

Australian Jewish Democratic Society

A Progressive Voice among Jews
A Jewish Voice among Progressives

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Dear Councillors,

Glen Eira Council: vote on 26 April whether to adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society, Inc (AJDS) was established in Melbourne 1984 as a politically progressive voice in the Australian Jewish community:

- To promote and contribute to justice in Israel/Palestine.
- To facilitate, support and grow politically progressive voices in the Jewish community.
- To be in solidarity with Indigenous fights for justice, land and water rights and decolonisation.
- To foster a specifically Jewish approach to the issues of peace and Social Justice.

Our organisation has promoted a just solution to the conflict in Israel and Palestine since our inception, one that accounts for the rights of both Israelis and Palestinians in conflict resolution. We continue to engage with the Jewish and broader community, including parliamentarians, offering a progressive perspective on the situation in Israel/Palestine. Our positions are similar to those found in many progressive Jewish organisations in Israel and the US.

The AJDS considers the adoption of the IHRA Working Definition as highly problematic, for the following reasons.

- It was not intended by its drafters to be anything other than a working definition for implementation in the particular free speech environment of American campuses; something very different to local government. In fact, its key drafter, Professor Kenneth Stern has said that “never intended to be a campus hate speech code”, but a discussion document and hundreds of eminent scholars and lawyers have pointed out its chilling effect on the exercise of free speech.
- While no reasonable person can object to its general characterization of antisemitism as hatred of Jews, the definition focusses on the political context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. This has made the document highly controversial, because the relationship between antisemitism and criticism of Israel is subject to considerable

dispute within the Jewish community and beyond. We are of the view that the Working definition has been weaponized against critics of Israel.

- Council should not be entering into such a controversial political space via the IHRA Working Definition.
- There is legislation and expert bodies at a federal and state level to deal with antisemitism and racism and it is to these that Council should make policy reference rather than a foreign document intended for a different audience
- A partisan motherhood statement such as that represented by the IHRA is of no practical use to Council, given that it promotes political division rather than unity.
- Racism IS a problem in Australia and Council must be alert to this. The needs of all communities must be considered. Adoption of the IHRA definition creates the impression that safety of Jewish citizens of Glen Eira has been neglected.

Sincerely

Dennis Martin
For the AJDS committee