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Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By online submission

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) thanks the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (the Committee) for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the inquiry into antisemitism at Australian universities.

This submission supplements the evidence I gave during my appearance before the Committee on 29 November 2024, along with my colleague Professor Kylie Readman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Education and Students).

It also adds to our submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs' inquiry into a *Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024* in August 2024.

As I outlined in my opening statement to the Committee, antisemitism has no place at UTS. The university has no tolerance for antisemitism, racism or discrimination of any kind and we have worked hard over a long period of time to reinforce this with our staff, students, and broader community.

Ensuring that everyone feels welcome, safe, and supported at UTS is of utmost importance to us. Our primary focus is on ensuring the safety of our community while supporting an environment in which diverse views can be freely expressed and discussed in line with our public purpose as a university.

We are very clear in our expectations that the exchange ideas must be done respectfully at all times. In a message to all staff in February, I emphasized the importance of striking this balance:

The fact that our community holds a range of perspectives should be respected, and we as a university must find a way of accommodating this diversity of views and experiences and their public expression.

Although this presents real challenges, we must strive to maintain the safety and wellbeing of our community, making sure everyone feels welcome at UTS, whilst not limiting freedom of speech. In any democratic country, but particularly within a university environment, freedom of speech and the ability to respectfully debate ideas – including contentious ones – is crucial. It is a fundamental part of an academic environment that we can present, defend and debate issues. That includes allowing our staff and students to speak up, to protest and to follow their convictions. Sometimes their views may even be upsetting to other members of our community.

In allowing these activities and diversity of viewpoints the university is not supporting one side or another. An individual's views are not those of the university, even if heard on the university campus or within the university community.

Maintaining these values and striking this balance has never been easy. Given how upsetting the current issues we are confronting are to so many of us, it is especially the case now. But if we treat each other with respect and kindness, care and sensitivity to other points of view, I believe we can continue to be an inclusive university that we are all proud to belong to.

We work to ensure all members of our university community are clear about our expectations on appropriate behavior, and we take action if people do not meet those expectations. Attached to this letter is additional information about:

1. Our work to combat racism
2. Actions post 7 October 2023
3. Our comprehensive policy framework
4. Definition of antisemitism
5. How our complaints process works
6. Support services
7. Measuring the effectiveness of our response

UTS appreciates that issues are constantly evolving and we regularly review our policies, procedures and support mechanisms to make sure they are working for our community. I have also engaged directly with student representatives and community leaders to understand their perspectives on UTS's response to issues raised by Jewish staff, students and community members. I am committed to maintaining an open and ongoing dialogue, and indeed ensuring we have strong channels for communication and dialogue underpinned by maintaining key relationships with key stakeholders has formed the basis of our approach this year.

We welcome the appointments of Special Envoys to Combat Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and the National Student Ombudsman to help universities respond effectively and prevent future incidents.

UTS appreciates the opportunity to outline our commitment to creating a campus environment free of antisemitism and other forms of racism and discrimination. Should you require any further information about any of these initiatives, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Professor Andrew Parfitt
Vice-Chancellor and President

1. Our work to combat racism

At UTS we have been building on our longstanding work to address racism, including antisemitism. We have a strong track record of tackling racism and promoting inclusion through:

- **Awareness raising campaigns:** such as providing training to our teaching staff to create inclusive environments in which students can respectfully discuss issues related to race and religion. This training explicitly includes antisemitism.
- **Comprehensive policy framework:** UTS policies are continually reviewed to ensure ongoing alignment with the university's strategy and that they are fit for purpose in meeting the needs and expectations of the UTS community and wider society.
- **Complaints mechanism:** we have established mechanisms for students to report incidents but equally there is a 'no wrong door' approach to complaints.
- **Support services:** UTS actively encourages staff and students to seek help via our support services (e.g UTS counselling and UTS Multi-faith Chaplaincy).

In 2023 we launched in partnership with Addison Road Community Organisation a 'Racism Not Welcome' campaign. As part of this campaign, signposts have been installed at prominent locations around campus with the words 'Racism Not Welcome' to remind students, staff and visitors of UTS's commitment to anti-racism. We are the first university to install these signs on campus.

This builds on our longstanding participation in the Australian Human Rights Commission's '*Racism. It Stops With Me*' campaign which has engaged our student body with a range of awareness campaigns using videos, digital screens in prominent locations and news stories, that strongly reinforce UTS's zero tolerance approach to racism.

We also work closely with our international students as soon as possible after they arrive at UTS, to make clear our expectations of them and their fellow students in a democratic, multicultural society. Training covers their ability to speak out in class on topics that may be controversial in their home country and their right and obligations regarding respecting fellow students and staff regardless of their background.

Bespoke and general training is provided for UTS staff covering anti-racism, race literacy, cultural diversity and unconscious bias. These include offerings which specially address anti-racism and belonging in the classroom and aim to upskill our teaching staff to be able to address problems or conflicts in the classroom if they arise.

UTS has also engage with the Race Discrimination Commissioner Mr Giridharan Sivaraman about the Commission's prevalence study on racism at universities. We are encouraged to note that this work will include consideration of the impact of antisemitism on students and staff in universities.

2. Actions post 7 October 2023

In an environment of heightened tensions since the attack of 7 October 2023, UTS has introduced a range of measures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our community.

Our senior staff, including our Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education and Students), Pro Vice-Chancellor (Social Justice and Inclusion) and Head of Security meet regularly with UTS student leaders from the Australian Union of Jewish Students, the Palestinian Society and students from the Student Representative Council to check in on the welfare of our diverse student cohorts.

These meetings aim to reinforce UTS services available to students and to provide an opportunity for students to alert us to any areas of concern. This month, our Pro-Vice Chancellor (Social Justice and Inclusion) reached out to Jewish Student representatives in response to recent antisemitic attacks in Melbourne and Sydney to see if UTS can do more to address safety concerns or support Jewish community members.

One outcome from these discussions has been the university has established a dedicated space for our Jewish students, at their request. We have also increased the number of Rabbis providing pastoral care to ensure support is available to a diversity of Jewish students in the context of heightened global tensions and wellbeing concerns.

In academic matters, since October last year, our DVC (Education and Students) has asked staff to act thoughtfully toward students who may be impacted or who have family impacted by global conflicts, including in Israel and Palestine. This includes accepting requests for extensions to assessment without formal documentation where the background of the student is known or described by the student.

Over the past 12 months, UTS has also reviewed its governance settings to address issues relating to student and staff demonstrations and expectations of behaviour by the university community and any visitors to the UTS campus. Some contained appropriate settings (they were reviewed but unchanged), while adjustments were made to other governance instruments to better support the internal and external environment.

The *Campus Policy* has been updated twice (March and June 2024) in response to the ongoing demonstrations and associated security issues on campuses around the country. The policy applies to all users of UTS campuses – which includes visitors. All policies and a version history of changes are available on the UTS Policy webpage

3. Comprehensive Policy Framework

Our internal policies and processes set out the behaviour expected of our whole UTS community, with a strong emphasis on tolerance and respect.

UTS policies are continually reviewed to ensure ongoing alignment with the university's strategy and that they are fit for purpose in meeting the needs and expectations of the UTS community and wider society. This also reflects expectations articulated by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) as part of its continuing monitoring of how Australian universities are assuring wellbeing, safety, freedom of speech and academic freedom.

Over the past 12 months, the following policy reviews were undertaken and all policies and a version history of changes is available on the UTS Policy webpage (<https://www.uts.edu.au/about/uts-governance/policies/uts-policy>):

- *Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression Policy*
- *Equity, Inclusion and Respect Policy*
- *Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy*
- *Code of Conduct (staff)*
- *Campus Policy*
- *Critical Incident Response Policy*
- *Student Rules*

Together, this policy environment provides the framework for how members of the UTS community exercise their rights and obligations, including:

- their right to freedom of expression (and the right to be safe);
- their right to demonstrate; and
- their right to make public comment.

4. Definition of antisemitism

The UTS *Equity, Inclusion and Respect Policy* outlines the social, ethical and behavioural standards expected at UTS as part of our core values under the UTS Strategy 2027. It provides definitions of discrimination, harassment, inclusive culture, victimisation and vilification.

Discrimination is defined to include when a person is treated less favourably than another person or group because of race, colour, descent, nationality, ethnic, ethno-religious or national origin.

Harassment is defined as any unwelcome, offensive, abusive, belittling, inappropriate or threatening behaviour that humiliates, offends or intimidates another person or group of people on the basis of race, religion, nationality, gender or gender status, sexual orientation or any other grounds specified under anti-discrimination legislation.

Vilification is defined as the public incitement of hatred, contempt or ridicule of another person on the basis of certain characteristics or grounds.

UTS is aware the Group of Eight and Universities Australia are working with the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism on a number of key issues, including a national definition of antisemitism. We look forward to hearing more as discussions progress and will carefully consider any implications for our existing policies and procedures.

5. How our complaints processes work

The university has established mechanisms for students and staff to report incidents of racism, discrimination and harassment. All students are informed of these processes during orientation sessions and every effort is made to ensure that processes are accessible and transparent for all members of our community.

We have received a small number of complaints from Jewish staff and students who have felt unsafe or unwelcome on our campus.

We work diligently to resolve these issues as early as possible, starting with relationship management before commencing formal complaints action available under our policies. Working with our students and staff to resolve concerns relies on us actively building trust in our ability to act, and trust in the systems we have developed to manage issues that are brought to our attention.

We are currently undertaking work to review our existing complaints processes and support mechanisms to ensure they comply with both the requirements and spirit of new regulatory initiatives. This includes alignment with the recently established National Student Ombudsman and the impending National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence with its emphasis on intersectional discrimination and wrap-around support for students.

6. Support Services

UTS actively encourages any staff and students to seek help via our support services. These include:

- a UTS Security (24/7 emergency support)
- Employee Assistance Program
- UTS Counselling
- TalkCampus (2417 Crisis Student Support line)
- UTS Multi-faith Chaplaincy – as noted above we have recently reviewed and increased the number of Rabbis providing pastoral support to ensure support is provided to a diversity of Jewish students in the context of heightened global tensions and wellbeing concerns.

7. Measuring the effectiveness of our response

To measure the effectiveness of our response, we maintain ongoing and frequent engagement with Jewish student representatives and through other channels such as our Student Council Liaison group and regular informal meetings. This approach enables us to provide timely feedback on the actions taken by the university. Our responses are generally received positively by those students and other stakeholders.

We still have more to do, particularly as the ongoing conflict continues to trigger unrest in our community here in Australia. At all times, we have aimed to be very clear about the actions we have taken in response to concerns, including explanations as to when we have not taken action.