



Opening statement by Jillian Segal AO to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

8 October 2025

Senators,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear this evening. It is my sincere wish that a role such as mine were not necessary. Unfortunately events of the last couple of years and leading into this period, have proven otherwise.

It has been just over a year since I was appointed by the Prime Minister as Australia's first Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism. The 9 months leading into my appointment, and 12 months since, have been traumatic for the Australian Jewish community. It is clear, however, that the confronting antisemitism we've seen since the attacks of October 7, 2023 is not spontaneous or new, and nor is Australia immune from the global dynamic. Jew-hatred has lived in the shadows waiting for its moment to re-emerge.

In 2024 alone, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry recorded over 2,000 antisemitic incidents, excluding online content. These included firebombings, acts of violent intimidation, graffiti, physical and verbal attacks and more. The community lives in fear of these incidents escalating further and becoming deadly, as we've seen time and again, most recently last week in Manchester, UK whilst the community was praying peacefully in synagogue on Yom Kippur.

Australia is an extraordinary country with a rich history of multiculturalism. We are a patchwork quilt of cultures and faiths, ethnicities and races; from the incredible and unbroken legacy of our First Nations Peoples, to the new immigrants arriving every day. We are a nation which values equality, freedom, safety and a 'fair go' for all. All hatreds, including antisemitism, are completely contrary to these principles and values. As the Prime Minister stated while standing next to me in July, "There is no place in Australia for antisemitism. The kind of hatred and violence we've seen on our streets recently is despicable..."

Despite making up less than half of one percent of the Australian population, the Jewish community is immensely proud of its outsized contribution to this country. In public service, such as Governor General Sir Isaac Isaacs; Mahla Pearlman, the first female judge in a State court; and of course arguably our greatest General, Sir John Monash. Jewish Australians have been proud and active contributors to the nation. We have had leaders in business, politics, the law, philanthropy, science, military, community and the arts. And yet despite this contribution over hundreds of years, the Director General of ASIO said in Parliament this year that in terms of threat to life, antisemitism is ASIO's top priority. It's the first time in our history that a form of racism was the top of ASIO's list. The recent connection of the Iranian Government to arson attacks on Jewish institutions in Sydney in

Melbourne – including the Adass Israel synagogue attack – emphasised the seriousness of that threat.

At the request of the Government, in July I released the Special Envoy's Plan to Combat Antisemitism. In the Plan I detailed a number of key areas which I believe need the focus of the Government & bureaucracy, policymakers, institutions, businesses and communities. It is a Plan designed to simultaneously protect the fragile fabric of Australian freedoms, and the vulnerable and under-attack Jewish community. This plan has the overwhelming support of the Australian Jewish community, and systematically working through the Plan is my focus for the next 12 months.

Antisemitism represents a clear and present danger to our national social cohesion, but it cannot be left to the Jewish community to defend alone. As former Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth Rabbi Sacks noted, "The hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews". This is a challenge for all of us. It has become clear that large swathes of the Australian Jewish community are traumatised, feel deeply isolated and in many cases fearful for their safety and future in this wonderful country. They are not asking for special treatment – they simply want to feel safe, welcome and equal in the country they call home. This is what my Plan seeks to address.

I look forward to your questions.