

# LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

## **Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024 (No. 2)**

Response of Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism to Question on Notice:

At the conclusion of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee (**Committee**) hearing on Thursday, 19 September 2024, Senator Henderson raised the topic of the National Tertiary Education Union, and asked as follows:

“Are you concerned about the role of the National Tertiary Education Union in failing to properly—or even at all—represent Jewish staff adequately at this time of rising anti-Semitism?”

In response I note as follows:

My office has conducted an informal survey of Jewish academics with the assistance of the organisation Academic Alliance Against Antisemitism Australia (**5A**) to gauge:

- to what extent the National Tertiary Education Union’s (**NTEU**) position has resulted in Jewish and/or Israeli academics resigning from the NTEU, and
- whether former or current members of the NTEU feel that the NTEU has engaged in antisemitic conduct.

In response to this informal survey, which I gave respondents only 24 hours to respond to, from 19 – 20 September 2024, 39 academics wrote to my office indicating that they felt that the NTEU had adopted an antisemitic stance or engaged in antisemitic conduct either following the massacre by Hamas in southern Israel on 7 October 2023, or prior to that. Indeed, some respondents indicated that they had resigned more than a year ago because of what they perceived as a racist position by the NTEU. At least two of these 39 respondents indicated that they are not Jewish, and that they felt strongly enough about antisemitism that they decided to leave the NTEU, despite this meaning that they no longer have union representation.

Some of the respondents shared their resignation letters with my office on a confidential basis but I have not publicised these because of the perceived risk to the individuals’ livelihoods or professional standing if they are publicly identifiable for having taken this position.

I understand that some of the academics who have been impacted by the overtly anti-Israel, and, in some instances, antisemitic position of the NTEU, have sought legal

advice and may soon be commencing legal action, but I do not have more information about this possible action. In essence though, by singling out Israel in a way that no other foreign country has been singled out by the NTEU, and in consistently passing overtly anti-Israel motions, which, in some instances, indicate an opposition to the Jewish people's internationally recognised right to self-determination, the impact on Jewish and/or Israeli academics (and some non-Jewish academics) has been that they do not feel they can remain 'in union'. A number of academics my office liaised with were very distressed at the situation and felt obliged to resign given the fact that at meetings the NTEU did not permit any other views regarding Israel, and they felt it no longer represented Jewish academics. They therefore do not have a union that represents them, and so they believe that they have been disadvantaged. They also question whether adopting such a strong anti-Israel position and giving such a wide berth to questions concerning Israel is in line with the NTEU's Role and Objects.

I note that the 8th example in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism is "Applying double standards by requiring of [Israel] a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation." Therefore, these academics would argue that the position adopted by the NTEU is antisemitic and that they have no meaningful choice other than to leave the union. This article provides further context: [Jewish academics have resigned from the National Tertiary Education Union \(NTEU\) in protest at its anti-Israel stance | The Australian](#)

Furthermore, in the evidence provided to the Committee by the NTEU on 20 September 2024, the NTEU noted that it is aware of over 57 Jewish and/or Israeli academics that have left the union since 7 October 2023 on account of what they believe is the anti-Israel or antisemitic stance of the NTEU.

I am also aware of at least five Jewish academics having left the University of Sydney and one Jewish academic leaving the University of Adelaide in the last 12 months due to the antisemitic treatment they say they have received.