# President Higgins calls antisemitism claims over Israel criticism a slander amid Gaza crisis concerns



President Michael D. Higgins recently asserted that accusations against those who criticise Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policies as "antisemitic" amount to a “slander.” Speaking at the Bord Bia Bloom event in Dublin, he lamented the prevalence of such allegations, stating that they have been weaponised against the Republic and individuals, including himself. This rhetorical stance reflects a broader narrative in which Higgins has been vocal about Ireland's position regarding Israel, particularly in light of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Higgins expressed deep concern over the ongoing suffering in Gaza, where he noted that more than 81% of the population has been displaced amid escalating violence. He highlighted that many have been forced into temporary shelters that have themselves become targets, compounding the tragedy of their displacement. “Their hospitals have been bombed,” he emphasised, painting a stark picture of the humanitarian toll. Reaffirming his past visit to Gaza in 2006, he spoke poignantly about the region's bakeries as vital cultural and economic fixtures, marking the interconnectedness of community and survival amidst conflict.

The President also critiqued the Israeli and US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, characterising it as “an entirely unaccountable body.” His comments came shortly after the resignation of its American executive director, Jake Wood, who reportedly left due to constraints on the foundation's operational independence. Higgins questioned the transparency of the aid being provided, suggesting that the distribution of branded products to those in need could obscure genuine humanitarian efforts, instead aiming to enhance future private sector opportunities.

The broader implications of Higgins' statements come as Israel's foreign representatives have made charged remarks accusing Ireland of antisemitism. Higgins categorically rejected this conflation of criticism with prejudice, arguing that such claims are not only unfounded but also serve to undermine legitimate discourse on critical human rights issues. He emphasised the importance of reframing these discussions, stating, “The idea that propaganda can pay against Ireland is now active in the United States,” where potential investors are reportedly warned of Ireland's stance towards Israel.

In a recent call to action directed at the UN General Assembly, Higgins urged immediate humanitarian aid for Gaza, highlighting the Assembly's powers to intervene when the Security Council fails to act. He firmly believes that now is the time for the international community to prioritise food, medical aid, and water access. Through such statements, Higgins continues to affirm his commitment to advocating for international law and human rights, illustrating the intricacies of Ireland's diplomatic positioning in the Middle East.

The ongoing tension over Higgins' remarks signals a critical juncture in the discussion surrounding antisemitism and criticisms of Israel, highlighting the challenges faced by leaders navigating these sensitive geopolitical landscapes. With growing scrutiny on his planned address at the upcoming Holocaust Memorial Day, where concerns have already been raised about politicising historical tragedies, Higgins remains a polarising figure. The discourse surrounding his views underscores a delicate balance between recognising legitimate concerns regarding antisemitism and maintaining an open critique of state policies that may breach international legal standards.

As these discussions unfold, the implications for Irish diplomacy and international perception are significant, with Higgins' consistent calls for humanitarian intervention and adherence to international law serving as a poignant reminder of the responsibilities nations have towards upholding human rights in the face of geopolitical strife.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/ireland/branding-those-opposed-to-netanyahu-policies-antisemitic-is-slander-higgins-L5GWUDQSNVFEPH2LIYTHUXTXLQ/), [[2]](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/irish-president-israels-antisemitism-charge-is-gross-defamation-and-slander/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/ireland/branding-those-opposed-to-netanyahu-policies-antisemitic-is-slander-higgins-L5GWUDQSNVFEPH2LIYTHUXTXLQ/), [[3]](https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2024/12/17/president-michael-d-higgins-accuses-israel-of-deep-slander-over-anti-semitic-claims/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/ireland/branding-those-opposed-to-netanyahu-policies-antisemitic-is-slander-higgins-L5GWUDQSNVFEPH2LIYTHUXTXLQ/), [[5]](https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-837711), [[6]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/michael-d-higgins-ireland-palestinian-irish-benjamin-netanyahu-b2665763.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/ireland/branding-those-opposed-to-netanyahu-policies-antisemitic-is-slander-higgins-L5GWUDQSNVFEPH2LIYTHUXTXLQ/), [[7]](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/politics/arid-41538359.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/irish-president-israels-antisemitism-charge-is-gross-defamation-and-slander/), [[4]](https://www.timesofisrael.com/irish-jews-cry-foul-over-antisemitic-presidents-planned-holocaust-memorial-speech/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/ireland/branding-those-opposed-to-netanyahu-policies-antisemitic-is-slander-higgins-L5GWUDQSNVFEPH2LIYTHUXTXLQ/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/irish-president-israels-antisemitism-charge-is-gross-defamation-and-slander/> - In October 2023, Irish President Michael D. Higgins criticised Israel's accusations of antisemitism against Ireland, describing them as a 'deep slander'. He argued that criticising Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policies should not be equated with antisemitism, highlighting breaches of international law by Netanyahu. Higgins also noted a pattern aimed at damaging Ireland's reputation, particularly in the United States, where investors were being contacted about Ireland's stance on Israel. He called for immediate humanitarian aid to Gaza, urging the UN General Assembly to act if the Security Council fails.
3. <https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2024/12/17/president-michael-d-higgins-accuses-israel-of-deep-slander-over-anti-semitic-claims/> - In December 2024, President Michael D. Higgins responded to Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar's accusations of antisemitism against Ireland. Higgins described the claims as a 'gross defamation' and 'deep slander', asserting that criticising Prime Minister Netanyahu's actions does not equate to antisemitism. He emphasised Ireland's commitment to international law and criticised Netanyahu for breaching international law and the sovereignty of neighbouring countries. Higgins also noted a pattern of actions aimed at damaging Ireland's international standing.
4. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/irish-jews-cry-foul-over-antisemitic-presidents-planned-holocaust-memorial-speech/> - In December 2024, Irish Jewish groups expressed concern over President Michael D. Higgins's planned speech at the country's Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony. They accused him of politicising the Israel-Hamas conflict during the event. Higgins, who had been previously accused of downplaying antisemitism and delegitimising Jewish viewpoints, was scheduled to deliver the keynote address on January 26, 2025. The chief rabbi of Ireland, Yoni Wieder, noted that Higgins had dismissed Israeli concerns about rising antisemitism in Ireland as a 'PR exercise'.
5. <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-837711> - In December 2024, the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland questioned the appropriateness of President Michael D. Higgins delivering the keynote speech at Holocaust Memorial Day. Maurice Cohen, a member of the council, stated that Higgins had made unsubstantiated remarks about Israel and seemed to prefer criticism of Israel over advocating for peace in the Middle East. The controversy arose after Higgins claimed that Israel was breaching international law and the sovereignty of Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt.
6. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/michael-d-higgins-ireland-palestinian-irish-benjamin-netanyahu-b2665763.html> - In December 2024, President Michael D. Higgins described Israel's accusations of antisemitism against Ireland as 'deep slander'. He criticised Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar's comments and reaffirmed Ireland's stance on international law and human rights. Higgins emphasised the importance of distinguishing between criticism of Israel's government and antisemitism, highlighting Ireland's principled support for international law and human rights.
7. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/politics/arid-41538359.html> - In December 2024, President Michael D. Higgins criticised Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar's accusations of antisemitism against Ireland, describing them as 'gross defamation and slander'. Higgins emphasised that criticising Prime Minister Netanyahu's policies does not equate to antisemitism and reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to international law and human rights. He also noted a pattern of actions aimed at damaging Ireland's international standing, particularly in the United States.