

Opening statement of  
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General Secretary,  
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Council

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Universities are fundamentally institutions of learning, and they must be safe, respectful spaces for all students to do so. This being said, they are also places of political engagement and protest, where students should be free to express dissent against governments and institutions, provided such expression does not infringe upon the rights or safety of others.

Striking that balance is essential. Yet recently, it has at times broken down.

Jewish students across the board have reported feeling targeted or isolated, often feeling like they are being held collectively responsible for the actions of the Israeli government. At UNSW, during a recent Student General Meeting, Jewish students attempting to speak were booed, jeered, and told to "Go back to Europe."

More broadly, we are seeing increasing hostility towards Jewish Australians with Zionist beliefs. Just a few days ago a University of Sydney academic published a tweet calling for Zionists to be 'executed like we executed Nazis'," This rhetoric alienates Jewish students, many of whom who see zionism as a core aspect of their Jewish identity.

At the aforementioned UNSW Student General Meeting, a Jewish, pro-Palestinian academic stated, "Jews should feel uncomfortable, it's our duty to make them uncomfortable," and was met with applause. Comments like these have real and serious negative consequences for students just trying to participate in campus life.

To be clear, I believe that criticism of the Israeli government is not antisemitic. Israel is subject to significant international scrutiny, including proceedings at the International Court of Justice and violations of international law, and students must retain the right to protest and to speak out on these matters and the horrific scenes we see from the Middle East. The Israeli government's actions in Gaza have resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians, including women and children. These realities understandably provoke strong emotions and calls for justice. But what is crucial here is that this political activism must not come at the expense of Jewish students' safety, inclusion, or dignity.

UNSW does have reporting and support mechanisms in place for students who experience discrimination. However, more must be done to ensure students are aware that these processes exist and that they are accessible, trusted, and responsive to incidents of antisemitism when they occur. Staff and students must also be better supported in recognising when political discourse crosses into harmful or exclusionary conduct. This could be achieved through antisemitism training for student leaders and staff, which I believe UNSW is rolling out soon.