

INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Sydney University Muslim Students' Association

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Official Submission to the Antisemitism in New South Wales Inquiry

To whom this may concern,

The **Sydney University Muslim Students' Association (SUMSA)** welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the 'Antisemitism in New South Wales' inquiry conducted by the NSW Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No. 5.

SUMSA's submission will primarily address section b) of the inquiry's Terms of Reference – 'record levels of antisemitism on university campuses and in schools undermining students safety'. As a prominent student society belonging to The University of Sydney for over 50 years, SUMSA has a keen insight into the multifaceted nature of student life and culture on campus.

Perhaps more relevantly for the purposes of the inquiry, SUMSA has been an active voice and organising body on campus since October 7th 2023, driving various actions protesting the ongoing genocide prosecuted by the Israeli state. Most prominent of these actions is SUMSA's key role in organising the encampment movement on The University of Sydney's Camperdown campus. The encampment went for 55 days and was the longest standing encampment on University grounds within all of Australia.

From its inception, the encampment drew strong criticism for being antisemitic, which this submission will seek to address. It should also be noted that the encampment ended on June 22nd 2024, following an amicable agreement between SUMSA and the Vice Chancellor's office.

Conflation between anti-semitism and criticism of Israel

SUMSA's experience in the encampment was a prime example of how criticisms of the state of Israel were continually misconstrued as instances of anti-semitism, and subsequently how these accusations of anti-semitism were used to securitise and fundamentally delegitimise the protest movement.

The encampment began on the 29th of April, 2024, following a wave of similar encampments throughout Universities in the United States of America, Canada, the UK and other countries. Like other encampments, the encampment at The University of Sydney was a peaceful movement, organised by a broad coalition of student groups on campus and with a set of simple yet pressing demands.

SUMSA's demands are still available on its social media platforms, where it first posted them. In its statement, SUMSA strongly condemned *"Israel's murderous genocide in Gaza, which has killed over 35,000 Palestinians to date"* (note that this was the death toll when the encampment started; the death toll is now estimated to be 48,405 with 111,835 reported injuries).¹ SUMSA's demands of The University, were, in full:²

1. *DISCLOSE and publish a review of any and all financial investments in Israel and companies that profit from the ongoing genocide in Gaza, and the occupation of Palestine more broadly, including of its \$4 billion endowment fund.*
2. *DIVEST from all such investments, and cut ties with global weapons companies that supply and arm the ongoing genocide in Gaza, including Thales Australia, Raytheon, Safran and Lockheed Martin.*
3. *BOYCOTT and suspend all partnerships with Israeli universities with clear links to the IDF, such as Tel Aviv University, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Technion Institute of Technology and Bezalel Academy of Art & Design and abolish the 'OLES2155: Experience Israel' unit of study.*
4. *DENOUNCE Israel's violations of international law and call for an immediate ceasefire in line with the ICJ ruling and in the same spirit as the University's 'Message of support on the conflict in Ukraine' and the Law School's 'statement on Russia's violations of international law in Ukraine' in 2022.*
5. *INVEST in international scholarships for Gazan students to facilitate their arrival and to offer asylum to Gazan and Palestinian academics in the same way that Ukrainians have been supported through the Scholars at Risk program. "*

We'd like to note that nowhere in the demands, neither in the statement as a whole, was there any mention or critique of Jewish students, Jewish identity or Jewishness. The statement was wholly concerned with the actions of a geopolitical actor, the state of Israel, which at this stage was standing accused of 'plausible genocide' by the International Court of Justice.

This conflation between criticism of Israel and antisemitism was carried through in the External Review Report commissioned by The University of Sydney Senate (written by Bruce Hodgkinson, November 2024). The report describes various examples of antisemitic behaviours, including a particular note on students engaged in the "the removal of Israeli flags". It is concerning to SUMSA, as it should be to any member of the University body, that within a week of the report being published, the University of Sydney Senate swiftly *"resolved to accept in principle the recommendations of the Hodgkinson External Review Report"*³ - a report operating on the proviso that critique of the Israeli state (represented by the Israeli flag in this instance) is an example of antisemitism.

The report contained a detailed discussion on a commonly used chant in the global pro-Palestinian protest movement, *'from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.'* Bruce Hodgkinson's report quotes Rabbi Jacobs who argues that *"most Jews hear this slogan as a call to expel Jews from Israel ... therefore it is advisable for anyone who does not want to be viewed as antisemitic to avoid this phrase or use it only when there is an opportunity to clarify their*

¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 4 March 2025 (<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/reported-impact-snapshot-gaza-strip-4-march-2025>)

² Sydney Muslim Students Association - our demands (https://www.instagram.com/p/C6xoeJnSbYz/?hl=en&img_index=1)

³ University receives Hodgkinson External Review report (<https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2024/11/27/university-receives-hodgkinson-external-review-report.html>)

meaning". The report goes on to recommend that the use of this phrase should be accompanied by an explanation of the context and intention of the phrase.

The public contest around this phrase is another example of the potential for antisemitism to be weaponised to regulate and silence free protest. On its apparent meaning, the slogan is a freedom call - '*Palestine will be free*'; it seeks justice, equality and freedom for a people that have undergone a brutal occupation for the last 75 years. No where in the phrase is there a call to expel Jews. In the campus context more specifically (where the recommendations may apply), no SUMSA representative, organiser or even protestor has ever indicated such a view alongside the slogan, yet campus activism is policed on the assumption that it is a reasonable meaning to draw.

Selective concern and a silence on Islamophobia

While SUMSA does not seek to make it a focus of its submission, it notes that instances of Islamophobia have starkly risen since October 7th, both on and off campus. It is regrettable and telling that the public discourse has primarily revolved around antisemitism while ignoring the significant impact of Islamophobia.

SUMSA reported instances of Islamophobia to campus security and University administration, often with little to no response. In one such instance, an individual walked past the encampment tents and made throat slitting gestures towards individuals seated in their tents. Multiple other instances of harassment took place, many of which have been documented by the Islamophobia Register Australia in their 2023-24 Islamophobia in Australia report.

Sydney University Muslim Students' Association