

Submission on behalf of the Australian Experts to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

Background

The following submission is made by the following Australian experts to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in their personal capacities: Dr Andre Oboler, Professor Emerita Suzanne Rutland, Associate Professor Avril Alba, Dr Steven Cooke, Pauline Rockman OAM, and Sue Hampel OAM. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), an intergovernmental organisation with 35 Member Countries and 8 Observer Countries, that unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, remembrance, and research worldwide and uphold the commitments of the 2000 Stockholm Declaration and the 2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration. IHRA is supported in its work by 9 Permanent International Partners: the UN, UNESCO, European Union, OSCE/ODIHR, Arolsen Archive, Council of Europe, Claims Conference, GAAMAC, and FRA who participate in its working groups, committees, and plenaries. Australia became a full member of the IHRA in 2019 and its experts are appointed by the Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The important role of Australian journalism, news and public interest media in countering mis and disinformation on digital platforms

Misinformation and disinformation are significant problems online. Holocaust denial and distortion are particularly concerning forms of mis/disinformation. As the IHRA Working Definition on Holocaust Denial and Distortion notes, “The goals of Holocaust denial often are the rehabilitation of an explicit antisemitism and the promotion of political ideologies and conditions suitable for the advent of the very type of event it denies.”¹ This form of mis/disinformation is a threat not only to the Jewish community and other minorities, but to social cohesion and our democratic society. Recent legislative changes, such as banning the public display of Nazi symbols and gestures, need to be complemented by efforts to prevent the spread of Holocaust denial and distortion on social media.

Australia journalism plays an important role in combating mis/disinformation about the Holocaust through articles and documentaries, particularly those marking International Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27th each year. The ability to share such articles on social media significantly contributes to Holocaust education and challenges the spread of mis/disinformation.

A block by social media platforms on news content, as is presently occurring in Canada and briefly occurred in Australia, would reduce access and visibility of this content.

¹ <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-holocaust-denial-distortion>

The algorithms, recommender systems and corporate decision making of digital platforms in influencing what Australians see, and the impacts of this on mental health

The spread of Holocaust inversion, in which Israel is presented as a new Nazi Germany, is a form of Holocaust distortion that is inaccurate and creates trauma for Holocaust survivors, their descendants and the Jewish community more broadly. It is explicitly listed as a form of antisemitism under the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism.² While comparative genocide studies are a legitimate academic approach, such work needs to be done with care. As the IHRA explains when introducing the *IHRA Reflections on Terminology for Holocaust Comparison*, “When we strive to shed light on aspects that intersect or parallel one another, our choice of terms can communicate respect and bring clarity, or they can offend and distort.”³

On social media, especially since October 7, there has been a significant increase in the volume of disinformation content promoting Holocaust inversion. This content undermines the understanding of the Holocaust and is used to justify antisemitism targeting the Australian Jewish community, a community with the largest number of Holocaust survivors and their descendants per capita outside of Israel.

A new report by the Online Hate Prevention Institute, *Antisemitism After October 7*, has demonstrated that this problem is particularly acute on LinkedIn where such Holocaust inversion is one of the most common forms of antisemitism on the Platform. This is not the case on any of the other 9 social media platforms examined, not even those dominated by the far-right.⁴ The data indicates LinkedIn is taking a very different approach to other platforms on this content.

Other issues in relation to harmful or illegal content disseminated over social media, including scams, age-restricted content, child sexual abuse and violent extremist material

To counter the spread of mis/disinformation about the Holocaust, the IHRA, created the *Protect the Facts* social media campaign.⁵ The campaign raises awareness of Holocaust distortion, how to recognise it and how to counter it. The campaign is a joint initiative by the IHRA, the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the OSCE/ODIHR, the United Nations, and UNESCO. The campaign can be seen at: <https://www.againstholocaustdistortion.org/>

This campaign is an example of an international educational approach on social media to tackle a particularly concerning form of mis/disinformation. It is also a campaign the Australian Government, as a member of IHRA, can promote as part of our efforts to counter the neo-Nazi ideology spread online and which has led to an increase in right-wing extremism in Australia, as examined by another parliamentary inquiry. These issues do not exist in isolation and the approach of Protect the Facts can apply to other harmful or illegal content disseminated over social media.

² <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>

³ <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/terminology-holocaust-comparison>

⁴ <https://ohpi.org.au/afteroct7/> pp. 85—86

⁵ <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/protect-the-facts>