

**Safer Merton**

*Working Together To Keep Merton Safe & Sound*

# **Merton Hate Crime Strategy**

**2022-26**



## FOREWORD

### **Councillor Agatha Akyigyina OBE**

#### **Cabinet Member for Partnerships, Public Safety and Tackling Crime**

As a local councillor for 15 years and lead member for Partnerships, Public Safety and Tackling Crime I am proud to serve your borough.



Merton is a diverse and internationally known borough with over 200,000 residents speaking over 100 languages. Each year Merton welcomes millions of additional people to the borough who visit our local parks and green spaces, shopping facilities, and the annual tennis championships.

Tackling hate crime is a key part of Merton's community safety strategy, with our first hate crime strategy launching in 2016. Five years on, it is clear much positive progress has been made however we are in no doubt as a partnership that there remains much more to do. This strategy reflects on our progress so far and lays the foundation for our priorities in the coming years.

Since the previous strategy was written there have been a number of events nationally and internationally which have sadly resulted in an increase in hate crime. Events such as the EU Referendum in 2016, the terrorist attacks in London and Manchester in 2017 and the emergence in China in early 2020 of the Covid-19 pandemic all led to spikes in hate crime targeting different groups in our community.

Most recently, the murder of George Floyd in America in May 2020 has led to a global focus on race hate crime and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. The murders in London of Sarah Everard in London in March 2021 and Sabrina Nessa in September 2021 has led to renewed calls by women's groups to include misogyny as a monitored strand of hate crime, in order to demonstrate that the harassment of women is not acceptable and is on a level with other hate crimes.

Whilst it is encouraging to see the number of victims coming forward to the police is increasing, we know reported hate crimes are the tip of the iceberg which is why increasing victim's confidence in reporting and obtaining the support they need remains a key pillar of our strategy.

I would like to thank our partners in the statutory, community and voluntary sectors for their continued drive and commitment in responding to victims of hate crime in Merton and working with us to deliver this strategy.

We are committed to tackling all forms of hate crime and will continue to uphold the message that Merton is a welcoming place for all where hate in any form is not tolerated.

Merton is proud to be one of the safest boroughs in London and we will continue to work hard, together, to ensure that this position is maintained.

## What is a hate crime?

A hate crime is defined as “any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person’s race, religion, sexual orientation, transgender identity or disability, or the perception of the person of having any of these characteristics.”<sup>1</sup> A hate crime may also be committed against a person by association, such as against the parent of a disabled child or the partner of someone of a different ethnicity. Hate crimes are now also recognised as a form of abuse in relation to safeguarding adults at risk; this stems from the introduction of the Care Act 2014 and the revised London procedures that were launched in 2016.

Hate crime, as monitored by the Metropolitan Police, can be separated into five strands:

1. Disability
2. Race
3. Religion/ Faith
4. Sexual Orientation
5. Transgender Identity

In November 2018, Merton Council formally adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) working definition of Anti-Semitism (*See Appendix A for full definition*).

## What is a hate incident?

It is important that this strategy recognises hate incidents as well as hate crimes. A hate incident is any non-crime incident which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person’s characteristics.

If the victim or any other party involved believe something to be a hate incident, then it should be logged as such by the person who is recording it. The Metropolitan Police record all reports of hate incidents however not all incidents will meet the threshold necessary to be classed as criminal offences; those that do are recorded as offences. Hate incidents can take many forms, examples of which include but are not limited to hoax calls, online abuse, offensive jokes, and displaying or circulating discriminatory literature or posters<sup>2</sup>.

Although a hate incident may not constitute a crime, it is still important to report it as this can help ensure that victims receive any guidance and support they may need. Additionally, the police and other authorities can use this information to target resources and gain a greater understanding of the issues facing specific communities. Police presence and understanding of hate incidents could also help to prevent an ‘incident’ turning into a ‘crime’.

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office Hate Crime Action Plan Refresh 2018

<sup>2</sup> Citizens Advice - <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/discrimination/hate-crime/what-are-hate-incidents-and-hate-crime/>

## Who is affected by hate crime?

Hate crime is a social problem as it not only harms the victim but is also deeply damaging to entire families and communities. A lack of action in tackling hate crime can lead to isolation and victimisation of individual people and vulnerable groups, as well as the polarisation of entire communities.

Victims can experience hate crime based on various/ multiple aspects of their selves e.g. a homosexual disabled resident may be the subject of homophobic hate crime and/ or disability hate crime.

It is important to understand that there is no specific offence of 'hate crime' in criminal law in the UK, however there are existing offences (e.g. threats, physical assault, harassment, etc.) which, when motivated by hostility or prejudice, are categorised as a hate crime. This can influence how the offence is investigated and can lead to an enhanced sentence.

It should also be recognised that hate crime may be motivated by hostility of other characteristics beyond the current monitored strands e.g. age and subculture.

Following the murder of Sarah Everard in London in March 2021 and campaigning by women's groups, the Government announced that police forces in England and Wales will be asked to record crime motivated by hostility based on sex or gender on a trial basis from autumn 2021. The Government is in consultation with the National Police Chiefs' Council on how to take this forward in light of an independent review that recommended misogyny should not be classed as a hate crime. In February 2022, the House of Commons voted against making misogyny as a hate crime as part of the Police, Crime and Sentencing Courts Bill.

The Home Office and Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime (MOPAC) strategic documents use the term 'victim' when referring to those who have a hate crime committed against them, and so this strategy will use the same terminology throughout. While this term is used to ensure consistency amongst strategies, it should be noted that this document respects the very personal and individual nature of hate crime and so recognises people's right to self-define and refer to themselves as 'survivors' or other terms if they so wish.

## Our vision for Merton

London is known as a city where people from all backgrounds and occupations are able to live in freedom and tolerance. This strategy is specifically targeted at tackling the issue of hate crime in the London borough of Merton however, it also feeds into the wider aim of the Community Safety Partnership to encourage community cohesion and ensure the safety and wellbeing of local residents.

Though our ultimate vision for Merton is one in which we will see zero instances of hate crime, our current aims include seeing an increase in reporting of hate crime, demonstrating public confidence that their reports will be taken seriously by authorities. We also wish to see a greater awareness of hate crime amongst members of the public, displaying an emotional intelligence and common respect.

Merton is fortunate in having a comparatively low crime rate in London and it has always been seen as a great place to live, with the borough enjoying high overall life expectancy and performing well with regards to education, housing, the environment, and many other factors. However, there are currently areas of the borough where residents need a greater level of support in order to reach their full potential.

The residents form a critical part of what makes Merton a great place to live and through strategies such as this, we hope to foster an environment where people are tolerant and understanding of one another, working together to better the community. In line with the Mayor of London's vision for the future of policing and crime in London, this strategy takes a victim-oriented approach, putting the victim's safety and wellbeing at the heart of everything we do.

## National and local policies for tackling hate crime

The following strategies form the basis on which this strategic plan has been developed:

- **Home Office Hate Crime Action Plan 2016-2020 – 2018 Refresh**

The UK Government's plan for tackling hate crime, which sets out a programme of actions to tackle hate crime.



Hate\_crime\_refresh\_  
2018\_FINAL\_WEB.PD

- **Mayor's Action Plan – Transparency, Accountability and Trust in Policing – November 2020**

In November 2020 the Mayor of London released an Action Plan to improve trust and confidence in the Met Police and address community concerns about the disproportionality in the use of certain police powers affecting Black Londoners.

<https://www.london.gov.uk/publications/action-plan-transparency-accountability-and-trust-policing>

- **Home Office Beating Crime Plan – July 2021**

This document sets out the government's plan to deliver change, resulting in less crime, fewer victims and a safer country.



Crime-plan-v10  
(1).pdf

## - **MOPAC Policing and Crime Plan 2022-25**

Hate crime sits under one of the key themes of the new Policing and Crime Plan of reducing and preventing violence. There is a zero tolerance policy to all forms of hate crime and the approach focuses on three things: prevention, supporting victims and oversight of police enforcement.

[Building a Safer London | GLA](#)

It should also be noted that the UK Government planned to produce a new standalone hate crime strategy at the end of 2021 which will set out their commitment to stamping out hate crimes, including their online elements. At the time of writing this it is awaiting release.

## **Hate crime data**

### **National picture**

- According to the Home Office in the year ending March 2021, there were 124,091 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales; of which there were 92,052 race hate crimes, 6,377 religious hate crimes, 18,596 sexual orientation hate crimes, 9,943 disability hate crimes and 2,799 transgender hate crimes.<sup>3</sup>
- Excluding Greater Manchester Police who did not supply data for year ending March 2020, there was a 9% increase in recorded hate crime compared with the previous year.
- Increases in police recorded hate crime in recent years have been driven by improvements in crime recording and a better identification of what constitutes a hate crime.

### **Merton and London picture**

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-21 and subsequent lockdowns during reduced movements of much of the population, thus reducing interactions between people which led to some falls in hate crime offences (the majority of hate crimes being 'aggravated' rather than 'motivated'). In late May 2020 the murder of George Floyd triggered the Black Lives Matter movement. June 2020 saw a spike in racist hate crime reports in Merton and the Metropolitan Police. It is not clear whether increased offending or increased willingness to report caused the increase, which fell back to more expected levels later in the year.

Across the Metropolitan Police for the financial year 2020-21 the overall number of hate offences increased by 10% to nearly 25,000 reports, primarily as a result of increased racist offences for the reasons outlined above. Faith and homophobic hate crimes saw year on year falls.

- Merton has seen 392 recorded hate crimes in the financial year 2020-21.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Official Statistics Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2020 to 2021 [Hate crime, England and Wales, 2020 to 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.met.police.uk/sd/stats-and-data/met/hate-crime-dashboard/>

- Hate crime in Merton increased by 9% in the financial year 2020-21.
- Racially aggravated offences make up the largest proportion of hate crimes committed in Merton – nearly 80% of the total.

### **Merton Residents' Survey 2021 and Your Merton Consultation 2021**

Merton Council regularly survey residents in the borough about their attitudes to their local area. Findings from the 2021 Residents' Survey<sup>5</sup> show that residents are less positive about community cohesion than at the time of the last survey in 2019, with an 8% fall in those who agree that the local area is a place where people from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together.

In 2021 Merton Council also carried out the Your Merton consultation<sup>6</sup> to understand the experiences of residents as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and shape a vision for the borough going forwards. Feedback established that residents want to maintain and foster the sense of 'community spirit' found during the pandemic.

### **Safer Merton Community Safety Survey 2021**

Safer Merton also conducted a survey in 2021, with 328 respondents, to find out the communities concerns in relation to crime and anti-social behaviour. In terms of perception of crime, 24% of respondents listed hate crime as being a 'fairly big' or 'very big' problem.

This section has provided an overview of the data in order to give some context to the strategic plan; however, more statistical information and a breakdown of hate crime strands and wards within Merton are available in the hate crime profile embedded below.



Hate Crime Profile  
2021 (2).pdf

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy/performance/annual-residents-survey>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.merton.gov.uk/council-and-local-democracy/get-involved/yourmerton>

## What have we achieved so far?

In implementing Merton's previous hate crime strategy 2017-2021 we have worked towards achieving our strategic priorities. Some key achievements are detailed below:

### Hate Crime Advice Surgeries

In 2019 Merton became the first borough in south London to host a monthly Hate Crime Advice Surgery, in partnership with Tell MAMA and other community organisations working with victims covering each strand of hate crime. The surgeries are a confidential drop-in service for victims of hate crime to be offered advice and support.



Merton Hate Crime Advice Surgery,  
Merton Civic Centre

### Third Party Reporting

Working closely with community organisations, Merton have developed a Third Party Reporting Protocol and network of Third Party Reporting Centres across the borough. The centres help to overcome barriers some victims of hate crime may experience, by making reports to the police on behalf of victims who do not feel comfortable reporting directly. Working to expand the network of Third Party Reporting Centres is a key priority of this strategy.

*"Inner Strength Network are proud to be a third party reporting centre. Our clients find a safe space to recover and obtain support during difficult times."*

*"The sessions provide an opportunity for the Polish Family Association to raise awareness of how to report hate crime incidents, and strengthen relationships in the local area between Merton Council, Merton Police and the Polish and Eastern European community."*



*"In becoming a third party reporting site Merton CIL is now able to provide service users another way to report crime, while maintaining their independence."*

*"South London Tamil Welfare Group is working as a Third Party Reporting Centre. This helps to overcome barriers some victims of hate crime may experience, by making reports to the police on behalf of victims who do not feel comfortable reporting directly."*

### **Launch of Stop Hate UK helpline for Merton**

The launch of the Stop Hate UK helpline for Merton in December 2021 has helped to strengthen the capacity of our Third Party Reporting services, with the helpline being open 24 hours, seven days a week to provide support and guidance to those experiencing or witnessing hate crime.

### **National Hate Crime Awareness Week**

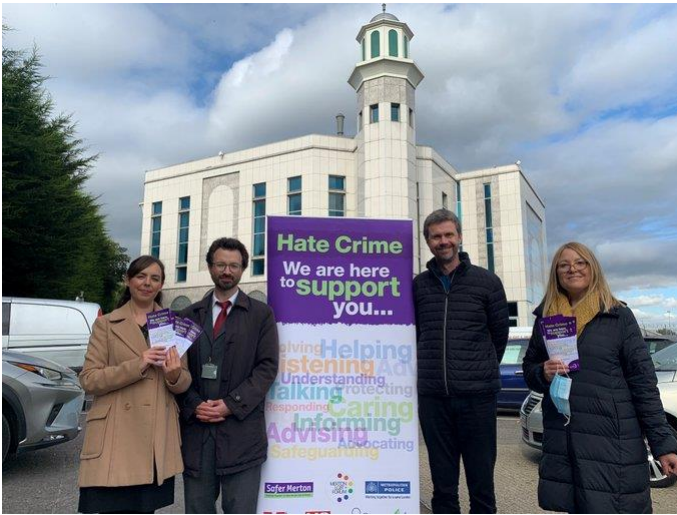
In October each year Merton holds a week of engagement events to mark National Hate Crime Awareness Week. The week aims to raise awareness amongst residents of what a hate crime is and to encourage the reporting of hate crimes and incidents.

In 2019 alongside our partners in the police and community we held a conference 'Hate Crime: Your Voice, Your Experience Matters' for young people at Merton College with over 100 young people from schools across the borough in attendance.

In 2021 the launch event focused on a panel of speakers discussing the national theme of Transgender hate crime. This was combined with a session focusing on working together against race hate crime, a coffee morning with the Polish Family Association and an engagement stall at the Baitul Futuh Mosque, Morden.



*'Hate Crime: Your Voice, Your Experience Matters' event for students at Merton College, October 2019*



*Leader of Merton Council, Councillor Mark Allison with members of the Safer Merton team at Baitul Futuh Mosque, October 2021*

### **International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT)**

This important day has been marked in Merton each year since 2017, with a rainbow flag raising ceremony attended by police and partner organisations to show solidarity with our LGBTQ+ residents and encourage those who have become victims of hate crime and intolerance to come forward and get the support they need.



*IDAHOBIT 2019, Merton Civic Centre*

### **Communications**

A dedicated web page on the Merton Council website<sup>7</sup> provides information about hate crime and the support services available to residents in Merton.

A hate crime information leaflet and wallet card have also been developed, which signpost victims to appropriate support services across the different strands of hate crime. These

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.merton.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/crime-prevention-and-community-safety/hate-crime>

have been useful to raise awareness and as an engagement tool when attending events in the community.

In addition, regular reassurance messaging is posted on Merton Council’s social media channels letting victims know that Merton does not stand for hate in any form and that support is available.

## How will the strategy be delivered?

Merton’s hate crime strategy, outlined in this document, aims to develop a victim-oriented, multi-agency approach to tackling all forms of hate crime across the borough. Over the next four years, the council will continue to come together with partners including the Metropolitan Police and groups representing the local community to foster a strong approach to tackling hate crime and supporting its victims. The following strategic aims will be carried out through a coordinated strategy implemented by all relevant partners.

I.	Preventing Hate Crime
II.	Protecting the victim and reducing repeat victimisation
III.	Providing suited support to people who have experienced or are supporting victims of hate crime
IV.	Developing and implementing an integrated, robust, and coordinated approach to tackling suspected perpetrators

### I. Preventing Hate Crime

Prevention work regarding hate crime needs to operate through a multi-level approach in order to be effective. Prevention of hate crimes will come about through a robust combination of educating communities in cultural understanding and acceptance, strongly enforcing the law, treating hate crime as the serious issue it is, and publicising successful prosecutions to act as a deterrent and to make it clear this kind of behaviour is not accepted within our society.

One of the largest issues around hate crime is its underreporting which severely hinders the authorities’ ability to respond to such issues. For this reason, awareness campaigns are an important part of prevention as they can help to ensure people are aware of what hate crime is, what their rights are, and how/ where they are able to report incidents. This information can give victims more confidence in reporting these crimes and thus lead to a stronger response from the appropriate authorities.

Educating communities on the value of diversity and cultural understanding and thus encouraging greater social integration is the best defence against hatred and intolerance. A

particular focus should be on educating children in such issues so that these values are instilled from a young age. This being said, it is crucial that this strategy considers the entire family unit with regards to education.

Migration to the UK must also be considered when developing an approach to hate crime awareness; it is possible that those from certain backgrounds will carry over rivalries from their home countries to the new communities within which they settle. Thus, it is important to make those entering the UK aware of the stringent laws that govern hate crime and the zero-tolerance approach that the police take. Equally, those already residing in the UK must develop an awareness of other cultures and traditions and so should understand and celebrate the migration that sees a community becoming more diverse.

## **II. Protecting the victim and reducing repeat victimisation**

Ensuring the safety of residents is this strategy's ultimate priority and work can be done to achieve this through the promotion of relevant available resources that aid residents in seeking help and support. The use of technology for personal safety and hate crime reporting should be explored further to consider its role as part of the borough's hate crime strategy. An example of this is the True Vision hate crime reporting website.<sup>8</sup>

While technical solutions can provide assistance and a sense of security to many, there remain those who are vulnerable and will not feel comfortable in using, or have access to, this technology. This cohort must also be considered and provided for within this strategy. This can be achieved through community outreach events in which police officers and community partners speak with people face to face, offering one-to-one support to build future resilience and facilitate more conversations around hate crime.

## **III. Providing suited support to people who have experienced or are supporting victims of Hate Crime**

Supporting victims of hate crime should take the form of counselling and emotional support as well as support during the reporting process. The reporting process, and seeing it through to a successful prosecution, can be a very stressful time for the victim and so multi-agency support must be made available for people going through this.

Coordinating this approach will involve the Safer Merton team, the Metropolitan Police, and guidance from community groups within the borough. This will result in shared practice and better communication between agencies, resulting in a clearer and smoother reporting path for the victim. Every resident's experience of hate crime will be unique and thus any support offered to victims should be suited to their needs.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.report-it.org.uk/>

From the Council's perspective, it is of great important to support community organisations in their abilities to take reports of hate crime and provide support for victims. Some residents do not feel comfortable in speaking directly with the police and so wish to report their experiences to those whom they trust. Community organisations play an integral role in providing support and guidance, and will be at the heart of the hate crime third party reporting network. It is acknowledged that some organisations need financial as well as other forms of support to carry out this role.

#### **IV. Developing and implementing an integrated, robust, and coordinated approach to tackling perpetrators**

This will involve robust policing of hate crimes in which every report is taken seriously and the victim is treated with respect. An improvement in police response and in prosecution rates will be partly facilitated by building public confidence in reporting such crimes as well as furthering knowledge of what information is required by police to increase the chances of a successful prosecution. Past cases have demonstrated how a series of low-level offences have escalated into serious crimes (in rare cases even murder) and so a commitment to identify and act on multiple incidents will be made.

Furthermore, where hate crime perpetrators are caught, they will need to be prosecuted to the full extent of the law; the responsibility for this would lie between the Metropolitan Police and the Crown Prosecution Service. Other methods of taking action against perpetrators will be investigated, such as reviewing the terms of their tenancy if they currently reside in rented accommodation.

Hate incidents and hate crimes can be equally as distressing to the victim and so the authorities' response should take consideration of this, providing services for those perpetrators who are often younger and whose actions are below the threshold of what is considered prosecutable.

## The strategic work plan

To deliver the strategic aims set out in this strategy there will be a focus on the following themes via an annual work plan.

### Themes of the work plan

#### 1. Co-ordination

**Aim:** To develop an understanding of the victims' needs and their journey through the criminal justice system to ensure that Merton's residents can access reporting and support services easily and efficiently

**How:** By ensuring that both conversations and actions regarding hate crime are made with input from all stakeholders and that this be embedded into service plans and coordinated effectively

#### 2. Prevention

**Aim:** To provide our residents with the knowledge and skills to stay safe, whilst challenging those who identify with the perpetration of hate crime. Developing and strengthening community cohesion through unifying our residents

**How:** Raising awareness through regular campaigning, projects, and programmes with a focus on Hate Crime Awareness Week in October. Educating the community, with particular attention paid to young people and children, on the importance and merits of diversity and fostering emotional intelligence. Building greater interaction between the police, enforcement agencies and young people to build a trusted relationship outside of crime and punishment.

#### 3. Provision

**Aim:** To ensure Merton is able to deliver the best support services possible, with a focus on supporting voluntary and community sector groups in the delivery and development of third party reporting routes

**How:** By working with partners and the community to provide a range of support services which assist in a practical sense with regards to reporting hate crimes and in providing emotional support to victims

#### 4. Protection

**Aim:** To provide a robust response to hate crime across the partnership, taking the most robust enforcement action possible against borough-based perpetrators

**How:** By ensuring that the police and partners are given training to identify factors which could flag a regular crime as being motivated by hate, in the process ensuring these are taken seriously and acted upon accordingly

## **Governance**

Merton's Community Safety Partnership commits to working together in order to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, whilst increasing community confidence and cohesion.

The Hate Crime Strategy Group is responsible for the monitoring and delivery of Merton's hate crime strategy. The group meets quarterly and is made up of representatives from community organisations representing the different strands of hate crime, police and other statutory and voluntary agencies. It is independently chaired by a representative from a local community organisation.

The Safer Stronger Executive Board is the primary mechanism through which the Hate Crime Strategy Group is held to account for the delivery of the hate crime strategy's objectives. The Hate Crime Strategy Group reports to the Safer Stronger Executive Board annually.

### **Measuring success**

The strategy's objectives will be delivered via an annual work plan which will be reviewed by the Hate Crime Strategy Group on a quarterly basis. At the end of the financial year a highlight report will be produced detailing the key pieces of work which have taken place over the past 12 months and indicating the priorities to be focused on in the year ahead. This will be circulated to the community.

## Appendix

### Appendix A

The IHRA definition of Anti-Semitism is *“a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”*

Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for “why things go wrong.” It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Contemporary examples of anti-Semitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- a) Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- b) Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- c) Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- d) Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
- e) Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- f) Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- g) Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- h) Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.



- i) Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- j) Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- k) Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.