

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Australian Jewish Association

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Submission by the Australian Jewish Association (AJA)

The Australian Jewish Association (AJA) is a national not-for-profit organisation with thousands of members, many in NSW, and the largest Jewish presence on social media, with over 100,000 followers. We thank the committee for this invitation to submit.

AJA offers a distinct perspective, often uniquely advocating positions widely held in the Jewish community. We were the only Jewish group to back the “No” campaign in the Indigenous Voice referendum—aligned with most Australians—and the only one to critique aspects of recent hate speech laws. As a frequent first point of contact for antisemitism victims and media, and the target of many antisemitic threats, including the ones leading to the first AFP charge under Operation Avalite, AJA is deeply engaged in this issue.

a) Causes of Antisemitism

Since October 7, 2023, antisemitism has surged, driven by three main sources:

- **Far-Right Antisemitism:** A small neo-Nazi fringe has existed for decades. Though longstanding, it remains marginal and largely contained. Those engaging in antisemitism on the far-right are often on the edges of society. We have not observed any decline in antisemitism because of the introduction of bans on Nazi symbols. AJA is frequently targeted by the far-right.
- **Far-Left Antisemitism:** There has been an explosion in antisemitism from the far-left. This has taken the form of street protests, influencers spreading hatred on social media, irresponsible behavior from far-left political parties and in university ‘encampments’. Jews are often vilified under anti-Zionist pretexts and the word ‘Zionist’ is often substituted for Jew. Almost all Australian Jews identify as Zionist. Far-left antisemitism is a significant escalation since October 7.
- **Islamic Antisemitism:** A major and growing threat, with reports of Islamic preachers celebrating October 7 and glorifying terrorism. Rather than condemn the extremists, mainstream Muslim groups often deflect criticism with “Islamophobia” claims, and we know of no Islamic leader unequivocally condemning the October 7 attacks publicly.

Recently, the phenomenon of ‘Jewish antisemitism’ has emerged : A tiny, fringe group claiming Jewish heritage parrots anti-Jewish rhetoric, rejected by the broader Jewish community but amplifying division and defending antisemitism. This group is used by the other three sources above to ‘legitimise’ their own antisemitism.

(b) Education settings

University campuses have emerged as hotspots for antisemitism. Many Jewish students have been scared to be publicly identified as Jewish. Administrators have been slow to react, and responses have been weak.

The worst offender has been the University of Sydney. We have received numerous complaints from students and staff there. Disgracefully, instead of protecting their Jewish students, the university negotiated with some of the most extremist protest groups.

Teachers and education unions have not protected their Jewish members and have tolerated antisemitism. We are aware of numerous Jewish teachers who have resigned from their union.

(c) Social Cohesion

Antisemitism represents a significant threat to social cohesion in NSW.

The ugly scenes outside the Sydney Opera House on October 9 were broadcast around the world and tarnished the reputation of this state. It is important to note that this disgraceful event occurred before Israel had responded to the Hamas terrorism of October 7 – it was not a protest against the Israeli response, it was a celebration of attacks on Jews and included various antisemitic chants and calls to violence (Intifada).

Since then, hateful protests have taken over the CBD causing many Jews to avoid the area.

The Jewish community has endured a sustained campaign of antisemitism.

There have been protests outside a synagogue, convoys of cars targeting neighbourhoods where Jews live, a jumping castle business refusing to hire to a Jewish school, a hateful video filmed in a healthcare facility, the targeting of homes, cars, synagogues, Kosher restaurants and a daycare centre.

Many Jewish people would not enter parts of Sydney if they were dressed in a way where they could be identified as Jewish. This is intolerable.

Regrettably, some local councils across NSW have exacerbated tensions by passing antisemitic boycott motions targeted at the world's only Jewish state.

There have also been media reports about employees of the NSW Government making extremist comments on social media. Those in positions of responsibility should not be inflaming the situation.

(d) + (e) Community safety & security

The financial burden placed on the Jewish community for security is exorbitant and not faced by any other community.

Many Jewish institutions resemble fortresses with high fences, bollards, cameras and walls to withstand explosions. Schools, pre-schools and aged care facilities need armed guards. Even small family celebrations require security.

Parents pay school fees which are diverted to cover the security costs.

The Jewish community greatly appreciates the support of governments in helping allay some of these costs.

Recommendations

1. Stop funding antisemitic organisations and individuals

Fighting antisemitism doesn't need to cost taxpayers. In fact, it could end up saving NSW taxpayers substantial funds.

NSW taxpayers should not provide grants to Islamic organisations who make antisemitic statements or arts organisations who spread hatred against the Jewish state.

Individuals are entitled to free speech, but taxpayers needn't fund those who are spreading hate.

NSW taxpayers face huge bills to police the hateful anti-Israel protests that have taken place since the October 7 attacks. There should be consideration for a system where the organisers meet some of the costs of their disruptive protests after a certain number of protests.

2. Implement the IHRA definition

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition on antisemitism is the authoritative, internationally accepted definition of antisemitism. The first step to treating a problem is to diagnose it correctly.

The IHRA definition has been adopted by federal and state governments and oppositions, but it needs to be implemented. Educational institutions are the most pressing place to start.

3. Take action against councils involving themselves in international affairs

Local councils are not elected to engage in international diplomacy. Antisemitic boycotts like those debated at Canterbury-Bankstown and City of Sydney Councils isolate the Jewish community and harm ratepayers. There are media reports that Liverpool Council scandalously gave ratepayer funds away to Lebanon after Israel was attacked from that country. The Minister for Local Government should not ignore the situation and should act against local councils who are acting outside their role and against the interests of their ratepayers.

4. Further assistance to meet security costs

NSW should continue to liaise with the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and the Community Security Group (CSG) about the security needs for the Jewish community. Financial assistance to help meet the heavy security costs is greatly appreciated.

5. Anti-BDS laws

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) is an antisemitic movement that builds on a long history of anti-Jewish boycotts. The BDS movement in NSW is small but growing. The majority of US states have legislation which deals with BDS. It is important to note that such legislation has a narrow focus and only restricts the distribution of public funds. In the US it sits alongside the First Amendment and does not offend free speech rights – any private individual, business or organisation can make whatever criticism or pursue any boycotts. But not if it is a recipient of government grants. AJA has draft legislation which we can provide.

The Australian Jewish Association looks forward to engaging further on these issues and giving evidence at a hearing.

Robert Gregory
Chief Executive Officer

Dr David Adler
President