



January 24, 2020

Dear Mayor Valérie Plante and City Council,

I am writing to you on behalf of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association to urge you and the city of Montreal not to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism when it comes before you.

The BCCLA is Canada's oldest civil liberties and human rights organization, founded in 1962. We are unequivocally opposed to antisemitism and all forms of racism. We support municipal initiatives to combat racism, racial profiling, and racial targeting. However we are strongly opposed to the IHRA definition because of its threat to freedom of expression. The legal adoption of the IHRA definition is inconsistent with the values underlying the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and would greatly narrow the scope of political expression in Quebec and Canada.

The IHRA definition of antisemitism is extremely vague, open to misinterpretation, and the document states that it is "non-legally binding." Not only is the text unsuitable for any legal or administrative purpose in Quebec or Canada, but the accompanying "illustrations" suggest that the definition conflates certain critiques of the state of Israel with antisemitism. If implemented, the IHRA definition will serve to severely chill political expressions of criticism of Israel as well as support for Palestinian rights. We note that similar motions were recently presented to both Vancouver and Calgary city councils but were not adopted in either city.

The BCCLA strongly believes that a broad range of perspectives must be welcome in our public sphere. We support the rights of people to celebrate or condemn the actions of foreign or domestic governments, without being vulnerable to censorship or other action from their municipal government. The BCCLA joins others in calling on all levels of government to continue to combat antisemitism and other forms of racism while ensuring that *Charter* rights are protected in the context of political speech and legitimate political action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Harsha Walia', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Harsha Walia
Executive Director