

## **INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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**To the NSW Parliamentary Committee to examine Anti-Semitism in New South Wales,**

I am writing this submission on my behalf. For the purposes of this response, I make an introduction, refer to the terms of reference and make a closing statement.

### **Introduction:**

My name is Lynn Townsend. I am a registered medical practitioner in Australia and am a specialist Obstetrician and Gynaecologist (O&G). In addition, I have sub-specialist qualification in O&G Ultrasound and am an executive partner and doctor in a private tertiary O&G Ultrasound Clinic. Lastly, I am also a Lecturer at the University of New South Wales in the discipline of Womens' Health, School of Clinical Medicine, in the Faculty of Medicine. I qualified as a medical practitioner in 2001 and have been practicing as a specialist O&G since 2013.

I identify as a Jewish woman and am known to my broader circles as being of Jewish faith. All 4 of my grandparents were born in Lithuania and fled the pogroms of the 1920s to South Africa where I was born. Extended members of the family fled to other countries. The remainder of my family who survived the pogroms were slaughtered by the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s. My nuclear family immigrated to Australia in 1986 to flee the Apartheid regime of South Africa where my mother was known as a student protester. They did not feel that South Africa was a safe place for Jews, and indeed the political views of the country were not in keeping with our family values of equality. I have family in Israel, South Africa, USA, Canada, New Zealand and Russia. My school education was at a Jewish Day School (Masada College) and I attended UNSW for undergraduate studies and then Sydney University for my medical degree. My husband's family is Jewish on his maternal line and can trace to living in Australia from England and Russia from at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century. My husband was unaware of his Jewish ancestry until age 36 years. His maternal grandparents were married in the Great Synagogue in Sydney so he was able to prove his Jewish heritage and we were married by Rabbi David Freedman at the Synagogue Kehillat Masada in 2004. We have 3 daughters.

Up until October 2023, I had rarely experienced anti-Semitism, either personally or at work. There were, of course, incidents where swastikas were graffitied on our school property and the occasional verbal abuse levelled at our school at community and sporting events. Over time, we watched as our school changed the metal mesh fences to permanent concrete structures and the gates to a sentry entrance. We watched as our Synagogues employed guards who quizzed us about our intention to attend services if we were not known to them as being Synagogue members. When my children started at a Jewish school, there was a guard with a firearm. This was not a cause for alarm, because it happened slowly. We still hung to Thomas Kenneally's idea that of all the Western cultures in the world, Australia is the least anti-Semitic of them all.

All of this changed for me personally in October 2023. The events were a daze. We could not fathom what had happened in Israel. The media reports were unclear. Over time, there was dizzying clarity. Young people at a Peace Music Festival raped, slaughtered and kidnapped. Innocent Kibbutzniks woken from sleep to murder, firebombing, people indiscriminately killed or kidnapped. Two beautiful orange haired babies and their mother taken hostage. Older Jews gunned down at bus stations. We were bewildered, lost. How could this happen? For months after I had nightmares about the atrocities the Hamas barbarians has committed and **documented with their body cameras**: babies put into ovens, children watching their parents being killed, families killed alive in burning houses and the terrible anxiety of

hostages in freezing tunnels, many of them young women, as my Australian daughters slept in warm beds.

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In 2023, as a medical practitioner, we had just had experienced the most challenging time of our careers with the COVID pandemic. Luckily I belonged to a group of female medical practitioners online via a Facebook group: Medical Mums and Mum to Be (MM). This group has a number of off-shoot groups and served as support, information sharing and general light-hearted camaraderie. MM had 15 000 participants, all of which were required to have AHPRA or NZMC (New Zealand Medical Council) registration. The MMs had previously organised 3 national conferences, which I had participated and spoken. We supported medical mums who were authors, artists, applauding successes and commiserating failures. We supported charities and raised \$120000 which we sent to Médecins Sans Frontieres during the Syrian crisis of 2018.

So on 9 October 2023 when I wrote a post (in the Grumpy MM offshoot group) surprised that no-one had reached out to the “Jewish and Zionist members of the group” for some support, I received a barrage of anti-Semitic abuse disguised as anti-Israel rhetoric. This continued unabated since. I received a vexatious (and subsequently exonerated) complaint from the Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC) that my original post on 9 October was “culturally unsafe” to the Palestinian members of the group. Keep in mind, the post was made even before the Israel Defence Force (IDF) had entered Gaza.

Since that time, the Jewish members of MM have been targeted with vile anti-Semitic comments. We have been told that we are “ethno-supremacists”, “baby killers” and that Zionism is a “mental health condition”. We have been told that we are “complicit in murder”. We are told that “pro-Palestinian voices are censored and pro-Zionist voices are amplified” whilst there has been silencing of Jewish voices in the group with individuals blocked from posts which use the words “Jew”, “Israel”, “Palestine”, “Gaza”, “Muslim” etc. We have been told that Hamas is “not at core an Islamist extremist jihadi group but a resistance movement”. We are referred to with derision as “Zios”. Many tried to justify their comments saying that they were not anti-Semitic, just anti-Israel, without understanding that for the overwhelming majority of Jews, Israel is an integral part of our Judaism and is viewed as our indigenous homeland.

**These are doctors in public and private hospitals and consulting rooms in New South Wales and across Australia and New Zealand.**

It was no surprise to me that on Wednesday, 12 February 2025, two NSW health practitioners appeared in a social media post threatening to refuse care and to kill Israeli patients. Suddenly, in the context of increased anti-Semitic violence on Sydney’s streets, NSW politicians condemned these nurses and placated the Jewish community with promises that anti-Semitism would be dealt with appropriately. I had patients ringing my rooms to express concern that they and their newborns were at risk from nefarious health practitioners when they were in hospital during childbirth. Across Sydney, medical facilities and the Australian Medical Association (AMA) put out media releases to condemn these nurses and to reassure their Jewish patients that they were safe.

But the doctors (and presumably other health practitioners) who harboured anti-Semitic views were unchanged. They continued to make posts on Facebook and other social media outlets about the evils of Israel and by extension, Judaism. It was just hidden from the media, and hidden from the Jews who were blocked from the comments.

When a formal letter expressing concerns about anti-Semitism was sent to the federal health minister by a Jewish Victorian colleague of mine in November 2023, the letter was ignored. It took a federal Senate committee meeting for health in late February 2025 before the letter was acknowledged by the federal health minister. My hope is that our voices are heard and acknowledged and that our concerns are acted on by this committee assessing our submissions.

**My submission to the NSW Parliament is thus as follows:**

The cause for increased prevalence and severity of antisemitic incidents:

1. Many people just harbour Jew hate. This hate is as old as humanity; it is the blood-libel, the Dreyfus affair, the Nazi Holocaust and now the Israel-Palestine war. Anti-Semitism is the oldest and now most acceptable form of racism. Jews are not homogeneously European. We are white, brown and black, and our Diaspora is worldwide.
2. Jews are seen as the outsiders, the killers of Christ. We are forever a trope: the greedy money lender, the large nosed creep, the weird beard-wearing men chanting in an unintelligible language.
3. We have been targeted by the political Left and in particular, the Greens political party, who view Jews and Zionists with moral outrage. The cognitive dissonance of the Left, be it "Queers for Palestine" or the kaffieyot wearing university students and lecturers heckling visiting Israeli academics on university campuses clearly illustrates this targeting. One university in NSW even offered a safe room for Jews on campus after anti-Semitic targeting. Why on earth do we need a safe room?
4. The inability of people to separate the politics of Israel from her right to existence occurs as a consequence of not understanding that the existence of Israel is fundamental to the Jewish faith. When we marry in the Jewish ritual, we break a glass to remember Jerusalem. We say "next year in Jerusalem" at the Passover meal. We face Israel when we pray. We recite the Amidah, the holiest prayer in our services where we say "May our eyes behold Your return to Zion in mercy" and "The one who makes peace in the heights, may They make peace for us and for all Israel". Jews cannot be separated from Israel. Lack of understanding of this principle makes it easy for people to hate Jews when they disagree with Israel's right to existence.
5. When our political elite make anti-Semitic statements, it encourages and validates the activities of those who harbour these underlying mistrusts of Jewish people. The choice of sending Senator Penny Wong to an Auschwitz commemoration was particularly hurtful to Jewish people as she has been one of the least supportive political leaders in Australia towards Jews and Israel.

#### The threat to social cohesion in NSW:

1. I have found the majority of people directly in my circles have been incredibly supportive of Jews and Israel. They are largely comprised of those of Christian faith, Hindu Indians and politically Right leaning individuals. They recognise that as the only true Middle Eastern democracy, Israel's right to existence must be protected.
2. The "woke" Left think that Israel is a rogue state and that it should be destroyed with the Arab population reinstated as the natural citizens. They cannot articulate what would happen to the 7 million Jewish inhabitants following the destruction of the Jewish state. Slogans like "From the river to the sea" calls for Jewish genocide in Israel.
3. This results in episodes like we saw on the steps of the Sydney Opera House where people were calling for "death to the Jews" and "gas the Jews". Gaslighting by the NSW Police Force suggested that the protestors were saying "where are the Jews?" which undermines the severity of this event. How can we tolerate a show of hatred on the steps of our most important NSW landmark? Surely whoever allowed that protest and the NSW Police who allowed those racist comments are equally responsible for the racist trauma that we directly experienced.
4. Weekly protests which disrupt activities in the centre of Sydney's CBD equally destroy social cohesion. This is particularly the case when jihadi flags are used. These flags call for the end of Western democracy. Jews are just the starting point.

#### How community safety can be enhanced:

1. Government already assist with necessary financial aid to the Jewish community for safety infrastructure.
2. This is not a money issue; it is an ideological issue. Governments need to take a strong stance on ideological anti-Semitism. One such example may be proactively and aggressively prosecuting hate speech, including the ministers of other religions who preach anti-Semitic rhetoric at their pulpit. There are multiple examples recorded on social media in recent times. I have yet to hear a Rabbi or other Jewish leader express happiness at the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza. This is unlike parts of Sydney where sweets were distributed and fireworks lit to celebrate the atrocities of 7 October.
3. I would encourage the adoption of the international recognised definition of anti-Semitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Appliance (IHRA) and mandating this definition in all

government sponsored entities (including universities). This would be a show of good faith and an excellent place to start: <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>

Doxxing and privacy issues:

1. There are already strong laws regarding doxxing. This was required following doxxing of Jewish creatives which directly harmed their earning capacity.
2. Exposing people who use hate speech is not doxxing.
3. It is the right of people who are concerned about retribution to withhold their personal details when appropriately referring hate speech to registrant organisations (such as doctors to AHPRA). Strong privacy laws within the registrant organisations is paramount to protect whistleblowers.

Sydney Jewish Museum:

1. Certainly the role of the Sydney Jewish Museum is important in Holocaust education, however Jewish identity is more than Holocaust remembrance. There are many alternative organisations which can teach our broader community about Jewish people and Israel, for example, the Zionist Federation of Australia and StandWithUs.
2. Reducing anti-Semitism to just Holocaust education is simplistic and reactive. It does nothing to alter the tropes.

### **Conclusion:**

Being Jewish gives me the right to say what is and what isn't anti-Semitic, without being "Jewsplained". I have been personally targeted by other doctors for being Jewish and being a Zionist. My community has experienced anti-Semitic activity on the streets of Sydney and with the attempted firebombing of my family's Synagogue. There is a deep lack of understanding that Jewish identity and Zionism are synonymous concepts. Zionism is a political and societal recognition of the long standing desire for Jews to return to and support our indigenous homeland. We recognise the historical, archaeological and genealogical presence of Jews within the region contained by Israel for millennia. One cannot be anti-Zionist without being anti-Semitic. One can disagree with the political landscape of Israel, and the protests on the streets in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem illustrate that not all Israelis agree with their democratically elected political leaders. But being anti-Israel is fundamentally being anti-Jewish. Yes there are a small number of Jews who are anti-Israel, but, and I cannot stress this enough, they are a tiny minority and do not reflect the majority feelings of Jews in Australia and around the world.

I call on the NSW Parliament to recognise that anti-Semitism is prevalent even in professional groups and urge you to take immediate and robust actions, like I have suggested above. Anti-Semitism is not just a relic of the past but a current and pervasive issue that affects individuals in all walks of life with aggression and exclusion.

Because Jews are often the first targets for racism, it is crucial that we foster a culture of vigilance and zero tolerance towards anti-Semitism. Educational programs and proactive measures must be implemented within all professional organisations to address and combat this deep-seated prejudice. By doing so, we can create a safer, more inclusive environment for everyone, ensuring that no one is subjected to hatred and discrimination based on their identity.

Collectively, we must recognise the seriousness of anti-Semitism, commit to continuous education, and support those who stand against it. It is only through such unified efforts that we can hope to eradicate this pervasive issue from our society.

**You, NSW Parliamentary Committee, have been charged with the responsibility of listening to our voices, and now you have the responsibility to act on them.**

Dr Lynn Townsend  
Sydney, NSW