

## **Jews For Justice – Working Definition of Antisemitism.**

### Preamble.

We believe that current disagreements over the definition of antisemitism arise partly from the term itself. It was invented in the nineteenth century to try to squeeze millennia of Jew-hate into contemporary ‘scientific’ racial terminology. As is well known, Jews are not the only Semites, but that is not our principal concern. There exists no clear distinction between Jews as a people and Judaism as a religion. Instead, there is a continuum of culture and tradition. It is therefore impossible to make a nice distinction between hatred of Jews as a ‘race’ and hatred of Judaism as a ‘religion’. This said, ‘antisemitism’ is the term we have, so we must work with it.

Existing definitions of antisemitism pay much attention to the State of Israel. Many Jews, especially Haredi (ultra-orthodox) Jews, are opposed to the existence of Israel. That does not make them ‘antisemitic’. We do not mention Israel in our definition, although the history of the State of Israel is implicitly included in our reference to ‘Jewish history’. Antisemitism has been a problem for thousands of years, and it is myopic to focus a definition on attitudes towards a country that was founded only in 1948.

That said, we are aware of the closet antisemites who claim they are opposed to ‘Zionists’, as a cover for their hatred of Jews. A Zionist is a supporter of the State of Israel. But when these people say ‘Zionists’, they mean ‘Jews’.

### Definition.

It is antisemitic to express prejudice or hatred and/or perpetrate violence towards Jewish people because they are Jews. It is not antisemitic to criticise people who happen to be Jewish, so long as the criticism is directed at their actions and/or opinions and not at their Jewish ethnicity or religion. So-called ‘antisemitic tropes’ are not necessarily in themselves antisemitic:

It is not antisemitic to criticise a Jewish person or organisation for their wealth or greed or stinginess or influence in financial affairs, so long as this is not attributed to their Jewishness. It is not antisemitic to claim that bankers are seeking to enslave the world population, or that ‘globalists’ are conspiring to

introduce a ‘one-world government’, so long as they are not specifically identified as Jewish. It is not antisemitic to claim there are political agenda behind uncontrolled mass migration (‘the great replacement theory’). It is antisemitic to blame it on ‘the Jews’.

It is antisemitic to exploit Jewish history to incite hatred and violence against anyone, whether Jewish or not. It is antisemitic to exploit Jewish history for purposes of discrimination. It is antisemitic to exploit Jewish history for political advantage and/or to suppress criticism of government policy. It is not antisemitic to make comparisons between current events and Jewish history, so long as a plausible reason is given for making those comparisons.

It is antisemitic to silence debate on any issue of Jewish history, including the Shoah (Holocaust). Holocaust denial legislation that criminalises the asking of questions about the Holocaust or the comparison of current events with the history of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, is itself antisemitic. Such legislation dishonours the memory of those who were murdered in the Holocaust, by making them irrelevant. It prevents people from learning from Jewish history, by telling them what they are or are not allowed to think.

### Conclusion.

We are concerned that existing definitions of antisemitism appear to regard it as a ‘strict liability offence’. It should be relevant whether the behaviour complained of was motivated by a hatred towards Jews (in legal language ‘mens rea’, a guilty mind). One reason why many people who have been accused of antisemitism have denied the charge so vehemently is that they resent the implication that they have been motivated by personal hostility towards Jews. That is why it has been suggested in some quarters that the definition of antisemitism should be limited to remarks or behaviour that disparage Jewish people, and that everything else is a matter of opinion.

We certainly do not believe that behaviour is offensive just because people have been offended by it. Free speech necessarily includes the right to say things that others might find offensive, just not to do so deliberately or gratuitously or with malign intent.