Anti-Semitism: Official Definition 'Will Fight Hatred'

December 12, 2016

BBC News

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-38281950>

The government plans to adopt an international definition of anti-Semitism to help tackle hatred towards Jewish people.

Police, councils, universities and public bodies can adopt the wording, Theresa May has said.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), which the UK belongs to, created the definition.

It calls anti-Semitism a "perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews".

The [definition](https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/press_release_document_antisemitism.pdf) adds: "Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

The prime minister told a lunch of the Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI) in London that a clear definition would "call out" anyone guilty of anti-Semitism in "essence, language or behaviour".

The UK becomes the first country to adopt the IHRA's definition, which created the wording in May.

## 'Contested' definitions

Downing Street said anti-Semitic behaviour could be overlooked because the term is ill-defined, with different organisations adopting their own interpretations.

Police in the UK already use this definition, which was adopted by the EU's Agency for Fundamental Rights.

It could now be used by other bodies, such as councils and universities, although it will not be legally binding.

Universities UK, the umbrella body for the sector, confirmed it was looking at the plans, saying that existing definitions were "variable and sometimes contested".

The IHRA - which is backed by 31 countries, including the UK, US, Israel, France and Germany - hopes the definition will be adopted globally as a "political tool" to deal with anti-Jewish hate crime.

Mrs May said: "It is unacceptable that there is anti-Semitism in this country. It is even worse that incidents are reportedly on the rise.

"As a government we are making a real difference and adopting this measure is a ground-breaking step."

**'Scourge' in society**

Sir Eric Pickles, the UK's envoy for post-Holocaust issues, told the BBC that the new definition addressed "modern" forms of anti-Semitism.

He said that holding Jewish people "accountable for what's happening in Israel" was one example.

"We've moved into a new phase of anti-Semitism, and it's important that definitions keep up," he said.

Image copyright Getty Images Image caption Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis: "I would like to salute the prime minister for her leadership"

Ephraim Mirvis, the chief rabbi of the UK and Commonwealth, welcomed the move for tackling what he called a "scourge in our society".

"My hope is that the adoption of this definition will provide a clarity which will herald a far more effective discourse on the ways that we can highlight and challenge anti-Semitism wherever it is found," he added.

The Community Security Trust said the number of anti-Semitic incidents in the UK [increased by 11% between January and June](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-36971865) - from 500 in the same period last year, to 557 this year.

Last week, [a man who subjected Labour MP Luciana Berger](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-38249351) to an online campaign of anti-Semitic abuse was jailed for two years.

## 'No excuses'

On Tuesday, the government will publish its response to the Home Affairs Select Committee's [report](https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/news-parliament-2015/antisemitism-report-published-16-17/) into anti-Semitism, which in October called on political leaders to do more to tackle hate.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said anti-Semitism must be understood for what it was - "an attack on the identity of people who live, contribute and are valued in our society".

"There can be no excuses for anti-Semitism or any other form of racism or prejudice," he said.

Labour, which has [faced accusations that it has failed to tackle anti-Semitism](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-37656197) in its own membership, also welcomed the move.

A spokesman for Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said hatred towards Jews was "as repugnant and unacceptable as any other form of racism".

Earlier this year Baroness Chakrabarti, the former director of civil liberties group Liberty, chaired an inquiry into anti-Semitism in the party.

It found the party was not overrun by anti-Semitism or other forms of racism, but there was an ["occasionally toxic atmosphere"](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-36672022).