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LD 1351

My name is Fateh Azzam of Georgetown, ME, and I implore you to reject this bill.

As a Palestinian-American, I am personally threatened by the overly broad and unlawful understanding of anti-Semitism as defined in the IHRA's definition. I offer the following reasons:

I was born a stateless Palestinian refugee born to a family ethnically cleansed from Palestine in 1948 and Israel never allowed us back to reclaim our homes and properties. I became a citizen of the U.S. in Portland, Maine in 1978. Today, some of my own relatives live as second-class citizens of Israel and some under a long-term brutal occupation in the West Bank. My people have been brutalized for more than 75 years! The last 18 months of ongoing genocide in Gaza and ethnic cleansing in the West Bank have been the most painful in my life.

Yet for me to even tell my own personal story may well be considered "anti-Semitic" and thus criminalized by this IHRA definition you are considering today. If it is adopted, I will have to be careful with every word I utter whenever the State of Israel is in the conversation, even as it is perpetrating a brutal genocide against my people in Gaza. I WILL NO LONGER FEEL SAFE IN MAINE.

As a human rights legal scholar myself, I fully support strengthening human rights protection against anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and all discrimination and racism against anyone. But I implore you to reject this specific definition. It weaponizes anti-Semitism for political reasons, which its own author, Ken Stern, warned against. Do NOT trample on my own human rights in order to protect the political State of Israel in the name of protecting Maine's Jewish community. Do not trample on the right to freely criticize a state member of the international political community. I call upon you to reject trading my human rights for the right of Israel to commit abhorrent human rights violations without criticism or censure.