



Development Studies Association of Australia statement on Universities Australia's definition of Antisemitism

22 May 2025

The Development Studies Association of Australia (DSAA) urges universities across Australia not to adopt the Universities Australia working definition of antisemitism nor to include it into their legislation, complaints schemes or disciplinary processes.

The DSAA opposes all forms of racism, including antisemitism. We, as the DSAA, maintain that antisemitism is different from the legitimate criticism of Israel's actions and of the political ideology of Zionism. Our concerns echo those of other Australian Academic Associations that study power, culture and the social world.

We support the rights of scholars and students in and beyond Australia to engage in research and public speaking about the situation in Palestine and Israel, and to criticise acts of violence and injustice as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity anywhere these occur. The Universities Australia definition will have a chilling effect, going beyond the prevention of hate speech, and undermining academic freedom and freedom of expression. It is an ambiguous statement which — like the widely criticised International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition — conflates research on and criticism of Israel and the political theory of Zionism with antisemitism. This contrasts with the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, which is less ambiguous and clearer on the issue of criticising Zionism and on supporting Palestine's quest for justice (among other things) as not being antisemitic.

While the Universities Australia definition notes 'Criticism of the policies and practices of the Israeli government or state is not in and of itself antisemitic', it provides a number of ambiguous qualifications, such as: 'However, criticism of Israel can be antisemitic when it is grounded in harmful tropes, stereotypes or assumptions and when it calls for the elimination of the State of Israel or all Jews or when it holds Jewish individuals or communities responsible for Israel's actions'. These qualifications are vague and could be used to discipline academics who criticise Israel in any way. The vagueness of 'harmful tropes, stereotypes or assumptions' could be interpreted in multiple ways, which may lead to academic self-censorship on issues of human rights in Palestine and the broader region. The statement's ambiguous wording could also be used by universities to conflate legitimate criticism of Israel and Zionism with antisemitism, thereby restricting academic freedom and the



possibility of scholars to contribute research and policy directives towards peace and humanitarian goals.

The inclusion of this definition has the potential to silence Palestinian academics and others working on human rights, development and humanitarianism in this region. It may make academics afraid of criticising the actions of Israel, which have been described as committing genocide in Gaza by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories.

As academics working on development, humanitarian and human rights issues, we believe it is crucial that we maintain the freedom of expression to criticise any government or political ideology, and that this is distinct from racism. We therefore urge all universities in Australia to stand with the many Jewish, Arab and other scholars, activists, professional associations and academic institutions calling for universities to reject definitions of antisemitism that conflate legitimate criticism of the Israeli state with antisemitism.

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