

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

**Organisation:** Sydney Friends of Standing Together

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## **Inquiry into antisemitism in New South Wales**

### **Sydney Friends of Standing Together (SFoST)**

We are Australians of diverse backgrounds and beliefs, inspired by [Standing Together](#), a growing movement of Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel united in their struggle for peace, equality and justice, and against the occupation. Like other Friends of Standing Together groups around the world, we amplify the voices of Jews and Palestinians who reject the status quo that benefits the ruling elites in Israel and Palestine to the detriment of the majority and perpetuates the false narrative that Jews and Palestinians are enemies.

We stand in solidarity with Jews, Palestinians, and other Australians who oppose racism and prejudice, fostering dialogue and conversation even in the face of disagreement.

Our membership is diverse, consisting of Jews, Palestinians, and other Australians who hold a range of perspectives. Jewish members of SFoST were among the more than [500 signatories](#) of a statement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, opposing President Trump's proposed ethnic cleansing in Gaza. Members of our leadership team, in collaboration with six Jewish groups, also [signed the statement](#) *Jewish Australians Demand a Firm and Immediate Response from the Australian Government*.

Our Jewish members represent a broad spectrum of views, from conservative to progressive. All our members are united in our commitment to accommodate differences of opinion, recognising the importance of engaging with diverse and sometimes opposing narratives. We believe that open discussion is crucial in combating polarization and fostering social cohesion.

### **Context of the Inquiry**

We understand that this Inquiry is a response to antisemitic incidents in NSW. The terms of reference require the Committee to investigate various aspects of antisemitism, including its

causes, its prevalence in universities and schools, its impact on social cohesion, and how community safety may be enhanced.

We are concerned that this Inquiry has been established under limited terms that reflect only some views within the Jewish community of NSW. We reject the notion that exists in parts of the Jewish community that Jewish people speak with one voice. There is a diversity of opinions and important differences that this submission will highlight.

By focusing on some narratives and sidelining more complex discussions, the inquiry risks producing an artificial and unsustainable outcome. A more inclusive approach should acknowledge how societal perceptions of antisemitism affect both Jewish and non-Jewish communities in NSW.

While the eight Terms of Reference (TOR) warrant consideration, they must be understood within a broader systemic and geopolitical context, which must also be explored as part of this inquiry. Effectively addressing antisemitism requires a holistic approach, incorporating it into a broader anti-racism framework.

Antisemitism has a long and complex history. It exists in Australia, as it does globally. In Australia, including in NSW, there is a reported increase in antisemitic incidents.

We appreciate that this inquiry focuses on antisemitism, however we caution against an exclusionary approach. Other forms of racial hatred, particularly [Islamophobia](#), anti-Palestinian prejudice, and anti-Indigenous racism, must be treated with equal seriousness. Elevating one form of hatred over others risks exacerbating inter-community divisions.

While there is debate over which incidents are or are not antisemitic, it is our strong view that claims of antisemitism should not be dismissed without proper consideration, and that the lived experience of antisemitism must be respected and taken seriously, as must be the case with all forms of racism and discrimination. We condemn all hate crimes equally.

In our view antisemitism must be considered in broader geopolitical contexts and cannot be combated effectively without consideration of other perspectives.

We note that there are varying definitions of antisemitism, some of which are contested within both the Jewish and wider communities. Some definitions, in particular [IHRA](#) and a similar definition adopted by [Universities Australia](#), have been criticised for conflating legitimate political discourse with antisemitism, particularly in discussions concerning the State of Israel. If the IHRA definition is used in this inquiry, it must be critically examined to ensure it does not suppress open dialogue.

This submission addresses five of the eight Terms of Reference (TORs): (a), (b), (c), (d), and (h).

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## Addressing the Terms of Reference

### **(a) Causes of the Increasing Prevalence and Severity of Antisemitic Incidents Across NSW**

Many Jews globally, including in Australia, regard the State of Israel as integral to Jewish identity. This perspective often contributes to social tensions, as criticism of Zionism and of Israel can be perceived as antisemitism. We assert that opposition to Zionist ideologies and Israel's policies must not automatically be equated with antisemitism. Palestinian historical narrative clashes with the Zionist narrative and accusing those who argue for Palestinian nationhood of antisemitism is wrong.

However, while it is common for Jews to associate being Jewish with being Zionist, many Jews experience a similar conflation by anti-Zionists as antisemitism. While the line can be thin, the distinction is essential for fostering meaningful discussions without fear of censorship or reprisal. We advocate a societal model where dialogue and understanding of divergent narratives are an essential instrument of combating all forms of racism.

The horrific attacks of October 7, 2023 and the ongoing hostage crisis have heightened insecurity within Sydney's Jewish community. Many Jews feel that the severity of these events is not adequately acknowledged in broader society, contributing to increased polarization in Australia, including in NSW. At the same time, there is a perception in pro-Palestinian circles that pro-Israel Jews deny the extreme loss and trauma of the Palestinians before and since 7 October, and that the Jewish community's focus is solely on Jewish trauma.

A series of incidents against Jewish targets over the past few months created an atmosphere of fear in large parts of the Jewish community. The incidents investigated as part of Operation Pearl were described as a hoax by NSW police. Many in the Jewish community believe that these attacks were antisemitic. We agree that selecting Jewish targets, irrespective of the perpetrators' intent, causes fear in the community and must not be discounted.

However we urge community leaders and politicians to use caution and restraint. In a volatile environment, it is easy to stoke fear and division. We know that Islamophobic attacks are also on the rise. We urge Jewish leaders to speak out against Islamophobia and Muslim leaders to speak out against antisemitism. All hate crime is abhorrent.

There is a need for all community and religious and political leaders to show solidarity in the face of communal hate, to counter bitterness and polarisation.

It is important for government to adopt a coordinated approach involving both state and federal efforts, utilising relevant institutions at each level. For example, the Australian Human Rights

Commission (AHRC) can be bolstered to play a key role. As an advocate for the Jewish Community, the Special Envoy for Antisemitism should work together with the AHRC, to ensure an integrated and balanced approach.

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## **(b) Antisemitism on University Campuses**

Many Jewish students and staff on university campuses in NSW have reported experiencing antisemitism. We note the Inquiry into [antisemitism in Universities](#) and the commitment by universities to treat claims of antisemitism seriously.

It is vital to distinguish antisemitic acts from freedom of expression. The anger and outrage expressed by Palestinians and their supporters on university campuses and in protests elsewhere, is understandable, given the scale of death and destruction to Palestinian people perpetrated by Israel in Gaza and the West Bank. Jewish supporters of Israel often perceive this rage, as well as calls to “Free Palestine,” by which some mean the dismantling of the State of Israel, as antisemitic, leading to discomfort, fear, and isolation.

We note two federal parliamentary inquiries into antisemitism on university campuses in the past year, one by the Senate and one by the House of Representatives. The reports of both Committees detail numerous incidents where Jewish staff and students experienced antisemitism and highlighted the absence of university policies or guidelines around what constitutes antisemitism. In some cases Vice-Chancellors acknowledged they had been deficient and had failed to provide a safe space for study or work, and made a public apology (University of Sydney), or have commenced independent inquiries into allegations of organised racist behaviour (QUT and its 2024 Racism conference).

Numerous incidents on campuses in every state and territory have been identified by the [Australian Academic Alliance against Anti-Semitism](#).

In our view anti-Zionist rhetoric can be dehumanising to Israelis, if applied as a whole to Jews with affiliations to Israel, or when it conflates Zionism with Jews in general, whether or not they support Zionism. Derogatory language, such as the term “Zios,” and the exclusion of pro-Israel or Zionist perspectives from conversations, are reductionist and marginalising. All students and staff have the right to feel safe on university campuses and universities must address all complaints of harassment and discrimination with equal rigour.

However, this does not mean adopting the views of some sectors within the Jewish community, who aim to suppress both criticism of the Israeli government and expressions of support for the

rights of Palestinians.

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### **(c) The Threat to Social Cohesion Posed by Antisemitism**

Antisemitism is a racial and communal hatred that cannot be excused or justified.

Distress within the Jewish community is significant. Many Jewish individuals in public life have reported experiences of antisemitism, and these experiences must be respected.

However we believe that in order to deal with antisemitism effectively, it must be understood in the specific contexts in which it occurs.

We regret the increasing social divisions in NSW related to Israel-Palestine, which stem from multiple factors, not solely or principally from antisemitism. We attribute part of this division to bitter controversy over Israel's failure to comply with international humanitarian law, including the International Court of Justice orders as noted by [Israeli human rights organisations](#), among others; Israel's ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the West Bank, which many human rights groups have described as [genocide](#); responses to these events and how they are reported in the media. For many in the Jewish community, the very words "genocide" and "ethnic cleansing", when applied to Israel's actions, are regarded as an expression of antisemitism. Human rights organisations themselves have been accused by the Israeli government and some Jewish groups of antisemitic bias. Such vastly different positions on the use of language and human rights law have exacerbated divisions in public discourse.

The strong alignment between Jewish identity and support for Israel among many Jews has contributed to both inter- and intra-communal tensions. We emphasise that expressions of outrage towards Israel's policies should not automatically be categorised as antisemitic. Government policies must not conflate Palestinian expressions of frustration with antisemitism. We caution against adopting a formulaic, one-size-fits-all approach that reflects the views of only certain parts within the Jewish community, especially given that such views may not represent the majority of Jews in NSW.

Education and community engagement are critical to fostering understanding. While Palestinian narratives that clash with pro-Israel narratives may be unsettling to many Jews, they do not constitute antisemitism. A deeper commitment to education, inter-cultural dialogue, and expert-led policy-making is necessary to mitigate tensions and promote social cohesion.

Engaging the Jewish community in conversation about the distinction between antisemitism and legitimate counter-narratives is crucial, especially as Israel's long-standing government continues to normalise supremacist ideologies. Such engagement should be reinforced by

government-backed initiatives that promote meaningful dialogue and engage leaders across Jewish and other communities.

Notably, the Australian Government's [Multicultural Framework Review Report](#) outlines "a generational reform agenda requiring a whole-of-government and community approach," to position Australia as a nation that fully embraces its diverse cultures, faiths, and lived experiences. Ultimately, combating antisemitism must be part of a broader human rights-based strategy that addresses all forms of discrimination, including Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, and anti-Indigenous racism.

On another level, racist, antisemitic, Islamophobic and other discriminatory behaviour is also a result of social inequality. Financial distress, cost of living struggles and insecurity have been shown to exacerbate these attitudes. A more caring and equal society is likely to give people less cause to find groups to blame and target, while repressive measures can inflame resentments while suppressing their expression.

We caution against adopting measures, including some that were recommended by the [Executive Council of Australian Jewry](#) and adopted as policy by the Leader of the federal Opposition, Mr Peter Dutton, that risk reinforcing a fortress mentality and distrust between communities. Any implementation of measures countering antisemitism must be a genuine move towards dialogue and social cohesion.

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#### **(d) Enhancing Community Safety for Jewish Australians**

While we do not contest the need within the Jewish community for enhanced security, in our view a broad, inclusive approach is required to address community safety at a deeper level. By promoting an exchange of narratives and fostering open discussions, we can work to reduce inter-community fear and division. It is essential to encourage respectful dialogue rather than suppress debate. In our highly polarised society, the skills needed for conducting dialogue need to be intentionally cultivated through education and community outreach.

Within the NSW Jewish Community, lateral violence resulting in compromised psychological safety, needs to also be acknowledged and addressed. There are strongly contested views on the legitimacy of the actions of the Israeli state. As a result, many of those who believe that the post 7 October 2023 actions of the Israeli State are legitimate have gone to significant lengths to shut down community discussion and debate. This lateral violence causes inter community fear and division, rather than fostering the necessary conditions for respectful intra-community dialogue.

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## (h) The Role of the Sydney Jewish Museum in Holocaust Education

Holocaust education is crucial in fostering historical awareness and combating antisemitism. Institutions like the Sydney Jewish Museum should continue to play a role in education, alongside other initiatives that address both antisemitism and the full spectrum of racism and discrimination. But Holocaust education alone is not sufficient for addressing increased polarisation.

There is a need for programs to educate Jewish school students and community members about Palestinian history, the [Nakba](#), and the histories of other communities with whom meaningful dialogue is essential. Understanding each other's past is crucial for fostering mutual respect and working toward solutions to complex, long-standing challenges.

Preventing and reducing antisemitism and other forms of racism will require sustained contact between communities, supported and funded by the NSW government, starting from early childhood education. Public and secular schooling as well as independent schools would be a good starting point for children to experience each other as belonging to the one community.

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### Recommendations

1. **Ensure that any definition of antisemitism** applied in legislation or policy is critically evaluated, and consider alternative frameworks that differentiate between antisemitism and legitimate political discourse, to ensure that political expression is not stifled.
2. **Ensure public statements by the NSW Government concerning events in the Middle East are balanced and sensitive.** In the event of future catastrophic events in the Middle East, ensure that any public statements consider the broader historical context that affects many diverse members of New South Wales—especially those who came to Australia as refugees or migrants from the region due to war or persecution.
3. **Avoid over-policing perceived antisemitism** as a stand-alone phenomenon. While antisemitism is a distinct and long-standing issue, it should not overshadow other forms of racism, which deserve equal attention and response. The NSW Government should adopt an **inclusive and transparent approach** to addressing antisemitism and racism, avoiding heavy-handed or exclusionary measures that risk exacerbating community divisions. A more collaborative approach will help to prevent further polarisation and build stronger, more cohesive relationships across communities.



4. **Incorporate diverse community perspectives** in the fight against antisemitism and racism, ensuring that all voices, including those from non-Zionist Jewish groups, are represented in efforts to combat racism.
5. **Fund and implement inter-cultural, inter-faith, and inter-community dialogue and appropriate skills development** at every community level, with community leaders driving and supporting these efforts to foster mutual understanding and social cohesion.
6. **Introduce education programs** that foster inter-community contact in both government and independent school education.
7. **Support a joint State and Federal approach** that maximises the potential of existing bodies to combat all forms of racism, including antisemitism, such as the AHRC.

## Conclusion

This submission calls for a balanced, evidence-based approach to addressing antisemitism in NSW, one that avoids politicising the issue and supports open, respectful dialogue across communities. Antisemitism must be addressed within a broader anti-racism framework that:

- Does not limit discussions to the Terms of Reference (TOR) reflecting primarily conservative Jewish perspectives, which may reinforce definitions of antisemitism on which not all NSW Jews agree.
- Acknowledges the geopolitical and socio-political factors that influence the rise and fall of antisemitism.

By investing in intercultural dialogue and maintaining a careful balance between free speech and other human rights, NSW can build a more inclusive, cohesive society that upholds the dignity and rights of all its people. A truly effective response to antisemitism requires inclusive, nuanced conversations and policies that consider it within the broader context of combating all forms of racism and discrimination.