

My name is Rachel Sussman. I am Australian and Jewish. I was born in the State of Israel and arrived to Australia in 1971. I did not come here looking for ‘greener pastures’, nor because I was unhappy in my country of birth, in anyway (indeed, I love my country of birth). I came as a young bride because I happened to fall in love with a young Australian while he was touring in Israel. Destiny brought me here...

Saying this, I fell in love with Australia from day 1. Its culture, mix of population, easy going outlook, love of the outdoors, its beaches, its openness, and so much more, reminded me of my own Israel. I felt at home here. I proudly received my Australian citizenship in 1973, feeling ever so blessed to have two homes that I love. I made a life here with my husband (now married for 53 years), we worked hard to save and get our home. We never asked for anything. I even managed to do my university study online (at nights while working), get my first then second degree... We raised two beautiful daughters and now gave Australia six amazing grandkids...

Over the years, my ties with Israel remained strong, and they will always be. First, Israel holds my childhood memories, much of my family of origin live there, as do many of my friends. Second, it holds my spiritual roots, I believe in the right of the Jewish people to their ancestral home -Israel - yes, I guess I am a ‘zionist’ (sadly, a dirty word this day). Nevertheless, these ties never impacted on my loyalty and love for Australia. Australia always felt equally like home, I have been proud to be part of it, I loved it, and would do what need be to protect it. Sadly, it seems that this love and loyalty have been betrayed...

October 7/23 has been an unimaginable shock to me personally and to the collective of Jewish community. I became aware of the events taking place through SOS messages from family and friends in Israel as the events were taking place. There is no need to describe here the horror of it. As we were all trying to somehow catch our breath we were hit with yet another wave of shock and horror – the response of Australia, the response of the World, the waves of hate and total lack of compassion that engulfed us. To me, the 8th of October, when we, the Jewish community were advised by the Police not to go to the city, not to stand vigil in front of the Opera House that was lit in blue and white and share our grief, because of expected ‘violent demonstrations’, was the day that Australia, as I trusted it to be and loved it, died...

The flood of antisemitism that inflamed (and still is inflaming) Australia (and the world) is indeed shameful... One can disagree with any country’s policies if one wishes or feels this way, open debates on ‘political rights and wrongs’ can always be carried with respect and with acknowledgement of all factual and historical truths, but this is not the same as denying atrocities committed against a people, as denying the right of a people to their ancestral land, as calling for the eradication of a country and a people, as holding to narratives that do not include all factual truthful information, and as persecuting citizens based on their religion.

Australia’s education facilities, especially its university system is guilty of all these failures...

A University should be a place of enlightenment, tolerance, inclusion and fair debate, not a place where hate, or racism of any kind, is allowed to flourish. It should be a place where history, and truths are encouraged - not lies, or distortions. It should be a place where harmony not division should be fostered. Some universities not only failed on all accounts, but also succumbed to hate and manipulation, and worse still actively participated – be it in words, be it in actions.

The failure of the education system in general and universities in particular, did not occur overnight. It is a deterioration one could have watched over for more than a decade...I certainly have; but I -and many like me - were still naively hoping/believing that it is a ‘minority’. We are guilty also. October 7, sadly showed how rooted and spread these failures are, lying beneath the surface, waiting for an opportunity to come to life with all their ugly venom.

The universities failed by refusing to recognize and acknowledge how antisemitism can manifest in today's world under the guise of 'human rights', of 'standing with those perceived to be oppressed', and of 'freedom of speech'. Their leaders participated in this failure with their statements, actions, and lack of action. It is time for all universities to adopt and implement a comprehensive definition of antisemitism that recognises all its 'modern day' trapping.

The universities failed by fostering for far too long, a one sided course material, often teaching a 'narrative' rather than an objective and all-inclusive history with all its facts. It is time for universities to adhere to course material that distinguishes opinions from historical truths and facts; material that includes all perspectives of these truths and all facts, and that encourages respectful, non-hateful, open and balanced debate.

It is time for universities to reclaim their stance as open and objective regardless of one's personal view... to have clear guidelines that distinguish between 'respectful free speech' and 'hate speech' and to be a place where all are welcomed as long as they engage in respectful free speech and not in hate speech.

It is time for universities to reclaim their stance as a safe place for all its students and staff, while ensuring that such safety does not give cover to anyone who chooses to engage in hateful or excluding activities of any kind.

It is time for all universities' staff – academic or otherwise – and students, to be a vehicle for social cohesion, of fair and truthful debate, not instruments of propaganda of any kind.

Education is the basis for social cohesion or social division. It can foster harmony and peace or encourage aggression. To act as a basis for social cohesion, peace and harmony, it must be a vehicle for open respectful acknowledgement of history, of facts, and of healthy debates. Otherwise, it will act as a basis for division and aggression. It is up to the leaders of this country – and any country – to ensure its education system is truly a basis for social cohesion and respect, not a place where hateful narrative and social division flourishes.

I sincerely hope that Australia can turn around for the sake of its future and the future generations to come. On a personal level, and for the Australian Jewish community, I hope that the dark stain that has covered Australia can one day be cleared enough so that I, my children and grandchildren, indeed the whole Jewish community, can trust Australia once more and call it Home.... It is up to you...