

## **INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Name:** Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees AM

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Dear Committee Members,

I write to you as a former Professor of Social Work & Social Policy at the University of Sydney, former Director of that university's Centre for Peace & Conflict Studies and as the founder, inaugural Director of the Sydney Peace Foundation.

My limited observations of anti-Semitism stand in total contrast to anti-Palestinianism, Islamophobia and attacks on Arab Australians. For example, in over twenty years of teaching at Sydney University I witnessed numerous occasions when students from Hebrew Studies attempted to break up seminars dealing with the world wide Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement on behalf of Palestinians' rights to self determination, to harass a distinguished Palestinian doctor invited to address the medical faculty. We tolerated such prejudice, such verbal abuse but now, if there is the slightest hint of criticism of the state of Israel's slaughter of Palestinians, then the lobby whose identity depends on claims about anti-Semitism, starts to grossly exaggerate claims about threats to Australian citizens of Jewish heritage.

For years, Australia has witnessed a complete imbalance. Just because the Zionist lobby is powerful does not mean to say that anti-Semitism is widespread. Just because Palestinian Australians have not had political clout, it can be alleged that Islamophobia and anti-Palestinianism does not exist.

Paradoxically, feelings about anti-Semitism become apparent in relation to attacks against Palestine and Palestinians. It's as though the Zionist pro Israel narrative must always dominate and any alternative resistance to this one sided version of history can be dubbed anti-Semitism. This is an appalling concoction, now even fostered by an anti-Semitism envoy Ms. Segal.

Let me explain just one piece of history. In 2003 when the distinguished and highly regarded Palestinian academic and politician Dr. Hanan Ashrawi was chosen as that year's recipient of the Sydney Peace Prize, the Zionist lobby used every opportunity to deride, attack and tell blatant lies about Ashrawi. Establishment figures, members of the Federal government, leading lawyers and journalists from right wing newspapers joined the onslaught against Ashrawi and against me as Director of the Peace Foundation. The mere presence of Ashrawi in Australia allegedly showed that a terrorist would be in our midst, that Australian citizens' security was threatened, that anti-Semitism was being encouraged. This distasteful, dangerous episode was concocted as evidence of anti-Semitism. That was a fallacy. On the contrary, support for Ashrawi ensured that almost for the first time in Australia the human rights of Palestinians could be discussed openly. Such discussion was telling Australian politicians and media outlets that the usual Israeli narrative that Jewish citizens were always the victims was false.

More recently I have observed Sydney University students in their pro Palestine encampment on the grounds of that university. I interviewed numerous students whose dismay at the continuing death and destruction in Gaza motivated them to protest by camping out in dire weather conditions. I witnessed the camping students including Jewish students in seminars about human rights, peace and justice. This had nothing to do with anti-Semitism yet the visibility of Palestinian flags, the speaking, as I did, about the unimaginable cruelty to the people of Gaza did threaten the usual domination of the Zionist narrative that Jewish people were under attack. Nothing could have been further from the truth, yet a fearful university management complied with the lobby that to bolster its identity claimed that anti-Semitism was rife on Sydney's and other campuses. Protests about the slaughter of doctors, nurses, cleaners, ambulance drivers and journalists in Gaza and the destruction of almost every

hospital in that narrow strip of land are entirely justified. How in heaven's name can such protests about a genocide be called anti-Semitic?

I acknowledge that Jewish people may feel threatened by widespread support for Palestinians, threatened even by the appearance of Palestinian flags and other symbolism but in my forty years of work and leadership on the Sydney University campus, including four as a member of the governing body the Senate, such threats were never brought to my attention.

The current repetition that anti-Semitism is rife cross Australia looks like a self fulfilling prophecy, an alleged threat to social cohesion has become a deliberate distraction from the genocide in Gaza and in the West Bank.

Does anti-Semitism exist? Did Humpty Dumpty tell Alice, 'Things mean what I say they mean.'

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Stuart Rees AM

Professor Emeritus, University of Sydney,

PS I have no problem with you publishing my submission.

Sent from my iPad