

# FREE SPEECH UNDER ATTACK IN THE UK

- Attempt to silence Palestinian voices on campuses
- Government's flawed definition of antisemitism

**Support: Motion 5 & Motion 57**  
**Support: Amendment 57A.1**  
**& Amendment 57A.2**

The UK Government has adopted a definition of 'antisemitism' that seeks to conflate criticism of Israel with anti-Jewish racism. It has urged Universities UK to advise all UK HE institutions that they should prevent meetings or events about Palestine that fall foul of the definition.

Some universities have already complied with this instruction, and have banned campus events. Others have explicitly refused to adopt the definition, and have resisted outside pressure from Israel's supporters to comply.

Now a senior QC has written an Opinion that describes the definition as confusing, with no legal significance, and relying on it to restrict freedom of expression has the potential to put universities and public bodies at risk.

## Origin

In 2011, UCU Congress passed a motion with an overwhelming vote dissociating the union from the 'Working Definition of Antisemitism' of the EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC).

The Working Definition deliberately conflated genuine antisemitism with criticism of Israel. In fact, despite its name, the definition did not originate from any EU organisation but from the American Jewish Committee, a self-confessed lobbying group for Israel.

The EUMC never formally adopted the definition, and its successor body the Fundamental Rights Agency quietly dispensed with it.

## Silencing Palestine

With sustained pressure from the Israel lobby, the EUMC working definition was reincarnated last year as the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

In December, the IHRA was adopted by the Government. Pro-Israel groups have seized on this opening, and the London Assembly, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, several other local councils, and the National Union of Students have all followed suit.

In February this year, Universities Minister Jo Johnson wrote to Universities UK insisting that university activities must respect the IHRA definition. In particular, "anti-Semitic incidents... might take place under the banner of 'Israel (sic) Apartheid' events."

## Banning meetings

Not surprisingly, the IHRA definition has been cited by some University authorities which have intervened to ban proposed activities during Israeli Apartheid Week this year. Others gave different reasons for their obstruction of pro-Palestine events, such as elements of the Prevent strategy, but were clearly responding to the signal from the Government.

## Opinion

Reacting to this wave of censorship the new, Jewish-led organisation Free Speech on Israel, along with PSC, Independent Jewish Voices, and Jews for Justice for Palestinians, obtained a legal Opinion from the eminent human rights lawyer Hugh Tomlinson QC.

## Unlawful censorship

This Opinion is devastating: it characterises the IHRA definition as confusing, not legally binding, and putting public bodies that use it at risk of ‘unlawfully restricting legitimate expressions of political opinion’.

A public body that bans a meeting under the IHRA definition without any evidence of genuine antisemitism could be breaching the European Convention on Human Rights which guarantees freedom of expression (Article 10), and freedom of assembly (Article 11).

## Anti-racism

The four bodies that commissioned the Opinion are deeply committed to anti-racism, including opposition to antisemitism. They view this definition as undermining the defences against antisemitism, by politicising it in an attempt to shield Israel from criticism. They are campaigning actively to inform public bodies round the country about the reality behind this shoddy manoeuvre.

You can read the full Opinion here:  
[tinyurl.com/frsp17](https://tinyurl.com/frsp17)

You can read more about the IHRA definition and censorship on campus here:  
[tinyurl.com/bricup](https://tinyurl.com/bricup)

**Support Motion 57 on the IHRA definition of antisemitism (from the Universities of Leeds and Brighton, and from Goldsmiths).**

**Also support amendments 57A.1 from Queens Belfast, and 57A.2 from London Retired Members.**

# Expulsion of Professor Kamel Hawwash (Birmingham UCU) from Israel

---

## Support: Motion 5

---

Prof. Hawwash, a UCU member at Birmingham University, and Past President of the European Society for Engineering Education, was prevented from entering Israel on 7th April. He was on a trip with his wife and young son to visit relatives in occupied East Jerusalem.

It is highly likely that he was picked on because he had been, until recently, the Vice-Chair of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) which supports boycotts, sanctions and divestment (BDS) against Israel until the occupation is ended.

When he was detained at Ben Gurion airport he was asked whether he knew about the new law, recently passed by Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, which bans BDS supporters. He was also questioned about his activities with the PSC.

Kamel’s detention and deportation are not only a violation of his own and his family’s human rights but are an assault on peaceful campaigners for justice.

Hugh Lanning, the Chair of the PSC, had previously been prevented from entering Israel. No doubt there will be further cases of this kind under the Knesset’s new law.

**Delegates are urged to vote unanimously for Motion 5 in defence of this UCU member, and in defence of all campaigners for justice, whether Palestinian or Israeli.**

### British Committee for the Universities of Palestine

If you would like to hold a meeting on your campus about Palestine and the campaign for justice, or to receive Bricup’s regular newsletter, please contact Bricup via [bricup.org.uk](https://bricup.org.uk)

### Free Speech on Israel

For information visit [freespeechonisrael.org.uk](https://freespeechonisrael.org.uk)