

Statement – Please accept as an official enquiry document:

My name is Joseph Symon, 97 years old and I survived the Holocaust – most of my family did not survive, as did the families of millions of Jewish people across Europe. I am Australian but I was born in Hungary which is where my experience of the Holocaust occurred. At 19 years of age I listened to forbidden radio stations such as the Voice of America and heard details of concentration camps and gas chambers – I became determined to evade the Germans and sabotage their actions at all costs – I escaped from a forced Labour Camp that I was put in by the Hungarians and I joined the Hungarian Underground and became involved in the fight against the Nazis. My purpose in the underground was to save lives, help people, slow down the German war machine as much as possible, and if necessary, fight. I sabotaged German roundups, smuggled Jews out of the Ghetto and organised food for starving Jewish children in hiding.

The horrors I witnessed and what it took to survive will never leave me, but I am one of the fortunate ones who was able to move forward after such horrors to have 2 children, 5 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren and a happy life in Australia. I am here today before you, asking you to make the use of the Swastika and other Nazi symbols illegal, criminalising their display.

I speak today not only on my own behalf but as the voice of my fellow Holocaust survivors past and present, their children, grandchildren and great children who are the legacy holders of our stories and memories. My commitment is to spread the message about the danger of hatred, the importance of knowledge and persuading the next generation to be better human beings.

I have over the years worked with B’Nai Brith, The Sydney Jewish Museum and Courage to Care to represent Holocaust survivors, tell the stories of the Shoah and its cost in human lives and generations lost and help to create awareness, understanding, challenge attitudes and behaviours and to do whatever I can to mitigate hatred, intolerance and discrimination.

The swastika is an ancient humankind symbol originally reflective of good luck and auspiciousness. Under Hitler and the Nazi regime it became the most recognisable symbol of Nazi propaganda in Hitler’s final solution to kill all Jews in Europe. What does the swastika, the SS insignia and all things connected with the Nazi regime mean to me – The swastika is a very vivid reminder of hatred, senseless loss of life of millions of people, Jewish and non-Jewish and the murder of my father. When I see a swastika in Australia it brings forward all the cruelty that people lived through and it also helps the extreme right wing and neo-Nazi’s push their agenda today to incite hatred against anything that is different to them.

To most in the wider Australian community they symbolise similar things, but to others who choose to abuse it today and use it to their advantage the effect is dangerous. Today it is being used by some for the same sick rationale used by the Nazis (White Supremist Movement who still “believe that the white race is inherently superior to other races”) and by others to advance a political agenda like BDS, Covid, Anti Vax etc. These people who intentionally choose these symbols have an objective that is negative and aimed at triggering behaviour that is not reflective of the Australian values and way of life. The rest of us don’t always get it right but when we continue to listen, learn, challenge our own biases and attitudes we are working to build a better world for ourselves and future generations.

Having the use of Nazi symbols legal, in my view inhibits the work of communities and the government to create and maintain an inclusive society that is underpinned by tolerance and harmony. It inhibits the fight against racism, bullying, anti-Semitism, discrimination and social injustice.