

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
20 August, 2024.

Dear Senators

Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024

Background

I am a Jew, raised by two holocaust survivors, my mother from Berlin and father from Köln, Germany. My father's family was previously expelled from Spain as a result of the Alhambra Decree of 1492. I am extremely proud of this diverse heritage and after my own early life, happy to live safely in Australia.

After WW II my parents settled in Johannesburg, South Africa, where I was born and raised as a devout Zionist Jew. Due to parent disability we were poor. Even at times when only through charity were we able to afford food and accommodation, we still put money in the blue Jewish National Fund tin for Israel.

As a result of circumstances I was subsequently, in part, raised by a family where my foster uncle was a founder of the Israeli Air force and a member of Irgun Tzvai Leumi, the pre-state underground militia led by, later to be Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin. His father funded a Civic Centre in Israel in memory of another son killed in WW II, and was a lifelong significant donor to Israel. The family were close personal friends of the former Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, whom they hosted in Johannesburg and with whom I was present at dinner on occasion through my teens.

My Jewish heritage, experience and learning was sufficiently apparent for my rabbi and temple president, in Johannesburg, to offer me a scholarship for rabbinic studies in Israel and the USA. In 1970 I visited Israel on a 'birthright' style scholarship. I lived on kibbutz

Beit Hashita and also stayed with relatives in Caesarea, my cousin and family still living there today.

Given my parents' German origins, my South African experience of apartheid and idolising of Israel, I was highly sensitive to racism. But, even then fifty years ago, the treatment of Palestinians, as third class citizens, after the recently arrived Russian and Ethiopian Jews, was most distressing. Due to my kibbutz host's military role I met Palestinians in the West Bank; they had no rights and suffered killing, beating, expulsion, theft, exploitation, harassment and destruction of property and livestock, and nothing has improved.

The visit to Israel was an epiphany that led to my rejection of Zionism for its brutal colonialism, fifty years ago.

While continuing to privately follow Jewish tradition, the fervent Zionism in Australia, and its encouraged, unbridled, racism and superiority, has precluded me from engaging in the formal adherence and structures of Judaism. This is an experienced and felt deprivation.

Antisemitism

The mistreatment of any person or people for any reason, whether on the basis of race, religion, self identification, affiliation, belief or behaviour, is abhorrent.

Jews collectively are not bad or good, and should not attract opprobrium for being Jewish.

There are people in Australia who have antisemitic biases against Jews. These include holocaust deniers who somehow feel personally aggrieved that there were six million deaths of Jews and other people during the holocaust. Then there are the white supremacists, incels, neo-Nazis and others who have been seen on campuses, usually promoting Nazi themes, including salutes, colours and regalia. They are usually vehemently antisemitic, except that they appear to dislike brown people more. In a reinterpretation of my enemies enemy is my friend, some now appear to support Israel in its genocide in Gaza, and its pre October 2023 ethnic cleansing, as repeatedly directly expressed by Israel's leaders. Some people have been present to disrupt rallies in support of Palestine, fortunately in small numbers, and the supporters, and police, usually ensure that they are given a wide berth.

While some of these extremists do daub swastikas, from discussion with them, their purpose is unclear other than a liking of authoritarianism, and a few, of Hitler and Naziism, while being ill informed as to its meaning. Most seem only inclined to cause distress through real life trolling. While this may be upsetting the act, while vandalising, is not antisemitic. Being perceived as such, again seems to be deliberate and often proposed as such by the organisations simultaneously decrying antisemitism. The description of these as such acts defies logic.

Similar defacing has been of Australian war memorials (at Avalon, Rosebud and the ACT, from memory and no doubt, others), ostensibly secular. Surely, these acts in Australia cannot meaningfully be determined as antisemitic. The defacing of memorials with pro Palestinian messages is highly distasteful and self-defeating; but only the most self-centred and alarmist could perceive or interpret protests against mass killing and maiming of anyone, anywhere, as being a personal attack.

The reported antisemitism on some university campus may be equivocal. Some seems to be misinterpretation, while others deliberately erroneous disinformation, publicised by actors who do know different. "Seeing their posters and graffiti around uni with messages such as "intifada revolution" makes me feel unsafe and so concerned."¹ While it is troubling that anyone should feel unsafe, the entire article from which this alleged quote was taken is one of perceptions of personal threat where, as far as I know and presume if a crime had been committed there would have been a police response, there was no basis for that. There is no evidence as to the origins of the quoted statements and they are at odds with my conversations with Zionist camps on campus, usually in close proximity to the Palestinian camps. Intifada literally means to shake off, and is synonymous with rising up and revolting against oppression. No less a document than the UDHR, and in its preamble states, "Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,..."² To state the obvious, Palestinian human rights have been trampled for 76 years.

But how can anyone take account of others' possible misperceptions? As analogy, some view me, an older man, as trustworthy, while others don't.

¹ <https://www.australianjewishnews.com/scary-and-emotionally-draining/>

² (accessed from the AHRC web site 12 June 2024) <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/commission-general/universal-declaration-human-rights-human-rights-your-fingertips-human>

The same article carries a photo of a man carrying a black flag with white writing during a protest march in Sydney. The flag can only be of concern to the ignorant. Social media jumped on, calling it an “ISIS flag”, others a Jihadist flag, including a prominent self-identified lawyer who should know better. From best knowledge and not as expert, the flag depicted in the photo has the phrase in Arabic, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger", being the Shahada or Islamic oath, one of the five pillars of Islam. Waving the flag is an expression of devotion, however it is misinterpreted.

There are also those who dislike Zionists individually and collectively for being supporters of what Israel has become. I am one. Dislike of people or a group who hold beliefs anathema to one's own is not antisemitic. Certainly Australian Zionists have been publicly, loudly and precisely expressive of their views of Palestinians, no matter the widespread offence and actual hurt this has caused to those whose families, friends and fellow Palestinians and Muslims have been killed and injured.

From the river to the sea has been in the Likud Party manifesto since 1977, ten years before the founding of Hamas. The full slogan “between the Sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty,”³ has led to the word “sovereignty” (ריבונות – ribonut – which also means dominion) adorning every Likud party banner and remains its policy. It is regularly expressed by Israel's leaders in speeches, including the Israeli Prime Minister, to this day. When pro-Palestinian protesters use it, it is antisemitic. What is it when the leader of the Likud party and of Israel uses it? “My insistence is what has prevented - over the years - the establishment of a Palestinian state...” (21 January, 2024).⁴

‘Ribonut’, alone, has become a dog whistle, a marshalling if not war cry in Israel.^{5,6} With journals dedicated to its implementation; the contents of some should be repugnant to all thinking humans, including and particularly in the light of history, to Jews.

Israelis in Israel and around the world have worn and still wear keffiyeh, including recently military age Israelis at a cafe' in Warsaw; near where some 390,000 Jews were killed or died of starvation and disease. In Afghanistan and Iraq, keffiyeh, also called a shemagh,

3 <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/original-party-platform-of-the-likud-party>

4 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/01/22/netanyahu-biden-two-state-solution-palestine-river-to-sea/>

5 <https://www.ribonut.co.il/?lang=2>

6 <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/political-science/articles/10.3389/fpos.2022.963682/full>

were the face covering of choice for Australian and other Special Forces as well as Israeli contractors.^{7,8} I too wore one in Afghanistan for warmth and to keep sand out of my face and have owned one for over fifty years, bought in Jerusalem. I wear mine to protests as an act of solidarity with thousands of others. It may be irritating to some, as any support of Palestinians may be, but as was claimed on a Melbourne campus and of Sydney actors, how is the wearing of a keffiyeh or any article or clothing antisemitic, including those of Naziism? To know the intent it would be necessary to ask. A perception of offence is not proof of perception. In Australia there are people who take offence to the Aboriginal flag. It would appear that any type of available behaviour is open to being perceived as an attack on Israel and by extension on Jews generally, and therefore antisemitic.

During the recent university based support for Gaza I attended campuses in Brisbane and Melbourne. Having been invited to a Zionist camp, at a university where I hold an appointment, to ensure there were ten (males) present for the reciting of the mourners' kaddish, I approached wearing my Aboriginal design kippah. I was chastised and called a "self-hating Jew" by a man who disclosed as being neither staff nor student of the university. When challenged by me he spat at my feet. In decades of engaging with Muslims, in Muslim countries and elsewhere and all other religions and all other people, I have never experienced anything approaching that behaviour. [For context, on a recent visit to the Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest, the site of 24 mass graves of over two thousand Jewish ghetto victims, the venerable caretaker prevailed on me to send him an Aboriginal kippah on my return to Australia].

When I have asked Jews as to their direct experience of antisemitism, at best I have received vague responses of them taking offence at something said or done. None of these, by the most bias-confirming interpretation, could be really so perceived. Usually their explanation is of something heard second or third hand, or of reports read, often in Jewish media. Reading of a slogan, that may or may not have actually been said or shouted, perhaps or not by a pro-Palestinian anti-genocide marcher, can be interpreted in any way, but not as a direct experience of antisemitism. The undoubted implication is that the slogans emanate from Muslims and are therefore threats of violence and condemned as antisemitism, in order to invoke hatred of Muslims, or as anti Islamism. This must be

7 <https://shop.iwm.org.uk/p/24285/Shemagh-military-scarf-green#>

8 <https://www.theage.com.au/national/how-our-leaders-loved-the-sas-to-death-20201120-p56ghj.html>
(photo)

called out and has not been thus far, except for a few brave souls at protests, marches and on campuses.

I have lived and worked in countries including South Africa, Israel, Gaza and West Bank, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Europe and of course Australia and others. The only places I have ever personally suffered antisemitism have been during conscription in the South African army, in Israel by settlers, and recently in Australia, from fellow Jews and even relatives. The only act of antisemitism with such intent ever witnessed was the daubing of swastikas on a synagogue wall in Johannesburg in the 1960s. I regard all vandalism of any place of worship as an anti-religious act against its believers and of any memorial as a deliberate act against any who hold it sacred. Protest is to catalyse change, which may be interpreted as threatening by those who feel guilt about the conduct.

In Australia, in the company of Muslim students, friends and colleagues with whom I have spent much less time than with fellow Jews, I have seen them experience greater orders of magnitude of active racism than that witnessed by me as being experienced by Jews or anyone else. Where are the calls for an inquiry into anti Islamism? Antisemitism occurs, but as a Jew it does seem to be exaggerated, and often for convenience, deflection and distraction. This claim too is usually called antisemitic.

There is apparent and rampant anti Islamism in Australia. Support of racism enacted by others is still racism. Support for an inherently racist project, the killing and expulsion of Palestinians and confiscation, destruction and appropriation of their property, is racist. The killing of populations is genocide. People doing this are, by definition, racists. To avoid being called out on this Israel has created an industry to defend any perceived attack by lobbying, deflection, distraction and denial. The most common approach is to claim any criticism of Israel or its actions or those of its leaders to be antisemitic. Making such an argument is circularly also deemed antisemitic. There are organisations, web sites and manuals exhorting this behaviour and instructing its conduct, in both coarse and subtle ways.

The synergising and obnubilation of Judaism with Zionism of the IHRA definition of antisemitism: "While anti-Israel rhetoric is surely not the only form of antisemitism, it is one of the most widespread forms seen today in the West. Those who oppose Israel and

Zionism try to separate Judaism from Zionism in order to get away with antisemitism. They accuse us of conflating anti-Zionism with antisemitism, even though the two have clearly blended into one."⁹, deserves rejection for its illusory logic and fallacious claim.

I resent the direct denial of my Jewish heritage by conflating Judaism with a claimed 'divine' genocide by the Israeli Prime Minister, quoting Samuel. Is this not the ultimate deflection? On **1 March 2023**, in response to being asked in an interview why he had liked a tweet, Israeli Minister of Finance Bezael Smotrich responded, "The village of Huwwara (subject to violent settler raids and killing of Palestinians) needs to be wiped out. I think that the State of Israel needs to do that - not, God forbid, private individuals." This was denounced by the US State Department spokesperson¹⁰ The Australian Government was silent

The Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) on its website styles itself as "the premier public affairs (propaganda) organisation for the Australian Jewish community." One recent example, an article of 12 July 2024, on the AIJAC website, titled, "The truth about water in Gaza"¹¹ is replete with selective referencing entirely from Israeli sources or from Zionist organisations and is an example of the described obfuscating. Its stated argument can be guessed; Israel is not responsible and Hamas steals the water. Meanwhile the extensive videos of children lining up for hours for water and the pleas of INGOs remain unexplained. AIJAC does not represent me in word or deed. Zionists individually and collectively, directly and indirectly, tacitly and expressly, support the mistreatment of Palestinians. This is rampant anti-Palestinism and racist.

The recent appointment of the past President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), which styles itself as "the voice of the Australian Jewish community to government, in the community, and overseas", as Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism, is among the most tone deaf I have observed, while a cringe worthy emulation of the U.S.A. That the appointee is a fervent and public, Gaza invasion supporting, Zionist makes it much worse. Even though this appointment has been public knowledge since at least April, at least in the Jewish community, the much larger Islamic community must await its envoy's appointment.

⁹<https://hasbarafellowships.org/debunking-common-claims-against-the-ihra-definition-of-anti-semitism/>

¹⁰ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-us-bezael-smotrich-evidence-genocide-support>

¹¹ <https://aijac.org.au/fresh-air/the-truth-about-water-in-gaza/>

The protests, marches, picketing, slogans, daubing of premises short of actual property damage, and solidarity camps on university campuses, and other non-injurious activism, including the calls of far too few politicians, are the least that anyone can and should do. That is not because Palestinians are being killed, maimed, expelled from their homes and land, and suffering other atrocities, in the past, now and no doubt, into the future. It's because people are being killed, maimed, expelled from their homes and land, and suffering other atrocities, in the past, now and into the future. It is the obligation of anyone claiming humanity to draw attention to this, naming and shaming the oppressors and their supporters. All well-intended protesters should be commended, rather than as they have been, castigated, including by the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Will we be able to stand tall when our children ask "why we did not speak out" (Martin Niemöller, c.1947, with intentional irony in the use of the reference web site¹²)?

This is written as the ICJ has handed down its decision on Israel's occupation of Palestine, ""The State of Israel is under the obligation to bring an end to its unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as rapidly as possible." ¹³

For the over fifty years of my visiting Israel, Palestinians have only been identified as Arabs, without rights. This is even when, for example, they are skilled surgeons operating on Jews in Israeli hospitals, but have to suffer the indignities of Qalandia checkpoint and its racist teenage IDF operators, when returning to their families.

All Palestinians are seen by Israelis as terrorists and members of Hamas and at the time of amending this submission, 19 August 2024, so too the leader of the Australian opposition; previously, they were labelled as the PLO. And all Palestinians are to be exterminated. On **23 June 2023**, Itamar Ben Gvir announced in the West Bank, "The Land of Israel must be settled and at the same time as the settlement of the Land a military operation must be launched. [We must] demolish buildings, eliminate terrorists, not one or two, but tens and hundreds, and if necessary even thousands". This is ugly racism and it must be protested by every means. Australian Jews have been prominently missing from any such condemnation, most usually obfuscating, if not justifying the most outrageous claims by Israel's leaders, and even some Australians, as described above.

12 <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/first-they-came-by-pastor-martin-niemoller/>

13 Advisory Opinion - Legal Consequences Arising From The Policies And Practices Of Israel In The Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, 19 July 2024, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/186/186-20240719-adv-01-00-en.pdf?>

I am writing this submission immediately after visiting Archie Moore's exhibit in the Australian pavilion at the Venice Biennale. I am as proud a Jew and of my heritage as my First Nation friends are of theirs. For the same reasons that they claim their heritage and many support Palestinians, so too do I claim mine and also support Palestinians. This is in defence of Judaism, an ostensibly peaceful religion of, notwithstanding the prescriptions of Deuteronomy, self-described, God's chosen people.

I am concerned that my Country, Australia, is being wedged into supporting a morally indefensible standpoint and genocide. In the name of humanity I need it to support a permanent ceasefire and a just solution to a simple problem. I am against an inquiry that seeks to reify antisemitism, and inevitably, the IHRA definition. I would entirely support an inquiry into racism, although the AHRC already has a highly qualified Race Discrimination Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,

(all emphases and underlining are mine).