

**Submission to the Standing Committee on Science and Research**  
**Study: “The Mission, Mandate, Role, Structure and Financing of the New Capstone Research”**

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December 16, 2024

This brief is respectfully submitted on behalf of concerned Canadian scholars and researchers in response to a proposal put forward to this Committee that constitutes outside interference in the governance of scholarly research and threatens academic freedom and integrity. The pro-Israel organization B’nai Brith Canada’s submission to this Committee, recommends that Canada’s proposed Capstone Research Funding Organization, that will manage federal research funding under the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), use the controversial International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism as the basis for reviewing research applications and funding requests made to these granting bodies. While the Canadian government included the IHRA as part of the 2019 Federal Anti-racism Strategy, Canadian university scholars and faculty associations have [overwhelmingly rejected the IHRA](#) definition on the grounds that it undermines academic freedom and would censor and suppress critical academic research. **We implore the committee to unequivocally reject this proposal and uphold the values of academic freedom and scholarly integrity, and to ensure that the pursuit of academic knowledge is free from outside interference from agenda-driven special interest groups.**

### **IHRA and Academic Censorship**

The vague language of the IHRA definition and the problematic examples, combined with its ineffectiveness as a tool to combat antisemitism has even led Kenneth S. Stern, the original drafter of the examples in the IHRA definition, to warn against legislation on the grounds that it would “restrict academic freedom and punish political speech.” As Dr. David Feldman, Director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Study of Antisemitism (University of London, UK) points out “the overall effect will place the onus on Israel’s critics to demonstrate they are not antisemitic.”

One of the illustrative examples of antisemitism is “[d]enying the Jewish people their right to self determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.” Here, the IHRA definition promotes a problematic double standard. Protecting Israel from charges of systemic racism would effectively establish an “Israel Exceptionalism” clause. Many scholars have concluded that the Canadian state is a “racist endeavour;” should these criticisms be silenced or deemed as hate speech? Why then should criticism of another state be subject to political censure? Penalizing those who claim that Israeli policies and practices are racist is categorically antidemocratic and denies Palestinian scholars (and those whose exercise of

academic freedom is in solidarity with them) the right to name and defend against genocide<sup>1</sup> and state oppression, without fear of sanction.

IHRA has been widely rejected by faculty associations and unions representing the Canadian university sector. To date, 40 university faculty associations and unions across the country including La Fédération québécoise des professeures et professeurs d'université (FQPPU), the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) and the Canadian Association for University Teachers (CAUT) representing 72,000 teachers, librarians, researchers, and other academic professionals at some 125 universities and colleges across the country, have passed motions to reject the IHRA.

On November 30, 2024, the Canadian Association of University Teachers National Council passed a motion reiterating their rejection of the IHRA WDA. The motion states that "CAUT opposes the adoption of or reliance on the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism and the Canadian Handbook on the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism as a basis for defining what constitutes antisemitism or for otherwise suppressing speech deemed as controversial, troubling, or offensive in Canadian universities." The motion also emphasized that, "the IHRAWDA poses a significant threat to academic freedom at Canadian universities and colleges and has already been used on a number of occasions to censor and impede the academic freedom of teachers and researchers who have developed anti-racist and decolonial perspectives on the policies and practices of the state of Israel, and through many of its examples conflates criticism of the policies of the State of Israel with anti-Semitism."

### **IHRA Weaponized to Target and Censor Scholars**

Across Canada, faculty associations have warned that the IHRA definition undermines important anti-racist and decolonial initiatives in Canadian educational institutions and can censor political speech and restrict the academic freedom of teachers and researchers who have developed critical perspectives on the policies and practices of the State of Israel. Such targeted attacks have a chilling effect on the academic freedom of professors in the classroom, in their research, and in campus politics more broadly. One important study by Dr. Sheryl Nestel and Rowan Gaudet called [Unveiling the Chilly Climate: The Suppression of Speech on Palestine in Canada](#) (2022) documents the targeting of Canadian scholars. Testimonies of 40 scholars across Canada revealed the following:

Faculty respondents reported restrictions on academic freedom, self-censoring of expression on Palestinian human rights, discriminatory treatment by academic publishing platforms, harassment by pro-Israel advocacy groups and media outlets, attacks from colleagues, political interference by university administration, classroom surveillance by

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<sup>1</sup> Israeli actions amount to genocide as defined in international law; a position supported by [Holocaust and genocide studies scholars](#) as well as [UN](#) and other [international human rights experts](#), [Amnesty international](#), and accepted as [plausible by the International Court of Justice](#).

pro-Israel student groups, and anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism. Indeed, the suppression of speech on Palestine has significant consequences in academia, where it threatens principles of academic freedom and encourages surveillance of critical intellectuals and activists and of the oppositional knowledge that they produce (p.2).

These findings are reinforced by a 2023 [study](#) by the European Legal Support Centre and the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies documenting the adverse impact of the IHRA on free speech and academic freedom at U.K universities. Ironically these studies may themselves be deemed “antisemitic” by the problematic standards set by the IHRA.

B’nai Brith’s brief cites without evidence the research of Canadian Palestinian and Muslim scholars as being “antisemitic” using the politically charged standards of the IHRA. This is a prime example of how the IHRA is weaponized to silence and suppress academic freedom. [Criticizing Israel is not antisemitic](#). Implementing the IHRA as a filter for academic research will continue to fuel the unfounded targeting and censoring of academic research that may be in any way critical of Israeli state policies and practices or that speaks to liberation, freedom from oppression, and anticolonialism. As the *Chilly Climate* study has shown, this targeting is primarily directed at racialized scholars,

Unsubstantiated allegations of antisemitic intent and support for terrorism are commonly levelled against pro-Palestine academics and activists. Significantly, Palestinians, Muslims, and non-Arab racialized participants appear to have borne the brunt of direct attacks on their scholarship and activism (Nestel & Gaudet, 2022, p.2).

B’nai Brith Canada’s submission to this Committee puts forward a problematic “deny list” of racialized scholars whom they wish to censor. The government must not collude with such neo-McCarthyist tactics of special interest groups who seek to dictate scholarly research standards and funding decisions.

## **Protecting Academic Research**

Academic research unencumbered from outside political interference, is vital at times of geopolitical crisis. The federal government has stated that the new Capstone Research Funding Organization’s mandate will be to “strengthen and modernize federal support for Canada’s world-class scientists and researchers working on the most pressing challenges of today.” Using an instrument of political repression to police this research and potentially defund or deny funding, is counter to the mission of free inquiry which is the cornerstone of our universities and academic scholarship. It is abundantly clear that the IHRA is incompatible with academic inquiry and free expression as the university sector has repeatedly confirmed through evidence-based studies and countless motions.

We can all agree that research should not reinforce antisemitism, anti-Palestinian racism (APR), Islamophobia or any form of discrimination or oppression. The Tri-Council bodies already have in place rigorous and robust peer review measures using EDI standards to adjudicate research grant proposals and the funding requests made to them. These processes allow for expert opinions, free of conflicts of interest, to be the arbiters of sound academic scholarship. This

process cannot be relinquished to appease special interest groups determined to undermine independent free inquiry and academic freedom. Therefore, the politically charged recommendation to use the IHRA to vet academic research and funding decisions must be rejected. Furthermore, now that the federal government is [officially adopting a definition of APR](#), it is important to ensure that this will be reflected in the Tri-Council's EDI Standards.

Respectfully Submitted,

- Academic Alliance Against Antisemitism, Racism, Colonialism & Censorship in Canada (ARC)
- Academics for Palestine-Concordia
- Arab Canadian Lawyers Association (ACLA)
- CEGEP Teachers for Palestine, Montreal
- Coalition Against Antisemitism, Anti-Palestinian Racism, and Islamophobia
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P) -National
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P), Ottawa Region [University of Ottawa, Carleton University & Saint Paul University]
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P), Queens University
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P), Saint Mary's University
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P) South-Western Ontario [Brock University, University of Guelph, University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University, McMaster University, University of Western Ontario & University of Windsor]
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P), Toronto Metropolitan University
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P), Trent University
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P), University of Alberta
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P), University of British Columbia
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P), University of Manitoba
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P), University of Regina
- Faculty and Staff for Palestine, University of Saskatchewan
- Faculty for Palestine (F4P) University of Toronto
- Jewish Faculty Network Steering Committee
- Palestinian-Canadian Academics and Artists Network (PCAAN)