Ελληνικά \(Greek\)](#)
[English](#)
[Español \(Spanish\)](#)
[فارسی \(Farsi\)](#)
[Français \(French\)](#)
[Hrvatski \(Croatian\)](#)
[Italiano \(Italian\)](#)
[עברית \(Hebrew\)](#)
[Kurmançî \(Kurdish\)](#)
[Latviešu valoda \(Latvian\)](#)
[Lietuvių kalba \(Lithuanian\)](#)
[Nederlands \(Dutch\)](#)
[Norsk \(Norwegian\)](#)
[Magyar \(Hungarian\)](#)
[Монгол \(Mongolian\)](#)
[Polski \(Polish\)](#)
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