

## ASIO SENATE ESTIMATES OPENING STATEMENT

23 October 2023

You have heard me say many times that Australia's threat environment is complex, challenging and changing.

The tragic events in the Middle East are powerful examples of the complexity, the challenge and the change.

While the events are a long way away from Australia, they are resonating here and ASIO is carefully monitoring the implications for domestic security.

As always, context matters.

Australia's terrorism threat level is unchanged; it remains at POSSIBLE.

ASIO is not seeing evidence of planned violence, although the likelihood of opportunistic violence remains real, particularly if tensions, protests and rhetoric increase.

This is why I chose to release a statement urging all individuals to consider the implications for social cohesion when making public statements.

ASIO has previously seen direct connections between inflamed language and inflamed community tensions.

ASIO is not interested in those who are engaged in lawful protest, but rather the small subset of protestors who may wish to escalate protest to violence – this includes religiously motivated *and* ideologically motivated violent extremists, or anyone who believes that violence is a means to further their own interests.

The Hamas attack is also a sober reminder that while espionage and foreign interference is now Australia's principal security concern, terrorism remains a threat, and must always be a priority for ASIO.

ASIO will continue to monitor emerging trends, drivers and shifts in the threat environment.

And with our law enforcement partners ASIO will continue to identify, prevent and disrupt threats in a targeted, proportionate and ethical way.

We are committed to safeguarding the security of all Australians *and* safeguarding their liberties... protecting from wrongs, while securing their rights.

That is why ASIO must always act within the spirit – as well as the letter – of the law.

That is why ASIO must always use the least intrusive methods possible.

And that is why I welcome robust oversight, governance, accountability and transparency – including by appearing at Estimates.

I look forward to your questions.