

Commission President calls for human rights in Australia to be upheld in wake of Middle East conflict

 Race Discrimination

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The President of the Australian Human Rights Commission is calling for respect for human rights to be front of mind for all Australians as the situation in the Middle East continues to worsen.

Commission President and Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher AM said: “The devastating conflict in Israel and Gaza and its horrific civilian fallout is impacting people across Australia. Many communities are being directly affected, with loved ones among the dead, missing, and injured.

“As the response here in Australia escalates, the Commission has become increasingly concerned about the implications of some commentary within Australia, including people in public life as well as people on social media.

“We need to ensure all levels of discussion adhere to the laws and principles which underpin our approach to human rights here in Australia.

“The Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA) makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their race, colour, descent, their national or ethnic origins or their immigrant status. Furthermore, subject to limited good faith exceptions, any public act done

because of someone's race which is reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate a person from the same community is unlawful. These provisions apply to and protect all of us. Racist statements from anyone are unacceptable and no one in Australia should have to fear for their safety in any space or context.

"Online hate or negative and inaccurate media portrayals can incite violence and discrimination. All relevant authorities and social media companies need to be mindful of their responses and content and take appropriate action to ensure people's human rights are upheld."

In addition, President Croucher raised concerns of reports that people's right to peaceful protest may be blocked in certain states and territories.

"The rights to freedom of assembly and association are protected in articles 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a core international human rights treaty to which Australia is bound.

"This protects individuals and groups wishing to express their views peacefully and publicly. It is imperative that this right is protected, and I urge authorities to keep this front of mind. We absolutely cannot tolerate any acts of violence, but we must also uphold the rights of people to express their views through peaceful demonstration. Any measures by authorities to override this basic human right need to be challenged at every level."

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