



We Need Your Help: The Lemkin Institute is under Attack

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On 17 September, Fox News [published](#) a defamatory op-ed claiming that the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention & Human Security is misappropriating the Lemkin family name to spread “antisemitism masquerading as human rights.” It further claims that we “defended or excused terrorist organizations.”

The Fox op-ed and subsequent reporting from [The Algemeiner](#), the [Jerusalem Post](#) and [Israel National News](#) have characterized our Institute as engaging in “extreme anti-Israel activism,” to quote from *The Algemeiner*.

These news articles have been triggered by a press release sent out by NJ attorney Joseph Lemkin (a relative of Raphael Lemkin) and the European Jewish Association (EJA) regarding a letter of complaint they have recently submitted to Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro, charging the Lemkin Institute with violating state and federal law by using the name of Raphael Lemkin to engage in genocide prevention work. Their letter is defamatory and wrong on many fronts, as we outline below.

We need your help. We intend to keep our voice strong against false claims and any litigation. One of our great strengths – that we are an unfunded organization with full independence – is a weakness if we are faced with endless legal challenges from genocide deniers. We are currently launching a fundraising campaign to strengthen our organization against the many threats – legal and political – that we are facing in the USA.

We first learned of the letter to the PA Governor, and the press release, on September 10 from a reporter at [eJewishPhilanthropy](#). We submitted a “Right-To-Know” request for a copy of the letter and any associated press release to the Pennsylvania Open Records Office. We received a copy of the letter on September 30. We have not seen the press release that has been mentioned in news articles.

The letter, sent by Alan Milstein and Jeffrey Resnick of the NJ-based Sherman Silverstein law firm, accuses the Lemkin Institute of having a “mission” that is “rooted in anti-Israel advocacy.” It states that we “defend Hamas,” “back Hezbollah,” and “target” the United States. The use of this inflammatory language can only be interpreted as a dog whistle within the context of growing authoritarianism in the US targeting, among other things, organizations raising the alarm about red flags for genocide in Israel and the USA.

If this were a legal battle about the use of a name, we would be informed by a lawyer of the nature of the charges. Indeed, when a different law firm sent a letter to us noting Mr. Joseph Lemkin’s demands regarding our name earlier this year, we responded that we are not closed to a name change but asked for more detail about the laws we have supposedly violated. Contrary to what Mr. Lemkin is [telling](#) the [press](#), we did in fact respond to his first attorney’s letter and have never received the clarification we requested. Instead Mr. Lemkin and the EJA have changed law firms and chosen to take a political path by forcing this issue with the PA authorities and the US and Israeli press.

We believe that this is a coordinated effort by genocide deniers who wish to bully and shut down free speech and genocide prevention work impacting Israel. In fact, Mr. Lemkin was first informed about the Lemkin Institute by [Ira Stoll](#), a columnist for *The Algemeiner*. As Stoll wrote in *The Algemeiner* on 13 November 2024, Mr. Lemkin “said he was unfamiliar with the institute until being informed of it by The Algemeiner.” The choice made by Mr. Lemkin and the EJA to now accuse us of supporting Hamas and Hezbollah -- in a letter to a U.S. governor — is a cynical attempt to bring the Lemkin Institute to the attention of the U.S. government as an entity that “supports” terrorism.

It is important to note that Joseph Lemkin does not speak for the entire Lemkin family, nor does he officially represent a Lemkin estate. We have Lemkin family members on our side who reached out to us after October 7, 2023. Peter Lemkin, in whose childhood home Raphael Lemkin was a frequent visitor, has been particularly supportive, offering encouragement, sharing insights into Lemkin’s work, and informing us of his family’s close collaboration in the effort to get the Genocide Convention ratified by states. While the Lemkin Institute has communicated to Joseph Lemkin publicly and privately through his attorney that we are open to discussion, there are other voices involved. Instead of engaging in any dialogue, Mr. Lemkin and the EJA have instead sought to pursue a well-funded political campaign to mischaracterize our anti-genocide work and shut us down. This suggests that the effort is about much more than a name.

Like the members of his family who support our work, we strongly believe that Raphael Lemkin would be in agreement with our methodology, which is based on his historical studies. In fact, the reason our Institute was named to honor Raphael Lemkin is because his works so strongly influenced the scholarship of the Institute’s two founders. Our [10 Patterns of Genocide](#) tool was developed in large part from a study of his cases. Raphael Lemkin was a sharp and unrelenting analyst. While we cannot say one way or the other what his exact sentiments would be about Israel’s current actions towards Palestinians, we do not believe that his Zionism – his belief in the need for a Jewish national home – is at all suggestive of his support of everything that Israel does. It is very hard to imagine that Raphael Lemkin would *not* have seen the genocidal dynamics of the present conflict early on, given his [definition](#) of the term and his [historical studies](#). We share Raphael Lemkin’s belief in the

need for a Jewish national home, but that has not meant that we are unable to see the genocide before our eyes.

As we have all come to witness in these past years, organizations dedicated to evenhanded genocide prevention are under attack. Although we have called out many other governments for exhibiting red flags for genocide and for committing genocide — using exactly the same tools to make these determinations as we used for Israel — it is only our work on Israel that has brought about a coordinated smear campaign in the USA with dangerous, precedent-setting implications. The idea that naming red flags for genocide in the Israeli state, and attempting to address these early (before things get to the point that we are now), is somehow “anti-Israel” or “antisemitic” or “pro-Hamas” is profoundly wrongheaded. We are no more anti-Israel than we are anti-US, anti-China, anti-Russia, anti-Ethiopia, anti-Syria, anti-Sudan, anti-Myanmar, anti-Azerbaijan, anti-Turkey, anti-UK, anti-Germany, and so forth.

The attempt to discredit us or to shut down our work is part of a wider effort to silence opposition to Israel's genocide in the USA. But we will not allow our work to be smeared, or our voices to be silenced.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention has never relied on sponsorship or grants because we believe that our work requires 100% independence. Instead, we rely on the donations of individuals who believe in our work to fund a very small budget covering newspaper and technology subscriptions. Our team of committed volunteers pours countless unpaid hours into research, advocacy, and education. And now we are being dragged into legal threats that could wipe us out entirely.

That is why we are launching a fundraising campaign to cover urgent legal fees, hire a full-time administrator, and ensure the survival of the Lemkin Institute. Every contribution, no matter how small, will help us continue to amplify the voices of the communities at risk and the survivors who refuse to be forgotten even in the face of strong opposition. We welcome individual donors and sponsors who believe in the need for consistent, evenhanded, and frank public assessments of genocide risk combined with public education initiatives that are animated by the same commitment. The Lemkin Institute is convinced that the success or failure of genocide prevention in the 21st century will depend on whether our prevention organizations tell the truth and engage honestly with the global grassroots.

This is not just about us. This is about defending a space for genocide prevention, for truth-telling, and for accountability in a world that is increasingly hostile to all three. If you believe in the work that we do, in the values that we defend, in the memory of Raphael Lemkin and the struggle he began, please stand with us now. Donate. Share. Speak out.

Thank you. 🙏