

21 January 2025

Charlotte Fletcher  
Committee Secretary  
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Fletcher

**Questions on Notice responses from Group of Eight Chief Executive, Vicki Thomson**  
**Parliamentary inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities**

Please find below responses to the Questions on Notice as requested by the Committee.

The Questions on Notice request referenced “the recent adoption” of a Go8 definition of antisemitism. It is important to note that the Go8 **has not adopted a definition of antisemitism**. Instead, the Go8 responded to a direct request from the Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism (ASECA) to develop a draft, working definition that is potentially suitable for use in an Australian university context. This work was completed late in 2024, after which it was taken to the Go8 Board of Directors for consideration. At a meeting held on the 4 December 2024:

- The Board endorsed the draft, working definition.
- The Board agreed to progress it back through their own institutional processes as a matter of priority; and
- The Board agreed to undertake a review of the definition and its applicability after 12 months, with a report to be provided back to ASECA.

It is important to acknowledge that the development of a Go8-endorsed working definition is not the end of the process, but the first step. The Go8 has undertaken the work to develop a draft working definition that also meets the threshold of being able to be operationalised within an Australian university context. However, that definition now has to be considered by each individual member university to determine whether and how it could work within their individual context – in concert with their existing processes, procedures, policies, regulations and so on.

## Questions on Notice

### **(1) What steps were taken to consult a diversity of Jewish staff and students, recognising the range of views and experiences, and that some don't identify as Zionist.**

Following the request of the ASECA, the Go8 assembled two working groups to leverage the expertise across our membership: one focused on developing a draft working definition, and the other focused on appropriate training packages.

The **Go8 Definition Working Group** comprised experts in hate speech and discrimination law, academic policy and regulatory context and social cohesion. The group consulted with the ASECA and her office and Jewish members of the Go8 community.

In addition to these, the Go8 also met with – and continues to engage with – community groups and leaders in the development of this working definition. These have included the Jewish Council of Australia (JCA), Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) and Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network (APAN).

In December 2024 the working definition was shared with the APAN, JCA, AUJS, Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), TEQSA and the National Student Ombudsman as well as the Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights.

### **(2) Were any Palestinians consulted, given what we know about certain definitions being used, in other settings, to silence Palestinian voices?**

The focus of this particular process has been on antisemitism, because antisemitism has been the specific focus of this parliamentary inquiry, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee inquiry into the Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024 and of the request made of us by the ASECA.

The Go8 has met with the Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network (APAN) and will continue to engage.

Go8 member universities also have a range of policies and procedures targeting all forms of discrimination and vilification. For example:

- All Go8 members have codes of conduct to which students and staff are required to adhere.
- Four members are signatories to the Australian Human Rights Commission Racism It Stops With Me campaign. (ANU, Monash, Melbourne, Queensland)
- Three members have published an anti-racism statement or commitment (Monash, Sydney, Melbourne) and one member has committed to do so (Queensland)
- The University of Melbourne has launched an Anti-Racism Action Plan (August 2024) detailing the steps it will take to combat racism on its campuses.
- Monash has committed to provide \$1 million over a two-year period to support an action-based programme to investigate the nature and experience of antisemitism, islamophobia and related prejudice and develop programmes to support social cohesion.

**(3) Given the significant implications for Go8 universities adopting the definition how did they consult with, amongst others, the NTEU, student bodies, and a broad range of relevant organisations such as the Jewish Council?**

The Go8 has engaged with a variety of community and university groups and leaders in the development of this working definition, as outlined in our response to question 1 above.

However, as noted in our introduction, the development of a draft, working definition is the start of the process, not the end of one. Each university member is now in the process of considering the draft working definition through their institutional processes, some of which will include the opportunity for further student and staff consultation.

Yours Sincerely

VICKI THOMSON  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE