

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Ethnic Communities Council of NSW

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Dear Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Justice and Communities

Inquiry in antisemitism in New South Wales

The Ethnic Communities Council of NSW (ECC NSW) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on this important matter. Please find our submission below.

ECC NSW is the state-wide peak body representing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Our core activities include advocacy, education and community development. Our membership comprises of hundreds of organisations and individuals representing new, emerging and established communities, which includes members from the NSW Jewish community.

Our mission is to actively promote the principles of multiculturalism, and advocate for the development of a culturally inclusive, cohesive and harmonious society. We are committed to empowering, engaging and involving multicultural, multi-faith and multilingual based communities in public life, ensuring their active participation and contribution.

The NSW Jewish community form an integral part of NSW and Australia. Jewish Australians have made significant and valuable contributions to Australian society over the course of the last century. The Jewish community of NSW has similarly been a long-standing member of ECC NSW and were a founding partner in our establishment 50 years ago.

ECC NSW condemns the recent spate of antisemitic conduct that has engulfed our communities across NSW. In our role as a peak body, our members firmly believe that a threat to one group in our society is a threat to us all. We are appalled and alarmed at the antisemitism crisis in NSW and the growing threat to the lives and way of life of our Jewish brothers and sisters.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms the vile and targeted acts of antisemitism that have been carried out on the community. These acts are nothing short of criminal thuggery that are designed to invoke fear in the community. There is no equivocation, nor is there any justifiable explanation for what we have seen in recent times. We call on all communities to unite in absolute condemnation of the targeting of our Jewish community, in particular the innocent children that are part of the future of Australia's multicultural and multi-faith society.

We confine our comments to section 1 (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the terms of reference.

a) the causes underlying the increasing prevalence and severity of antisemitic incidents across the state

Judaism is considered one of a few ethno-religious groups world-wide. The Jewish people are a community with a shared religion, ethnicity and history, where Jewish identity is intertwined with religious practice and cultural heritage. The Jewish community are diverse, tracing their heritage back to countries across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and their ancestry to Israel. While considered by some as part of 'mainstream society', the Jewish people are a minority that have endured discrimination, persecution, genocide and expulsion from their homes across the world.

Unlike other forms of racism and bigotry, antisemitism is an ancient racial hatred that has continued to infect society for millennia. This hatred has evolved over time to fit the prevalent historical circumstances and context. Blood libels, deicide and conspiracy theories of Jewish influence are expressions of historical antisemitism that have been recycled throughout centuries. These tropes have been appropriated in modern times with the creation of the Jewish state of Israel and the escalating spur of antisemitism often under the guise of anti-Israel rhetoric.

Since October 7, the rise in antisemitism has taken a form this country has not seen in its recent history. The recent spate of antisemitic conduct has engulfed our communities across NSW at an alarming rate. These acts are nothing short of criminal thuggery that are designed to invoke fear in the community. There is no equivocation, nor is there any justifiable explanation for what we have heard and witnessed in recent times. The antisemitism crisis in NSW continues to pose a threat to the lives of Jewish Australians and their ability to practice their faith openly and safely.

The ongoing events of the middle east conflict have undoubtedly contributed to this rise in antisemitism and while many may have a view on the ongoing conflict, the import of the conflict has no place in Australia and within current discourse. In the ongoing protest of the conflict, antisemitic slurs and libels have ever-increasingly been used to substantiate anti-Israel claims and rhetoric. Protestors, academia, media and community and political leaders continue to be provided an open forum to espouse these antisemitic slurs without consequence. The crossover between antizionism and antisemitism also must be considered when claims begin to erase Jewish history and deny rights to self-determination.

The frequency of anti-Israel protests have provided these antisemitic libels, tropes and slurs a consistent platform to enter public discourse. The protest of the Israeli government and its policies in itself is not antisemitic, as is the protest of any country. The framing of these protests, however, in perpetuating antisemitic discourse have undoubtedly contributed to motivating the recent physical and violent attacks on the Jewish community that we have seen. Protests that take place outside Jewish places of worship and communal centres further edge towards deliberate acts of antisemitism. The lived experience of the Jewish community and their safety concerns cannot be discounted in this regard.

We reiterate our absolute and united condemnation of the vile and targeted acts of antisemitism that have been carried out on the Jewish community. It is for the reasons outlined that antisemitism must be dealt with in a targeted strategic and holistic manner.

b) record levels of antisemitism on university campuses and in schools undermining student safety

We firmly believe that every child has the right to an education in NSW, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, culture or linguistic background. Every student must be appropriately supported to feel safe and secure as they engage in their learning throughout primary, secondary and tertiary education. The onus of this responsibility falls on schools, universities, the NSW Department of Education, TAFE NSW and other sector bodies to ensure all students are welcome in a safe and inclusive environment.

The rise in antisemitic incidents on university campuses and in our schools is a blight on the education system that NSW prides itself on. While school-based incidents continue to reach the media, antisemitic incidents continue to be significantly underreported, as a whole, across government and non-government schools. This has occurred for a variety of reasons including insufficient reporting channels, inadequate training and awareness programs and a persistent fear by students and parents.

ECC NSW strongly supports the increase of reporting channels available to Jewish students and the improvement of the structures and resources available to Jewish students to respond to school-based antisemitic incidents promptly and effectively. We recommend that schools, peak sector bodies and government implement strategies, including:

- Awareness programs on the reporting channels and resources available for Jewish students to respond to antisemitic incidents.
- Awareness campaigns for how students can access reporting channels, the *religious bullying hotline* and other in-community supports services.
- Professional development for teachers, principals and ancillary school staff in identifying and responding to antisemitic incidents in schools.
- Cultural competency training for teachers, principals and ancillary school staff to improve understanding of antisemitism and associated cultural sensitivities.
- Whole-of-school and communal programs focused on anti-racism and anti-religious education with a focus on antisemitism.

ECCNSW calls on the NSW Department of Education, as the largest school sector in NSW, to implement these strategies across government schools. The Department has a responsibility to keep students safe by providing reporting channels for antisemitic incidents and the necessary resources available to respond to these school-based incidents. ECC NSW recognises the positive work that the Department has delivered in its recent launch of its Anti-Racism Strategy, and the allocation of 8 new anti-Racism Education Support Officers to assist in meeting the increase in schools requesting support to respond to racism and religious intolerance, through its Multicultural Education Unit.

We also acknowledge the role of the Anti-Racism Contact Officers (ARCOs) in government schools that are designated school staff that support anti-racism education. These ARCOs have a role to play in supporting Jewish students but are finding it difficult to address and respond to the recent rise in school-based antisemitism. We strongly urge that the Department support the delivery of the ARCO's role with the implementation of the strategies mentioned including professional development, cultural competency training, awareness campaigns, antisemitism resources and specifically nuanced education programs.

c) the threat to social cohesion in New South Wales presented by antisemitism

ECC NSW's mission has historically been to actively promote multiculturalism in NSW, advocating for a culturally inclusive, cohesive and harmonious society. We see the basis of Australia's multiculturalism as a parting of the problems of the 'old world' and the building of confidence in this one. In recent times, we have found that this focus must broaden to a position of constant vigilance in defending our multiculturalism. Antisemitism, racism, bigotry and religious prejudice have continued to erode the foundations that Australian multiculturalism has been built on.

The recent rise of antisemitism has engulfed our communities across NSW creating an antisemitism crisis that continues to pose a risk to the lives of Jewish Australians. The vile and targeted acts of antisemitism have been intended to stoke fear and division in the community, impacting the ability for Jewish Australians to practice their faith and culture freely and in safety. The shift in public discourse espousing antisemitic rhetoric and libels has further isolated the Jewish community and increased the threat of upholding the social cohesion we have nurtured over the years through Australia's Multicultural Policy.

The politicisation of the Middle East conflict on both sides of the political spectrum has contributed the sowing of division between communities in NSW. The divisive nature of current political discourse has continued to demonise communities, impact inter-cultural community relationships, and erode social cohesion in NSW. The use of antisemitic libels in the ongoing protest of the conflict have contributed to demonising the Jewish community while protests outside of Jewish places of worship and communal centres further impact the community's ability to practice their faith.

ECC NSW and our members firmly believe that a threat to one group in our society is a threat to us all. Antisemitism is often considered a precursor to further divisiveness across society with flow on effects to other forms of racism, prejudicial hate and bigotry. To allow any form of hate speech or racism to continue unchecked only empowers those willing to destroy the foundation of our Australian multiculturalism. Social cohesion is a standard that all communities must shoulder equally.

An approach that promotes dialogue, understanding and the bridging of cultural gaps across communities is critical in building inter-community relations. Educational programs targeted at building understanding between communities are now more critical in dispelling stereotypes and prejudice. It is the responsibility of all communities to build cross-cultural competencies and promote values of tolerance and inclusivity towards the Jewish community as well as all other communities.

ECC NSW has a strategic relationship with the government agency, Multicultural NSW, through its Multicultural Peaks and Partnership Program. This Program has enabled and supported programs and services, and underscore the importance of addressing prejudices and divisions that emerge between communities in building a more cohesive society.

This is the time for communities to unite in absolute condemnation of the targeting of our Jewish community, in particular the innocent children that are part of the future of Australia's multicultural and multi-faith society.

d) how community safety might be enhanced, on behalf of the Jewish community of New South Wales

Any event or incident resulting in the harm of any persons that are carrying out religious or cultural activities in Australia would be an undeniable stain on our country's history. The vile and targeted acts of antisemitism that have been carried out on the community have taken many forms, impacting the physical, cultural and psychological safety of the NSW Jewish Community. While ECC NSW is not in a position to comment on specific physical safety measures, our response instead focuses on enhancements to the cultural and psychological safety of the Jewish community.

We strongly recommend that the NSW State Government maintains its momentum and continue to supply the NSW Police with the appropriate resources necessary to provide security to all Jewish cultural and religious centres for the foreseeable future.

We strongly support the NSW Government's strengthening of legislation for Hate Crimes, Hate Speech, and graffiti on places of worship as well as and the introduction of legislation to prevent protests outside places of worship. We endorse the expansion of aggravating circumstances associated with Hate Crimes and the increased penalties for graffiti on places of worship. The ban on protests outside places of worship is critical in ensuring that Jewish and other cultural communities can openly and safely practice their faith.

We stress the importance of the Hate Speech legislation that makes it a crime to incite racial hatred intentionally and publicly, including the incitement of violence. ECC NSW supports the broadening of the hate speech legislation to cover all communities while not undermining the effectiveness of the legislation in protecting the Jewish community.

We support targeted programs focused on the deradicalisation of youth as we fight to defend the multiculturalism for future generations. The radicalisation of youth across our NSW communities including the far-right have been of growing concern for some time. The current rise in antisemitism and the shift in public discourse has likely further empowered these groups to become more radicalised, posing an increasingly significant threat to the Jewish community and other cultural communities. Notably, youth have been involved in some of the antisemitic incidents occurring across our state.

We support the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism at all levels of government. The IHRA definition should be the standard in which NSW government entities, services and sectors appropriately identify and respond to incidents of antisemitism.

We support the implementation of educational programs and campaigns that focus on bridging the divide between the Jewish community and other communities, while providing targeted anti-racism and anti-religious education. The increase in cultural exchanges between communities can build mutual appreciation for cultures while dispelling prejudice and bigotry. The improvement of cultural competency across communities towards Judaism, the Jewish people, Jewish history and antisemitism is critical in enhancing the safety of the Jewish community in the long term and in minimising misinformation that negatively impacts all levels of community.

ECC NSW, as the peak body representing NSW multicultural communities, continues to stand shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with our NSW Jewish community during this difficult time. We will continue to collaborate with and offer our support to the Jewish community as we would any other community as we continue to defend our multicultural society.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission and for your commitment to building a more cohesive and inclusive society.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Doukas OAM

Chair, Ethnic Communities Council of NSW