Dear Committee,

Once again we wish to thank the committee for the invitation to speak at the Inquiry's public hearings and for making the time to write to us for supplementary questions. We have set out below responses to the two questions you have provided to us.

(1) Your submission states that you feel safe attending pro-Palestine rallies. Is it possible your personal comfort does not reflect the lived reality of Jewish schoolchildren or Holocaust survivors?

We do not deny that some may experience discomfort watching pro-Palestine rallies but we contend that this discomfort is not based in any way on anti-Jewish rhetoric or actions at said rallies.

Our members, who are parents to Jewish schoolchildren, and descendants of Holocaust survivors, attend the rallies regularly and consistently report feeling safe. We contend that their lived reality is no less important than any other person.

No doubt, the experiences of our members and many other non-Zionist Jews, contrasts with the reactions of others from the Jewish community, largely due to the incorrect conflation of criticism of Israel (which is loudly expressed at the rallies), with a perceived implicit negativity towards Jews for being Jews (i.e. antisemitism), which does not occur at the rallies.

There is no mystery for this incorrect conflation, as defenders of the Israeli government and Zionism frequently seek to tie Israel to all Jewish people, and all Jewish people to it. As the submissions to this inquiry demonstrate, concern about antisemitism is broadly felt in the Australian community, and it is a concern we share. That includes a concern that responses to antisemitism must be targeted at real instances of it, not simply perceptions.

Unfortunately, the actions and messaging of the NSW State Government during the recent spate of graffiti and arson attacks against the Jewish community further stoked unfounded fears about the pro-Palestine movement, by erroneously tying these criminal acts to the pro-Palestine protest movement and invoking them as cause for restricting protest rights.

We submit that there is no evidence that the Jewish people are the subject of any protest chants, posters or other visible or audible signals of critique at the protests. This does not mean the discomfort that some Jews might experience is not genuinely felt, it simply means it is not based on the actions of pro Palestine protesters or organisers.

Criticism of Israel's actions leads to emotional responses from many in the community, as they incorrectly view this as antisemitic and understandably this leads to fear. Many in the community also fear that criticism of Israel will then lead to criticism of Jews. However, the organisers of the pro-Palestine movement have done an excellent job of focussing the discourse in the movement on Israel, where it belongs, and regularly including Jewish voices as speakers in forums and at the rallies. In such ways, the organised pro-Palestine movement has likely prevented antisemitism, rather than encouraged it.

We welcome this Inquiry as it furthers this crucial point of clearly delineating between antisemitism and criticism of Israel, which we again reiterate, are not one and the same.

(2) How do you reconcile your experience with the recent incident at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) where, during a student-led protest on 26/03/25 one of the speakers stated that "I agree with Randa when she says Jews in particular should feel uncomfortable, and it's our duty to make them uncomfortable, and that includes the fellow over there" before pointing directly at a student wearing an Israeli flag?

Thank you for this important question. Important, because it demonstrates a common misconception that runs through this debate — the difference between comfort and safety. The first Supplementary Question was about safety, and none of us have ever felt unsafe at the pro-Palestine rallies, nor have we witnessed anything that threatens anyone's safety from participants or organisers. The second question, however, is about comfort, which is fundamentally not the same thing.

Many of us have felt uncomfortable at the pro-Palestine rallies. Whether because it caused us anguish to think about the atrocities being carried out by a country which is home to our relatives or friends, or whether because we felt powerless due to the silence of our own government in the face of such suffering, or whether it was the deep shame we felt that our own Jewish community organisations continue to support a war that many experts (including Jewish and Israeli scholars) have now said constitutes genocide. All of these are incredibly discomfiting feelings; they have nothing to do with safety.

We, as Jewish people, should feel uncomfortable about what is happening in Gaza (and the West Bank). We should all feel uncomfortable about it as human beings, firstly, and also as Australian citizens whose leaders continue to take insufficient action whilst innocent civilians are shot, bombed and starved. But we should also feel uncomfortable as Jews because Israel claims to be acting on our behalf, and because many of us have personal and communal ties to the State of Israel, and because all of us are connected in ways small and large to the wider Jewish community in Australia whose established leadership has abdicated Jewish tradition and ethics by continuing to support and defend a military campaign and policy which, in our view, has become genocidal.

Most of us are also descendants of Holocaust survivors — it is more than uncomfortable, it is deeply painful, to see the memory and lessons of that horror that they survived, but that many of our other relatives did not, being forgotten, for the commitment of "Never Again" to be betrayed, not least by those who should be its fiercest keepers.

In addition to the above we note separately that the politics behind wearing an Israeli flag at this time, during the ongoing genocide by Israel in Gaza and the ongoing violent dispossession of Palestinian land and homes by settlers and the military in the West Bank, is an action that indicates that the person wearing this flag, whether Jewish or Israeli or neither, supports these actions. Wearing the Israeli flag is an action that most reasonable people would interpret as supporting the grave violations of international law by Israel. It is our view that people publicly supporting Israel's actions at this time should feel uncomfortable and reflect on what they are supporting.

All of us should be safe to express our political opinions, that is a fundamental human right. That includes the role of the activist to break the silence and discomfort the comfortable.

As it is often said, to be Jewish is to question and the ancient meaning of Israel means 'to wrestle with god'.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony and we look forward to observing the progress of your inquiry.

Sincerely,
Hayim Dar
Jewish Voices of Inner Sydney