

**Middle  
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17 September 2019

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2  
Canada  
Fax: 613-941-6900

The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez  
Minister of Canadian Heritage  
15 Eddy Street  
Gatineau, QC K1A 0M5  
Canada  
PCH.info-info.PCH@canada.ca

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Rodriguez:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern over the Canadian government's decision to rely on what we regard as a flawed definition of antisemitism as part of its new anti-racism strategy. We believe that the adoption and deployment of that definition poses a threat to freedom of expression and to the principles of academic freedom.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has over 2,500 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

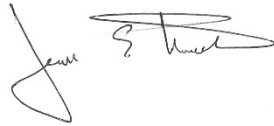
MESA believes strongly in the need to combat antisemitism and all other forms of racism, bigotry and discrimination, and we therefore commend the government of Canada for producing a thoughtful strategy which aims to redress historic and structural racism and discrimination against the country's indigenous peoples and other racial, religious, and ethnic minority communities. However, the definition of antisemitism which that strategy employs is the one formulated in 2016 by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Regrettably, as the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, several Members of Parliament and other individuals and organizations in Canada have noted, many of the "examples" of contemporary antisemitism offered in the IHRA's definition of antisemitism conflate actual manifestations of antisemitism with criticism of Israeli actions and policies and of Zionism as a political ideology.

We fear that the government's adoption and deployment of such an overly broad and obviously politicized definition of antisemitism may have a chilling effect on free and open discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an issue of widespread public

concern in Canada as elsewhere, thereby threatening the freedom of expression guaranteed by Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It may also pose a threat to academic freedom at Canada's institutions of higher education, some of whose faculty are members of MESA. Finally, the government's reliance on a definition of antisemitism that could be used to characterize entirely legitimate speech as antisemitic may have damaging consequences for efforts to combat actual manifestations of antisemitism, the ostensible target of government's anti-racism strategy.

We therefore call on the government of Canada to adopt a definition of antisemitism for its anti-racism strategy that does not threaten freedom of expression or academic freedom by conflating criticism of Israel or of Zionism with antisemitism, and that will thereby more effectively serve that strategy's laudable goals.

Sincerely,



Judith E. Tucker  
MESA President  
Professor, Georgetown University



Laurie Brand  
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor, University of Southern California