



Opening Statement - Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Justice and Communities - inquiry Antisemitism in New South Wales

5A represents hundreds of academics and professional staff from across 32 Australian universities both Jewish and non-Jewish who are concerned with the emergence of Antisemitism on their campus in the Australian tertiary sector.

Our submission limited itself to four items from the terms of reference:

(a) the causes underlying the increasing prevalence and severity of antisemitic incidents across the state.

(b) record levels of antisemitism on university campuses and in schools undermining student safety. The survey 5A conducted last year revealed how severe the situation is on Australian campuses with a large majority of students and staff surveyed – 67 per cent – reporting experiences of antisemitism that had a significant impact on their lives. Only a third of the students and academic staff felt physically safe on campus. We need to ask how this is possible in Australia in 2025?

(c) these disturbing findings highlight the threat to social cohesion in New South Wales presented by antisemitism.

(h) the role of the Sydney Jewish Museum in providing Holocaust education for students.

In this short opening statement, we do not repeat all that which appears in our written submission, but address the first three of these terms of reference, with direct reference to very recent events.

Australian Zionists include most Australian Jews, some 91%. This proportion is similar to that which is found in the Jewish diaspora throughout the world. Moreover, Israelis as a national group are overwhelmingly Zionist, and they comprise almost half the global Jewish population.

It is a common false proposition, set out for example in submission 41, that there has been a "conflation of Antisemitism with criticism of Israel and Zionism." Such assertions misapprehend, sometimes inadvertently, and sometimes deliberately, what Zionism is.

Zionism is the belief, grounded in centuries old Jewish prayer, and also held by many people not of the Jewish faith, in the Jewish right to self-determination in their own indigenous land just like all other peoples on earth. That right is embedded in the UN Charter. But over three thousand years ago, well before the UN was conceived, the Children of Israel lived in the land. It is trite to state that the State of Israel today plays a very important part in Jewish identity generally.

Anti-Zionism is the belief that all peoples, but not the Jewish people, are entitled to self-determination in their own indigenous land.

To quote the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks from 2016:

*Antisemitism is a virus that survives by mutating. In the Middle Ages, Jews were hated because of their religion. In the 19th and 20th centuries they were hated because of their race. Today they are hated because of their nation state, Israel. Anti-Zionism is the new antisemitism.*¹

Anti-Zionism is traditional antisemitism, disguised as wine but truly an old poison, rebottled, labelled with new academic terminologies that misrepresent and deceive.

The Australian Academic Alliance Against Antisemitism stresses the fundamental role of anti-Zionism as a vehicle for contemporary antisemitism on NSW university campuses.

An illustrative example of how serious the problem in NSW now is presented itself last week on Wednesday, 14 May, when the Sydney University Student Representative Council adopted resolutions for the dismantling of the State of Israel and to end academic exchange programs with Israeli universities.

The purported purpose of the SRC meeting was to consider the University's adoption of the Universities Australia definition of antisemitism, which the SRC inevitably rejected.

¹ <https://rabbisacks.org/archive/anti-zionism-is-the-new-anti-semitism-newsweek>

The student representatives literally turned their backs on the Jewish students at the meeting and rejected Jewish student views on what constitutes antisemitism. While they would never deny the right of Indigenous Australian the right to call out racism against Australia's first peoples, they openly deny the Jewish people's right to identify and respond to anti-Jewish racism, which is what Antisemitism is.

The example last Wednesday is far from unique.

Why does this matter? Singling the Jewish people out as alone not having a right to self-determination, a theme that has been normalised in the academy, and now in the public square, makes Jewish citizens unsafe.²

That normalisation facilitates harassment and other forms of violence, including fire bombs against actual and perceived Jewish targets.

It has to stop, and to reinforce the legislation recently passed by the Parliament of NSW, the recommendations which we at 5A and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies have made, if implemented, will go a considerable way toward turning back the tide of normalising antisemitism.

There is not time in these brief opening remarks to explain the history or sociology that underpins this aberrant behaviour. But its adverse impact on social cohesion should be obvious.

Professor Gregory Rose Adjunct Associate Professor David Knoll AM

Opening Statement Ends

² *Philippsohn v Attorney General for New South Wales* [2025] NSWSC 267 at [81]