

Statement for Nadia Prepared following the meeting of Neighbourhoods, Inclusion, Communities and Equalities Committee, 3 Dec 2018

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to follow up the Deputation we made to the full Council meeting on the 18th of October. At that meeting I spoke for a Deputation of numerous civil society organisations in the City - which work to combat racism in all its forms – to urge Councillors to vote *against* adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism, together with its eleven ‘illustrative examples’. The proposal to adopt the IHRA definition was passed – though it is unclear what function the definition will serve now that it has been adopted.

In the deputation’s statement to the Council we set out the case against adopting the IHRA definition in the positive spirit of standing together against all racism and we outlined why adoption would be *misguided and damaging*. Whilst there is no immediate prospect of the Council reversing its decision, we have decided to use the opportunity afforded by this committee meeting to explain the damage we fear will be done by the Council’s adoption of the IHRA definition, and to put a few questions to this committee which we feel require answers *urgently*.

On October 18th, Cllr Yates, did not address any of the points in our deputation directly. Instead, he insisted that, the issue was a simple one of a particular community within the City – in this case the Jewish community – having an inviolable right to define for itself what counts as discrimination and prejudice against them, and to expect the Council to adopt that definition as Council policy.

We know from our close work with several minority ethnic communities in the City that, if asked to propose a definition of race hatred as it applies to *them* specifically, they would decline. This is not because they are free from race hatred – far from it. We know that they are also often subjected to appalling pernicious racism. They would decline because they look to the Council to adopt and implement a *comprehensive and inclusive definition of racism* which protects all communities and individuals suffering racism.

Privileging antisemitism as a particular form of racism in this way raises an important question for other members of our community who face racism. Members such as the Muslim women who, in meetings with councillors, have made clear their fears in the context of the increase in race hatred and racial abuse many are experiencing. That question is: if the Council’s antiracism policies are inadequate for *some* parts of our community, should they not be strengthened for the benefit of *all* parts of our community?

Furthermore, the IHRA definition extends beyond a definition of anti-Jewish prejudice and discrimination by explicitly linking antisemitism to criticism of the Israeli government. By adopting the definition, the Council is construing legitimate *political* criticism as *religious* or *ethnically* based hostility or discrimination. The effect will be to silence legitimate criticism of Israel for fear of accusations of antisemitism and to embolden pro-Israel activists, as they seek to disrupt campaigning in the City on behalf of the Palestinian people.

The Council has a responsibility to uphold Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, including the right to freedom of expression for all its citizens. Recently, a prominent group of Israeli scholars, including several recipients of the Israel Prize, have joined the many who have asserted that it is inappropriate to associate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, that doing so could contribute to Israel's immunity against criticism. They have called for the preservation of free speech for those who reject the Israeli occupation and insist that it ends. We ask no less of Brighton and Hove City Council.

We therefore formally request that this committee provide us with written answers to the following questions:

1. Why has the Council not strengthened its antiracist policies for the benefit and protection of all minority communities in the City rather than singling out antisemitism for special treatment?

Like all other local authorities and public sector organisations the council is obligated under the Public Sector Duty of Equality Act 2010 to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunities and foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics. Therefore all minority communities in the city are protected by the legislation. Adoption of a definition of discrimination based on individuals and or communities shared protected characteristics does not usurp this responsibility to all. The council works to the legal requirements of the Act.

2. What measures will the council take to reassure members of other communities facing racism that their experience of racism is taken no less seriously?

The council is working with a range of communities and groups to build trust and confidence in the council that all communities experience of racism is taken seriously, for example the Racial Harassment Forum, Brighton & Hove Faith in Action, One Voice Partnership. Only by working together – the council, communities and other public organisations – can we continually raise awareness, knowledge and confidence of how to report hate crime, what happens in the process, and where support is available to those affected. Reassuring victims, families, friends and communities that all public agencies take all hate incidents including racist incidents seriously and that they will be dealt with appropriately and effectively. Further, we are working with and supporting different communities to help build their capacity to deliver projects, services and support in the city that both support their own communities but also foster good relations between different communities, and raise the profile of different communities and celebrate the diversity of the city's residents.

3. What measures will the Council take to protect the civil liberties of local people campaigning on behalf of Palestinians and against Israel's record of

apartheid, war crimes and violations of human rights and international law? What steps will it take to avoid such lawful campaigning being disrupted by pro-Israel activists emboldened by the Council's adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism?

This is a policing matter. Organisers of protests of the nature described should contact and liaise with the police in relation to the event management. Any unrest or unlawful activity would be managed by the police.

