

## INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 6 April 2025

---

Partially  
Confidential

TOR a.

Although it has particular characteristics, antisemitism, like other forms of discrimination, prejudice and racism, is a widespread, often unconscious and unexamined societal problem sadly prevalent to some degree in Australia as it is around the world. At the various levels of government, Australia has developed ways to reduce or prevent it, via the legal system, policy and through education and community programs, with patchy but generally satisfactory success. As a societal problem, government will likely only ever be part of the solution.

Like other forms of discrimination, prejudice and racism, the expression of antisemitism is emboldened or encouraged by local, national and international events; manipulative political and media discourse and other social forces. Antisemitism can be more and less severe in its consequences for the society, groups and individuals.

In my view the most important thing to say to this inquiry is this: Since October 2023 antisemitism in Australia has been thoroughly confused with taking sides regarding Israel and the Palestinians. This is the main reason antisemitism has stayed so high on the agenda for the past 17 months, and the main reason for this inquiry.

The confusion has spread via political parties, religious and community leaders, mass media, social media and individuals—sometimes intentionally, eg for political point-scoring or to influence particular populations; and sometimes because of individuals' and groups' historical experiences, prejudices and feelings eg of vulnerability or fear.

Also, opposition to Israel can be very passionate and angry. When a group believes that there is the intent to destroy them as a nation, not only kill their people and flatten their infrastructure, as many Palestinians do—not unreasonably, their expression may not be especially calm or measured. And when they believe that their oppressors are successfully claiming victim status and have official support and sympathy, as Palestinians perceive to be the case with Israel and Australian governments, then again, “siding against Israel” can have a lot of energy behind it.

Now we also have Jews, myself included, who through our traumatic history and understanding of the world are hair-trigger sensitive to any hint of antisemitism. And we've imbibed throughout our lives a very strong narrative about Israel and what it means for the Jewish people. So is it any wonder that our hearts race when we hear accusations of genocide, or that we are horrified when Israel is decried as a supremacist, racist and illegitimate country.

However, our reactions do NOT make the accusations antisemitic, whether or not they are true, exaggerated, fair, unfair etc.

The confusion has ongoing serious negative consequences—for Palestinians, for Jews and for Australian society and democratic rights.

In Australia, the matter of taking sides regarding Israel and the Palestinians is about world politics, human rights, morality, the histories of two peoples—including in Australia, traditional loyalties of various kinds, political ideology and philosophy and many other things.

But there's another factor: we know that advocates and lobbyists in every sphere regularly use whatever is at their disposal to sell what they're selling. So in the case of Israel advocacy, although the dispute is actually about land, power, history, economics, international interests and influence, and other matters, with very little actually to do with a racial or religious prejudice against Israel or its Jewish supporters, the advocates and lobbyists have realised the value of focusing on the red herring of antisemitism. Nobody defends antisemitism anymore as an ideology, or wants to be called antisemitic, so effectively associating Palestine advocacy with antisemitism turns it into a horrible racist movement—where none of those other factors matter.

To put it another way, unsurprisingly, many advocates for Israel use a slight of hand to portray any opposition as antisemitic (ie wrong and evil), through faulty logic: most Jews take the side of Israel, therefore opposing Israel's actions against the Palestinians means opposing most Jews. Opposing most Jews means you're antisemitic, therefore opposing Israel's actions against the Palestinians is antisemitic.

Very frustrating and infuriating for Palestinians and their advocates, who, less successfully although perhaps with more cause, have belatedly tried to enlist accusations of anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia to shore up the justice of their own side.

So what is the context of "the increasing prevalence and severity of antisemitic incidents across NSW"?

1. We have the reality of horrific killing and destruction in the Middle East, most of it by Israel against Palestinians.
2. We have a phoney politically-motivated discourse from community and political groups and media that sees antisemitism in every Free Palestine badge.
3. We have many people—Jews and others— who are completely convinced by the conflation of antisemitism with Palestine advocacy that accords with their emotional reactions and beliefs about Israel, Jews and Palestinians.

4. We have an often furious reaction by Palestine advocates against this discourse and its ability to subvert and discredit their messages about what is happening in Gaza and the West Bank.

5. We have an actual documented increase in, or increased expression of, antisemitism in Australia.

6. We have an actual documented increase in, or increased expression of, anti-Palestinian prejudice and Islamophobia.

So these are major causes of increasing “antisemitism” in my view: calling something antisemitic because of how it makes many members of the Jewish community feel, and the outcry over Israel’s killing and destruction in Gaza, the West Bank and elsewhere. It is very difficult to entangle the threads, and is in the interests of various groups, especially pro-Israel groups, to keep them tangled.

Recommendation:

Do NOT emulate the USA in bringing the controversial and problematic IHRA definition of antisemitism into legislation use by government organisations. Its flaws are serious and have been proven elsewhere. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2025/mar/23/antisemitism-redefinition-jewish-safety-christian-nationalism-democracy>

Recommendation:

Avoid over-policing perceived antisemitism as a stand-alone phenomenon. Policies and solutions need to be seen principally as part of inclusive and transparent approaches to racism, inter-communal tensions and prejudice more generally or the risk will be that community divisions will be exacerbated.

Recommendation:

Non-Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews and Jewish groups are part of the Jewish community and the broader community, and need to be included in relevant considerations and consultations.

Recommendation:

Develop and fund intercultural and inter-community dialogue and dialogue skills training at every level to foster mutual understanding and social cohesion.

TOR b.

I am very worried by the definition of antisemitism recently developed by the G8 universities and adopted more generally. Among other concerns, it presumes to generalise about what is core to Jewish identity—something I deeply resent and object to as a Jew. Jewish history belies such a facile statement as “for most, but not all Jewish Australians, Zionism is a core part of their Jewish identity.”

As has been pointed out by many others I’m sure, worse than the presumption and oversimplification is the likelihood such a statement will be used to stifle debate. For example “Criticism of Israel can be antisemitic . . . when it calls for the elimination of the State of Israel . . .” The legitimacy of all states, or of particular states, is frequently debated, and why should it not be? In discussing Israel-Palestine, proposals for confederation, one-state, two-states etc abound. This is especially so now where it is clear that the current situation: the state of Israel plus its violently and militarily occupied Palestinian territories—has led to over 50,000 deaths in the past 18 months alone. Is it because of antisemitism that some Palestinians call for the elimination of 76-year-old Israel at such a time, and considering that a Palestinian state does not yet exist? Or rather is it because of suffering and injustice caused by that state?

Nevertheless I accept that many Jewish students find the campus experience very uncomfortable in the presence of the strong anti-Zionist movement, and that this movement sometimes harbours antisemitism. Finding a balance between the right to free speech and the right to freedom from intimidation and harassment is difficult and important, and must be the ongoing work of the universities themselves as well as all affected communities. The encouragement of genuine dialogue, with sensible guardrails, is particularly important in the university setting—as is real and frequent encouragement of empathy for “the other” by all leaders in every setting.

TOR c.

We would have greater inter-community understanding if far more of the population attended public schools and used public transport and other public spaces and services.

We also need far greater awareness by politicians and community leaders of the consequences of focusing on one group or one incident out of context. For example, the Premier’s decision to light the sails of the Opera House in blue and white following Oct. 7 2023, showed absolutely no attention to social cohesion, and was monumentally insensitive to the context for many Palestinian Australians for whom Israel is the hated and feared oppressor. The reaction was fierce and completely avoidable. That decision was clearly made without adequate consultation. I can think of no good reason for any flags except Australian and Aboriginal flags to be flown or reproduced on public buildings. This could be a state policy.

I refer the committee to this excellent discussion of “social cohesion” and ask with its author if we, or this inquiry, are asking the right questions?  
<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/andrew-jakubowicz-social-cohesion-history-meaning-and-future/105092876>

Recommendation:

Ensure any public statements or gestures by the NSW government concerning events in the Middle East or community and religious groups in Australia are balanced and sensitive. It is hard to overstate the negative effect of the Israel solidarity gesture using the Opera House after the October 7 attacks.

Recommendation:

Increase and develop programs that foster inter-community contact in and between schools.

TOR d.

A broad approach to community safety is most important, which is less focused on policing and security and far more focused on a society where there is equality and maximum interaction between diverse individuals and groups. Australia has been a relatively safe place for most communities because of a general experience and expectation of justice, equality and rule of law. These are most important to enhance and maintain, while avoiding over-legislating and over-policing.