

Hate-mongers should not be welcome in Canada

By **Sergio R. Karas**

Law360 Canada (November 11, 2025, 2:28 PM EST) -- On Sept. 19, 2025, the federal government announced that the Irish rap band Kneecap had been deemed ineligible to enter the country, saying: "The group have amplified political violence and publicly displayed support for terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas."

The band had been scheduled to perform concerts in Toronto and Vancouver in October. Kneecap has long faced criticism for lyrics filled with expletives and drug references, as well as for political statements perceived to glorify terrorist groups. The trio, however, rejected these accusations, claiming that critics were attempting to silence them because of their outspoken support for the Palestinian cause in the war in Gaza. They maintained that they neither supported Hezbollah nor Hamas nor condoned violence of any kind. However, in 2024, band member Mo Chara was charged in the United Kingdom with a terror-related offence after waving a Hezbollah flag during a concert in London.



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Earlier in 2025, Kneecap performed at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in California, where they accused Israel of carrying out "genocide" against Palestinians. Their comments sparked public backlash, with some people calling for their visas to be cancelled, and several of the band's later shows were cancelled as a result.

While freedom of expression and artistic performance are central pillars of any democracy, they are not absolute protections when speech crosses into endorsement of violence or support for extremist organizations. Canada provides a clear legal basis for refusing entry to non-citizens who are involved in, support or promote terrorism or acts of violence. Section 34(1) of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) gives a pre-emptive tool in immigration law to deny entry to individuals who may pose a security risk, whether through espionage, terrorism, violent acts, subversion of democratic processes or membership in dangerous organizations.

For cases like those involving bands, activists or public figures, this legal basis allows the government

to assess not only direct acts but also symbolic, ideological or organizational connections to extremist causes. In practical terms, even absent a criminal conviction, a person can be rendered inadmissible based on credible evidence of threat or membership in a designated organization under s. 34(1) of the IRPA.

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs welcomed the government's decision to bar Kneecap from entering Canada, stating that "incitement, hate and radicalization have no place in this country," and praising the move as a necessary step to prevent the normalization of extremist messaging under the guise of cultural expression. Antisemitic incidents have surged in recent years, and any concerted normalization of groups or symbols that have targeted Jews worldwide cannot be treated as abstract art alone.

According to a statement by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), quoted by the CBC, the Israel-Hamas war has led to a spike in "violent rhetoric from extremist actors" that could prompt some in Canada to turn to violence. Further, according to the latest Global 100 survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), nearly half of people worldwide hold antisemitic views. The study found that 46 per cent of adults, an estimated 2.2 billion people, have strong antisemitic attitudes. This is more than double the level recorded in ADL's first global survey a decade ago and the highest ever reported.

Kneecap is not alone in facing inadmissibility for speech or associations deemed a threat to public safety. Canada has a long history of denying entry to individuals whose actions or affiliations fall under the security provisions of the IRPA. In March 2009, British MP George Galloway was barred from entering Canada after the government deemed him inadmissible for providing "material support" to Hamas, a listed terrorist organization in Canada. Immigration officials, citing the IRPA's security provisions, ruled that Galloway's financial aid and public praise for Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh amounted to support for terrorism, making him a danger to Canada's national security.

In October 2022, the government announced a ban on more than 10,000 senior members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, invoking the same IRPA framework to permanently render them inadmissible for their involvement in "terrorism, systemic human-rights violations, and threats to international peace." These cases underscore how Canada has consistently used the IRPA's national security provisions to prevent the entry of individuals whose actions or affiliations pose a threat to public safety or contribute to the spread of extremist ideology.

Admission into Canada by non-citizens is a privilege, not a guaranteed right. The government's decision to deny entry to Kneecap reflects how immigration policy intersects with national security and social cohesion. It is not simply about barring a band from performing; it is about ensuring that the individuals invited into the country do not exacerbate risk for minorities or exploit Canada's open democratic culture to propagate messages of violence or hate.

Freedom of expression remains a cornerstone of democracy, but it cannot come at the expense of public safety or the normalization of extremist ideologies. The refusal to admit Kneecap is not about silencing dissenting voices; it is about drawing a necessary line between artistic freedom and the dangerous glorification of violence, to protect citizens and uphold the values of peace, inclusion and democratic integrity.

In a global environment where extremist ideologies and hate propaganda transcend borders, immigration control measures serve as the first line of defence in safeguarding national security. The IRPA empowers the government to declare individuals inadmissible when their actions, affiliations or rhetoric may incite division, glorify violence or undermine public order.

To strengthen this objective, the authorities should ensure coordination between the Canada Border Services Agency, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and other agencies to improve intelligence-sharing and risk assessments for high-profile entrants. In doing so, Canada can uphold its openness to diverse voices while maintaining firm, pre-emptive vigilance against those who might exploit that openness to endanger its national security.

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