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ENSURING FAIR & ACCURATE MEDIA COVERAGE OF ISRAEL / COMBATING ANTISEMITISM

UNMASKING
ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM
An HRC Investigation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Anti-Palestinian racism (APR) is a framework and definition that was developed by the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association (ACLA), led by its president Dania Majid, in 2022. Though the term itself had been sprinkled in rhetoric around the Arab-Israeli conflict in recent years, ACLA made the effort to establish a framework to define APR and its application. The document "Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and Manifestations," is the culmination of this scheme.

The ACLA definition of APR is rooted in what ACLA refers to as an 'anti-racist' and 'settler colonist' framework, one that not only recognizes the discrimination of Palestinians as a unique form of racism, but also positions any pushback of a singular Palestinian narrative and identity as a form of discrimination. In short, it elevates a political narrative to the level of incontestable truth, in essence redefining political disagreement as systemic hate.

Beyond this clear, foundational concern, APR as defined by ACLA presents several dangers in our view. ACLA's APR effectively attempts to erase the role of religion in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the existence of a conflict in any capacity, by reframing it as a matter of settler-colonialism — wherein Israelis, or Jews, are settlers that continue to seek the suppression of the Indigenous population of "historic Palestine." APR renders the affirmation of Jewish peoplehood, as tied to the land of Israel, as discrimination, and pits APR against the well-established and historically rooted understanding of antisemitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and its working definition. It makes criticism of Palestinian terrorism, or challenging the narrative of the "Nakba," a form of racism, which presents a challenge to free speech in public discourse.

On a practical level, ALCA's framework for APR challenges the ability to define combating anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia, as well as discrimination and justice for Indigenous peoples in Canada. It also challenges Canada's anti-racism strategies more broadly by politicizing Canada's effort to promote multiculturalism through addressing systemic barriers for marginalized groups. Particularly, it does so by seeking to codify one group's narrative through invalidating another group's identity and history, rendering the adoption of APR as the adoption of a political narrative within what should be a non-partisan effort to promote pluralism.

This report concludes that APR is not a neutral anti-discrimination tool to be implemented into Canada's anti-racism strategies, but a politically-motivated and polarizing framework aimed at promoting a singular narrative that ultimately negates Canada's multicultural values. As this report demonstrates, APR is creeping its way into Canadian schools, political advocacy, media and public institutions. This report highlights how in our estimation, the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association framework for anti-Palestinian racism is harmful to the Jewish community but also to the sociopolitical fabric of Canada.

INTRODUCTION TO ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM:

The foundation of "anti-Palestinian racism" (APR) was conceived by the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association's (ACLA) in a document entitled: "Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and Manifestations," published in April 2022 and which was predominantly prepared by Dania Majid, co-founder and president of the ACLA. Majid, who has represented ACLA and their advocacy for the inclusion of anti-Palestinian racism in Canadian frameworks across media platforms, signed an open letter in November 2023 that we regard as having justified Hamas' terrorism against Israel[1] — including, most obviously, Hamas' massacres on October 7, 2023. Both ACLA and Majid herself were signatories of the letter that "rejected" the idea that "contextual[izing]" Hamas' actions is a form of antisemitism and referred to combating antisemitism as "a new McCarthyism."[2]

Bearing this context in mind, ACLA's definition of anti-Palestinian racism is as follows:

"Anti-Palestinian racism is a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives. Anti-Palestinian racism takes various forms including: denying the Nakba and justifying violence against Palestinians; failing to acknowledge Palestinians as an Indigenous people with a collective identity, belonging and rights in relation to occupied and historic Palestine; erasing the human rights and equal dignity and worth of Palestinians; excluding or pressuring others to exclude Palestinian perspectives, Palestinians and their allies; defaming Palestinians and their allies with slander such as being inherently antisemitic, a terrorist threat/sympathizer or opposed to democratic values." [3]

This analysis will look at the ideological foundations and issues with the definition of anti-Palestinian racism (APR) as established by the ACLA, as well as APR in praxis within Canadian institutions and advocacy.

1 HonestReporting Canada (2023) "Exposing The Hateful Letter Signed By Members Of Canada's Legal Community Justifying Hamas Terrorism," HonestReporting Canada. https://honestreporting.ca/exposing-the-hateful-letter-signed-by-members-of-canadas-legal-community-justifying-hamas-terrorism/

2 "Hateful Letter Signed."

3 Arab Canadian Lawyers Association (2022) "Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and Manifestations," p. 14. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61db30d12e169a5c45950345/t/627dcf83fa17ad41ff217964/1652412292220/Anti-Palestinian+Racism-+Naming,+Framing+and+Manifestations.pdf

The aforementioned document details the process that ACLA took to create the definition, or what they refer to as a "framework," explaining how it addresses the contexts of both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the lens of settler-colonialism and anti-racism.[4] Prepared by Majid, the lawyer described APR as "a specific form of racism that targets those who are Palestinian or advocates of Palestinian rights in order to suppress any challenge to Israel's decades-long apartheid and occupation of Palestinian land and people (…) We really wanted people to understand what we are experiencing is a systemic form of hate directed towards a community."[5]

As ACLA explained, "The Palestinian community and its allies are no longer solely engaging in political or legal debates to justify their existence and perspectives. While legal and political responses still play a vital role, Palestinians and advocates are also confronting offensive behaviour when it appears and calling it what it really is — racism."[6] In other words, the development of the term and definition of "anti-Palestinian racism" marks a shift away from exclusively engaging in legal or political discourse, and toward redefining what counts as systemic racism within contemporary human rights frameworks. As already demonstrated, but will be further explored, this framework for APR is hinged on rendering a singular, extreme, and polarizing narrative as an incontrovertible truth, a truth that negates not just the Canadian strategy for addressing antisemitism within the larger Canadian anti-racism strategy, but overall Jewish identity and history.

ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM AS DEFINED BY ACLA:

ARAB CANADIAN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION DES AVOCATS ARABO-CANADIENS

At the center of this development is the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism which has been adopted by the Canadian government and globally by governments, academic institutions, and more.[7] The ACLA team take issue with the definition, primarily criticizing it for being allegedly "weaponized to suppress the speech and activities of Palestinians and advocates across North America and Europe"[8] and "instrumentaliz[ing] identity politics."[9]

In fact, ACLA pinned the blame on IHRA for "[m]aking APR difficult to name and confront" because it "describes criticisms of Israel as antisemitic."[10] This is categorically untrue. The IHRA working definition provides examples of when criticism of Israel veers into antisemitism — "Denying the Jewish people

4 "Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and Manifestations," p. 8.

5 Shee Paradkar (2024) "Why the term 'anti-Palestinian racism' has an uphill climb to recognition," The Star. https://www.thestar.com/opinion/why-the-term-anti-palestinian-racism-has-an-uphill-climb-to-recognition/article_931ccdd4-3497-11ef-b87d-3b1359fe637f.html

6 Ibid, p. 2.

7 "Working definition of antisemitism," International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism

8 "Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and Manifestations," p. 15.

9 Ibid, p. 14.

10 Ibid, p. 14.

their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor. (…) Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation." [11] It plainly holds that "criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic."[12]

As previously referenced, the APR framework was developed as explicitly different from the legal and political approach taken by Palestinians and advocates in the past decades. Rather, APR was constructed within an anti-racism framework with the core of the definition relying on framing Palestinians as alleged victims of settler colonialism alongside Indigenous groups and Black people, particularly in North America.

The framework of "settler colonialism" is a "a system of oppression based on genocide and colonialism, that aims to displace a population[13] of a nation (oftentimes indigenous people) and replace it with a new settler population." Settler colonialism is distinct from colonialism, "the act of power and domination of one nation"[14] because "settler colonizers destroy indigenous peoples and cultures in order to replace them and establish themselves as the new rightful inhabitants."[15] It is an ongoing system or structure of relationships, one that, in North America, relied on the destruction of Indigenous communities and ways of life, and the enslavement and oppression of African Americans.[16] [17] Both apartheid and military occupation are considered by Cornell Law School to be different forms of settler colonialism.[18]

APR attempts to superimpose this context onto the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, creating a new understanding of the dynamic between the two entities, and how their relationship can be understood. According to ACLA, "[i]t is widely accepted that Palestine-Israel is fundamentally a settler-colonial struggle where Palestinian lands are seized and occupied by Israel in accordance with their political ideology of Zionism."[19] The ACLA definition of APR includes "Palestinians as an Indigenous people with a collective identity, belonging and rights in relation to occupied and historic Palestine"[20] as a criteria, thus defining Palestinians as the victims of the occupation of their indigenous homeland — and silently casting Israelis, or Jewish people, as the dominating nation attempting to destroy the indigenous people and culture in "historic Palestine." Thus, APR is conceived out of this relationship between Israel and Palestine, a system of racism that is rooted in the structure of settler colonialism in "historic Palestine."

12 Ibid.

13 Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute, "settler colonialism." https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/settler_colonialism#:~:text=Settlercolonialism

14 Cornell Law School, "settler colonialism."

15 Alicia Cox, (2017) Oxford Bibliographies, "Settler colonialism." https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0029.xml

16 Alicia Cox, "Settler colonialism."

17 Warren Bernauer, (2024) "Canadian settler colonialism: Structure, event, relationship, or process?" Canadian Geographies / Géographies canadiennes, 68, 4, p. 451–455. https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12943

18 Cornell Law School, "settler colonialism."

19 "Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and Manifestations," p. 21.

20 Ibid, p. 14.

This structure, within which Palestinian issues are framed as matters of racism, thus implies that "failure to acknowledge Palestinians as an Indigenous people" [21] is a form of racism. Specifically, "denying the existence of Palestine and Palestinians as a people; denying the settler-colonialization of Palestine; (…) erasing Palestinian ancestral and present-day ties to their land and communities and denying their right to return; benefiting from, or complicity with, the removal of Palestinians from their lands" [22] are all forms of alleged racism.

This reframing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, perhaps most notably, evident with ACLA's claim that "[r]educing the conflict, and the experience of APR, to a religious war between Judaism and Islam perpetuates stereotypes and a falsehood against Muslims, Arabs, Palestinians and Jews - namely that these groups are committed to a preordained belief system that programs them to hate one another, and therefore makes peace between them impossible."[23] This not only erases the role of Judaism in the re-establishment of the land of Israel as a Jewish homeland in the modern era, but it erases the role of pan-Arabism and Islamic antisemitism in perpetuating the Arab-Israeli conflict. More broadly, it erases the fact that Islam, like Judaism, is not peripheral to but rather innately linked to how the land is understood, contested, and claimed by Palestinian Arabs (and similarly with Palestinian Christians). So, although the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot wholly or solely be understood through a religious lens, neither can it be understood through a rigid settler-colonial framework.

Additionally, the creation and defining of anti-Palestinian racism is redundant because there is already a framework and definition for Islamophobia, and anti-Arab hatred more broadly. In creating a form of discrimination that is particular to a specific historical and political context — and to a group within a larger group — it creates a path through which other nationalities can claim a framework is needed to understand discrimination, such as "anti-Cuban racism" or "anti-Nepali hatred." These groups may experience a form of discrimination, in and out of a political context, but creating a framework wherein any unjust act against a group is a unique form of racial oppression ultimately will dilute the coherence and capacity of anti-discrimination frameworks overall, and certainly ones that are already in place. With anti-Palestinian racism in particular, a geopolitical conflict between two peoples is being reduced to a binary of oppression and narrative; altogether this sets a dangerous precedent and serves to embolden a culture of competitive victimhood.

The ACLA definition of anti-Palestinian racism is predicated on a singular, narrow and blatantly ahistorical narrative about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Jewish identity and history, as a whole. This finding is rooted in the insistence on ACLA's part to distinguish APR from Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism.[24] Their logic is that the framing of instances of discrimination against Palestinians as Islamophobic or anti-Arab is problematic because on the whole, it assumes the conflict as an issue of religious or geopolitical conflict — which, for ACLA, it decidedly is not. [25] Rather, it is a matter of settler-colonialism, which is predicated on the belief that Jews are settler colonialists in Palestine, that the Palestinians are the sole indigenous group to the land, and that any discrimination against Palestinians is a form of racism like discrimination against POC

21 Ibid, p. 19.

22 Ibid, p. 19.

23 Ibid, p. 21.

24 Ibid, p. 20-21.

25 Ibid, p. 21.

and Indigenous people in North America: founded on a settler colonial history of oppression and subjugation.[26] Simply, it is not a "conflict" but a system of oppression by clear oppressors.

But ACLA's accusation, that the IHRA working definition of antisemitism "instrumentalize[s] identity politics," falls flat because their framework for APR relies on the instrumentalizing of not only identity politics, but identity politics as a mechanism to insulate a political position and narrative from criticism or scrutiny. This is clearly seen with the inclusion of "denying the Nakba"[27] as a form of racism against Palestinians. Under APR, the Nakba, which is described by ACLA as "the ethnic cleansing of Palestine that led to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948," [28] is therefore an untouchable truth, insulated from scrutiny or any other interpretation. The Jewish and Israeli understanding of Israel's War of Independence, the establishment of the state of Israel that saw a multi-front attack from surrounding Arab countries and led to the expulsion — both coerced and voluntary, not just by Israel's hand — is therefore "racist." As Shimon Koffler Fogel, former CEO of the Centre For Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) succinctly put it in July 2024: "Simply asserting the fact that there has been a continuous Jewish presence in Israel for more than 3,000 years — debunking the idea of Israel being a settler-colonial state — would, under this definition, be considered racist."[29]

According to their very own definition, ACLA defines anti-Palestinian racism as not a form of religious or cultural discrimination, but a framework that fits into the larger anti-racism movement, which largely rejects Jewish people and the antisemitism they face. In this framework, discrimination against Palestinians — or their pro-Palestinian allies — is framed not with systematic oppression, but by acknowledgement of the Jewish connection to the land of Israel. Simply, anything that is not strict compliance with their determined narrative about the history of the land of "historic Palestine" has the potential to be designated as discrimination against Palestinians and their supporters.

Other points to note about the ACLA definition of anti-Palestinian racism:

- According to CIJA, "APR has the potential to silence dissenting viewpoints on issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict. It fails to accommodate differing perspectives and narratives, including current government positions. The definitions of genocide denial under APR would mean that the Government of Canada's position that the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza is NOT a genocide would be considered APR."[30]
- CIJA also pointed out that criticism and concern about Palestinian leadership, politics, activists and terrorism will be stifled by the definition of APR.[31]

26 Ibid, p. 21.

27 Ibid, p. 19..

28 Ibid, p. 12.

29 Shimon Koffler Fogel (2024) "Shimon Koffler Fogel: The push to define anti-Palestinian racism is not about fighting discrimination," The National Post. https://nationalpost.com/opinion/the-push-to-define-anti-palestinian-racism-is-not-about-fighting-discrimination

30 Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, "Ten major concerns with the concept of Anti-Palestinian Racism (APR)," p. 2. https://www.cija.ca/ten_major_concerns_with_the_concept_of_anti_palestinian_racism

31 "Ten major concerns," p. 4.

- Shimon Koffler Fogel pointed out in his National Post commentary that "APR attempts to pit Canadians against each other in a toxic zero-sum game, where fighting discrimination against one leads to discrimination against another."[32] Treating Israel with double standards and denying it as the homeland of the Jewish people, driven by self-determination, is antisemitic, and denying Palestinians are the Indigenous people of "historic Palestine" and victims of settler colonialism is anti-Palestinian racism. These two definitions completely contradict one another, as CIJA relayed: "[u]nder APR, affirming Israeli identity would be considered erasing Palestinian identity, labeled racism."[33] The vice versa cannot be said to be the case; the IHRA working definition of antisemitism is not contingent on the denial of Palestinian identity, culture or self-determination. Despite ACLA claiming that traditional understandings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and IHRA's antisemitism make it so that Jewish self-determination and Palestinian self-determination are "mutually exclusive,"[34] their definition of anti-Palestinian racism reinforces that very exclusivity.
- The framework for anti-Palestinian racism is detrimental to the already-established and robust systems and resources for addressing anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia.[35] [36] CIJA addressed this matter, pointing out that "Canada's Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia stated in the 2024 Anti- Racism Strategy that a major goal was to 'Develop a Canadian Guide on Islamophobia and addressing the safety and security needs of Muslim communities.' Islamophobia is a threat to Canadian Muslims, and focusing on APR undermines and polarizes the important work needed to combat Islamophobia."[37] If and when Palestinians face discrimination on the basis of their identity, resources on Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism are equipped with the information and tools to address it — without the politicization of a narrative or perspective.
- APR co-opts the framework of Indigenous rights and movements to push a political narrative, but also dilutes the unique experience of Indigenous peoples in North America.[38] The misapplication of these terms — settler colonialism, Indigenous, and so forth — to a complex, regional conflict beyond Canadian borders trivializes the experience of First Nations here in Canada.[39]

ACLA's development of anti-Palestinian racism can be understood as part of a bigger pattern of framing antisemitism as a morally just, human rights cause. Shimon Koffler Fogel made the poignant parallel between the definition for anti-Palestinian racism and the 1975 United Nations General Assembly that passed the "Zionism is racism" motion.[40] The 1975 motion was a distortion of the Jewish connection to the land of Israel, and a moment wherein a political stance — cloaked in the language of human rights and anti-imperialism that was gaining popularity at the time — was weaponized by the Soviet Union to strengthen ties with Arab countries in their fight against Israel.[41]

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32 "Shimon Koffler Fogel: The push to define anti-Palestinian racism."

33 "Ten major concerns," p. 3.

34 "Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and Manifestations," p. 21.

35 Government of Canada, "Changing Systems, Transforming Lives: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2024-2028." https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/combatting-racism-discrimination/canada-anti-racism-strategy.html#a6g

36 zAlonist (2025) "Radical Concepts Building Walls: Anti-Palestinian Racism Harms Everyone."

37 "Ten major concerns," p. 2.

38 "Radical Concepts Building Walls."

39 "Radical Concepts Building Walls." 1.

40 "Shimon Koffler Fogel: The push to define anti-Palestinian racism."

41 Evelyn Sommer, "Fighting Delegitimization: The United Nation's 'Zionism Is Racism' Resolution, a Case Study," World Jewish Congress. https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/85th-anniversary/fighting-delegitimization-the-united-nations-zionism-is-racism-resolution-a-case-study

This weaponization saw the distortion of Zionism itself, and its impact was far-reaching, even as the motion was repealed in 1991.[42]

Rooted in a historic, mutating form of hatred that has impacted Jews for centuries upon centuries, the IHRA working definition of antisemitism is attuned to both the intrinsic parts of Judaism and the Jewish experience and the well-documented, inescapable tendency for antisemitism to conspiratorially cast Jews as whatever is most hated in society.

Nowadays, the lens, language, and value systems of human rights and social justice are used to navigate the world. Jews have been cast as the ultimate offender of this value system: white European, settler colonialist, occupying oppressors. To support the cogency of this offence, Judaism, Zionism and Israel have increasingly been twisted and redefined. ACLA's naming and defining of anti-Palestinian racism represents a new step in this process, creating a framework to explicitly cast Jews as the ultimate evil in today's society, and to label any attempt to stray from this framework as a form of racism against victims of oppression.

One of the notes (36) in ACLA's guide is a 2021 article by William Paul, wherein the author criticized the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre for Holocaust Studies' "Together we are stronger #Antisemitism #Antiracism" page.[43] Paul noted that "In the FSWC view it is therefore antisemitic to say that is Israel is an apartheid state (sic), that Israeli Jews are European colonial settlers or that Israel is committing ethnic cleansing."[44] ACLA's referencing to an article that framed "Israeli Jews are European colonial settlers" as a political opinion derived from pro-Palestinian advocacy tells Canadians everything needed to know about their guide for anti-Palestinian racism.

THE APPLICATION OF ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM IN CANADIAN DISCOURSE AND POLICY:

Slowly but surely, anti-Palestinian racism is being institutionalized in Canada. On November 6, 2024, Amira Elghawaby, Canada's Special Representative on Combating Islamophobia, released a statement following a meeting with former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau about "the ongoing threat to belonging and inclusion of Canadian Muslims."[45] Elghawaby referenced the impact of the Israel-Hamas war on Palestinian and Lebanese

42 "Fighting Delegitimization."

43 William Paul (2021) "Let's Be Honest:" TDSB stifles criticism of Israel," Education Action Toronto. https://educationactiontoronto.com/articles/lets-be-honest-tdsb-stifles-criticism-of-israel/

44 Paul, "Let's Be Honest."

45 Government of Canada (2024) "Statement by Special Representative Amira Elghawaby after meeting with the Prime Minister of Canada on the ongoing threat to belonging and inclusion of Canadian Muslims." https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/combatting-islamophobia-canada/media/meeting-prime-minister-2024.html

Muslims in Canada, and commends the government for its ongoing efforts to combat racism, but notes that "there are widespread concerns that Islamophobia and other forms of hate continue to increase."[46]

According to Elghawaby, "Through a series of roundtables across Canada, members of Parliament and my Office heard clearly that exclusion and erasure that are being reported by our communities, including among youth, are in part due to a lack of federal acknowledgement of anti-Palestinian racism."[47] Elghawaby then thanked Trudeau for his "commitment on adopting a definition of anti-Palestinian racism" and provided details about her and her team's work to train and advise on these matters within their broader work, which now includes "Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism."[48]

By Fall 2024, the concept of anti-Palestinian racism had been developed beyond a framework. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives published a research project on "Anti-Palestinian racism in schools" by Muna Saleh and Nada Awwad on September 7, 2024.[49] The research duo described anti-Palestinian racism as "rooted in historical and ongoing euro-western racial-religious supremacy, settler-colonial logics, Orientalist dehumanization, and Zionist mythologies,"[50] but also quoted Majid and ACLA's framework for the basis of their understanding of APR. An example of APR provided by interviewees from their research is:

> ***"Colonial mythologies and erasures where the ongoing Nakba, violent settler-colonization, and sometimes existence of Palestine are denied. Jenin shared a story of how, during Israel's bombardment of Gaza in May 2021, her high school's Instagram account posted a message that erased colonial violence and oppression by referring to 'the conflict' and how 'we don't choose sides."*** [51]

Another example is a November 2024 article in The Globe and Mail, "Helping to end extreme polarization, one conversation at a time," wherein the increasing polarization in Canadian society is discussed.[52] The authors elucidated that "[s]ince 2019, the number of police-reported hate crimes has more than doubled, and over the past year, there has been a rise of anti-Palestinian racism and anti-Semitism as a ripple effect of global conflict."[53] The coupling of antisemitism and APR is notable here, and neither are mentioned again in the article.

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46 "Statement by Amira Elghawaby."

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Muna Saleh and Nada Awwad (2024) "'It's like we're not even allowed to be Palestinian': Anti-Palestinian racism in schools," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/its-like-were-not-even-allowed-to-be-palestinian/

"It's like we're not even allowed."

50 "It's like we're not even allowed."

51 Ibid.

52 Globe Content Studio (2024) "Helping to end extreme polarization, one conversation at a time," The Globe and Mail. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/adv/article-helping-to-end-extreme-polarization-one-conversation-at-a-time/

53 "Helping to end extreme polarization."

Where anti-Palestinian racism came to the fore of public discourse was and continues to be the developments within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). ACLA's report described the incidents in the past few years that put the TDSB on the map; first, the 2021 suspension of equity advisor Javier Davila, who shared "a resource that describes the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands as racist and genocidal, and also states that Palestinians have been resisting the violence against them, mainly through non-violent resistance but sometimes through force"[54] with other educators. Later that year, the TDSB retained journalist Desmond Cole for a staff talk on racism where he compared "Black Lives Matter" to "Free Palestine."[55]

Then there was post-October 7, 2023, wherein "multiple statements were made by the TDSB condemning the Hamas attacks without mentioning anything about the unfolding genocide of Palestinians,"[56] according to Wasser. This led to lobbying for a vote to "to address anti-Palestinian racism as part of its Combatting Hate and Racism Strategy" which passed in June 2024.[57] [58] Matters exploded when, in September 2024, students from TDSB schools took a field trip to attend an anti-Israel protest.[59] Even after the events in September 2024 were reviewed, the TDSB is expected to have a plan to combat APR as early as October 2025.[60]

Simultaneously, the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) introduced a model bill on May 15, 2025 to recognize the "Day of The Nakba: An Act for Canada to Stand for Human Rights and Peace in the Middle East," titled the "Nakba Bill."[61] The bill calls for: Canada to establish a day commemorating the Nakba, a weapons embargo on Israel, a ban on IDF recruitment in Canada & the sale of Israeli products from settlements, the recognition of a Palestinian state, and most relevantly, the recognition of anti-Palestinian racism.[62]

The CEO of NCCM, Stephen Brown, explained that the model bill is "an opportunity for Canada to be consequential with our own values, our own values of pluralism, our own values of respect for human rights, our own values of respect for international law, our own values of a rules-based order system where it's not might that makes right, but right that makes right."[63]

54 Marlee Wasser (2025) "Co-Resisting Anti-Palestinian Racism in Toronto Schools," Briarpatch Magazine. https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/co-resisting-anti-palestinian-racism-in-toronto-schools

55 "Co-Resisting Anti-Palestinian Racism."

56 "Co-Resisting Anti-Palestinian Racism."

57 "Co-Resisting Anti-Palestinian Racism."

58 "Some Jewish, Palestinian parents say TDSB needs to safeguard students supporting Palestinian human rights," CBC News Toronto, Oct. 25, 2023. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/tdsb-parents-anti-palestinian-racism-1.7008306

59 Melissa Nakhavoly and John Marchesan (2025) "TDSB calls for expedited investigation by Ontario ministry into field trip that involved pro-Palestinian protest," CityNews. https://toronto.citynews.ca/2024/09/25/tdsb-calls-for-expedited-investigation-by-ontario-ministry-into-pro-palestinian-protest-field-trip/

60 Ziad Arab-Oagley (2025) "TDSB accelerates plan to combat Anti-Palestinian Racism in schools," CityNews. https://toronto.citynews.ca/2025/05/30/tdsb-accelerates-plan-to-combat-anti-palestinian-racism-in-schools/

61 The National Council for Canadian Muslims (2025) "Day of The Nakba: An Act for Canada to Stand for Human Rights and Peace in the Middle East." https://nccm.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Nakba-Bill.pdf

62 "Day of the Nakba: An Act."

63 "Canada's 'Nakba Bill' offers blueprint for 'vision of peace,' says rights group head," Middle East Monitor, May 19, 2025. https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250519-canadas-nakba-bill-offers-blueprint-for-vision-of-peace-says-rights-group-head/

Were anti-Palestinian racism, as defined by ACLA, widely adopted in Canada, it would threaten both the goals of the country's anti-racism strategy and the principle of free expression within political and public discourse. The real-world consequences of adopting APR into Canadian policy are critical to consider.

Canada's anti-racism strategy is grounded in "building a Canada where everyone can reach their full potential – with equality, equity and fairness."[64] The policy strives to recognize diversity and intersectionality while simultaneously promoting equity and inclusion through acknowledging and addressing "systemic barriers."[65] If APR were adopted within the Canadian anti-racism framework, it would undermine the goal of anti-racism strategies because it relies on a narrowly-defined, highly politicized understanding of a geopolitical conflict, and ultimately aims to elevate Palestinian grievances by framing them as anti-racist. More so, it positions not just discrimination against Palestinians as racist — which it is, under the umbrella of anti-Arab racism and/or Islamophobia — but disagreement with a narrative within a geopolitical conflict that is not in Canada as racist. Rather than addressing systemic barriers faced by Palestinians in Canada, APR redefines a geopolitical narrative as a form of racial oppression, and in doing so, politicizes the anti-racism space in a way that privileges one narrative and delegitimizes others.

Two of Canada's anti-racism guiding principles are: "Address how people's lives are shaped by intersecting identities and multiple forms of oppressions. (…) Ensure that all action is informed by community voices, disaggregated data, and the academic research."[66] Another is "flexibility," or developing the "capacity to offer rapid responses to the evolving self-defined needs of communities."[67]

The IHRA working definition of antisemitism reflects these principles. It explicitly distinguishes between antisemitism and criticism of the Israeli government, and it recognizes the Jewish people's connection to the land of Israel without denying the potential for others — including Palestinians — to claim a connection as well. IHRA leaves space for multiple historical narratives while safeguarding against the erasure or demonization of Jewish identity and history. In doing so, it allows for diversity of perspectives and balanced political expression — despite accusations to the contrary by groups like ACLA.

On the other hand, ACLA's anti-Palestinian racism negates these principles. If ACLA advocated for anti-Arab racism strategies to consider adapting to recent events between Israel and Hamas, and consider the unique experiences of Palestinians in this moment in time, that would align with the principles set out by the Canadian strategy. However, because APR is rooted in the settler-colonial framing of Zionism, any acknowledgment of Jewish peoplehood, indigeneity, or the right to self-determination in the land is interpreted as an act of erasure or oppression against Palestinians. In effect, APR seeks to preserve one group's narrative by invalidating the history and identity of another. This is not action "informed by academic research," as the Canadian strategy demands — it is the politicization of anti-racism itself.

64 "Changing Systems, Transforming Lives." See note 36.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

Characteristic	IHRA	APR (ACLA)
Community-led	✓ Broad global adoption across Jewish and international bodies	✗ Developed by ACLA with limited consultation
Intersectional & Inclusive	✓ Allows multiple narratives and critiques of Israel	✗ Elevates one narrative, excludes Jewish self-determination
Trauma-informed	✓ Rooted in centuries of antisemitism and Holocaust memory	✗ Centers Nakba, erases Jewish historical trauma
Evidence-based	✓ Grounded in historical, legal, and academic research	✗ Driven by ideological framing (settler-colonial lens)
Flexible & Responsive	✓ Distinguishes antisemitism from legitimate critique	✗ Rigid—labels dissent from narrative as racism
Systemic focus	✓ Addresses antisemitism in political, legal, and social structures	✗ Recasts a geopolitical conflict as systemic racism
Holistic & Integrated	✓ Works alongside other anti-racism frameworks	✗ Fragments anti-racism by separating Palestinians from Arabs/Muslims; negates IHRA
Historical & Global accountability	✓ Anchored in Jewish history and international norms	✗ Anchored in activist discourse, ahistorical framing

APR does not align with Canada's anti-racism strategy, because it functions as a tool that silences political and public noncompliance. If Canada were to adopt APR into their anti-racism strategies for promote equity, tolerance and pluralism, it would transform its framework for combating bigotry into a zero-sum enterprise, a weapon for enforcing and protecting singular political narratives.

Advancing equity and pluralism in Canadian society, while necessary to address with policy, is not political by nature. Acknowledging the discrimination of and systemic barriers for marginalized communities should not be a political, or partisan, act. APR makes it so that acknowledging discrimination against Palestinians must be done through the adoption of a particular political stance about a geopolitical conflict beyond Canadian borders.

APR fundamentally threatens the nature and purpose of these kinds of strategies and policies. The adoption of APR thus has real implications for Canadian society and its values, as well as its infrastructure for promoting multiculturalism, "a fundamental part of our Canadian heritage and identity."[68]

64 Government of Canada, "About multiculturalism and anti-racism." https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/about-multiculturalism-anti-racism.html

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

Anti-Palestinian racism is a newly defined framework, created and outlined by the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association led by Dania Majid. While purporting to establish a guideline for recognizing discrimination against Palestinians and their allies, ACLA's anti-Palestinian racism is constructed within anti-racist and settler colonial frameworks to politicize a particularly ahistorical and frankly in our view, antisemitic narrative about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Judaism, all in the name of Palestinian advocacy.

In praxis, the definition is slowly but steadily making its way into public discourse, policy and education. ACLA's anti-Palestinian racism has the potential to completely negate the historically-informed and meticulously researched IHRA working definition of antisemitism, which we are seeing happen with the Toronto District School Board and the Nakba Bill. When one form of discrimination is defined by and hinged on the negation of another form of discrimination, it results in a morally incomprehensible and politically charged battle — one that prioritizes ideological alignment over the protection of marginalized communities.

Most importantly, the framework for anti-Palestinian racism as put forth by ACLA takes advantage of the Canadian values of multiculturalism and pluralism, which are rooted in Canada's strategies for combating discrimination and bigotry. Rather than promoting these Canadian values, APR takes the concept of racism — and anti-racism — and uses it to boost a narrative, which not only negates the pluralism these strategies aim to promote, but stifles free expression in our pluralistic society. In effect, APR discourages the diversity of all Canadians by limiting the freedom of all Canadians.

The ACLA framework for anti-Palestinian racism sets a dangerous precedent for approaching bigotry in Canadian society, in its efforts to reframe the path of pluralism with a zero-sum mandate of identity politics over dialogue. If adopted in Canadian society and policy, APR will transform anti-racism, a tool that aims to protect and promote equity for marginalized groups, and turn it into a tool that polarizes narrative non-compliance and suppresses free expression.

MEDIA INQUIRIES OR REQUESTS FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CAN BE DIRECTED TO US AT:

LAYLA RUDY

Research Analyst

layla@honestreporting.ca

AMANDA ESKENASI

Director of Education

amanda@honestreporting.ca

CONTACT US:

Phone: (416) 915-9157

Website: www.honestreporting.ca

Email: info@honestreporting.ca

Mailing: P.O. Box 6, Station Q, Toronto, Ontario M4T 2L7