



08 December 2020

Intervention: Presentation – Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA definition of antisemitism

EC Working Group

I would first like to thank Katharina von Schnurbein for her invitation and the European Commission and RIAS for the idea to develop a handbook on the IHRA working definition of antisemitism. I would also like to thank the speakers of the previous panel – it is always encouraging to learn about effective strategies in the fight against antisemitism on the ground.

At the IHRA's Plenary Session last week, we also had a chance to share good practices for the implementation of the working definition of antisemitism. I was impressed by the innovative methods used to incorporate the definition into training programs for police and teachers, as well as for firefighters, and even for directors of cultural institutions. And I was impressed, too, by the range of organizations that have adopted the working definition. From law enforcement officials, to religious associations, to the Bavarian Beekeepers' Association. And indeed, this is critical.

We know from history that antisemitism's dangerous path is incremental. It begins by touching seemingly insignificant areas of life. But gradually, it breaks the bonds between individuals in a society, poisoning it, devastating it.

The fight against antisemitism is the responsibility of us all. Antisemitism is not confined to one part of society; it does not stop at national borders. It is a complex and stubborn problem, and we must all work together to combat it. In short, countering antisemitism requires the building of a broad coalition.

The working definition of antisemitism is essential in that effort. As it is non-legally binding, it can be applied flexibly to a variety of contexts. As an educational and awareness-raising tool, it helps to sensitize people and institutions to antisemitism and the mechanisms behind it. As a mutual starting point for discussion, it provides a common denominator for strong networks, opening the door for cooperation and engagement.

And it is exactly this discussion, between individuals, within and between organizations, that creates the foundation for a shared understanding – among beekeepers and police officers alike – that antisemitism is a problem and that we all play a role in addressing it.



The current handbook will no doubt provide a useful contribution to the discussion that the working definition opens up. It is being developed by RIAS and published by the European Commission with help from a few IHRA experts – one of whom we have with us today. With illustrations of the working definition’s examples and an overview of forms of implementation in a variety of contexts, the handbook encourages the definition’s further use. It should help policymakers, but also people and organizations at the grassroots level, to embrace the working definition.

Such an effort is especially important today. We see how the pandemic is accompanied by the erosion of democratic values, the rise of conspiracy myths, and widespread economic hardship. We see the development of conditions which are ripe for antisemitism to thrive. We welcome this important contribution to fostering discussion about antisemitism – how to identify it, how to counter it. And in that way, to bring more and different people and organizations into the fold, strengthening the broad coalition necessary for fighting this persistent scourge.