

## **Sydney Jewish Museum - Statement for Senate Inquiry into Antisemitism on Australian university campuses**

The word 'Antisemitism' has appeared regularly in the Australian media since the massacres carried out by Hamas in southern Israel on 7 October 2024. Sadly, those events have come to exert a negative influence on Australian society with an increase in both antisemitism and Islamophobia in our own country.

Often, antisemitism is perceived as religious intolerance. However, in its most simple definition, Antisemitism is a form of racism. It has been expressed in different ways with varying levels of intensity through millennia, but at its root are long-established tropes, libels, and conspiracy theories. History shows that antisemitism flourishes in times of political or social upheaval, while at other times it has sat apparently dormant. In the decades immediately after the Holocaust, Jewish people generally felt a level of unprecedented tolerance, particularly in the West, but antisemitism never fully disappeared.

In recent times antisemitism has arisen with a new visibility in countries around the world, as democracy and the post-war world order faces serious challenges. Even some of the most seemingly liberal and inclusive societies such as Australia are now showing significant spikes in both antisemitic attitudes and incidents.

The Sydney Jewish Museum (SJM) educates approximately 35 000 students per year from across New South Wales and across diverse school systems and cultural and religious backgrounds. Our mission is to engage these students in an examination of Jewish culture, the contribution of the Jewish community to the Australian landscape, and through a focus on the Holocaust, the dangers of racism, prejudice and antisemitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry.

By studying the historical development of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students are able to make the essential connection between history and the moral choices that they confront. Through teaching about the Holocaust, our programs aim to raise ethical questions, praise rescuers as models of behaviour and help students find sources of strength, hope, resilience, identity and renewal.

The Holocaust stands out as one of the defining moments of history that has shaped the conscience of humanity. It was unique in its roots, implementation and envisioned totality. Using best practice and innovative content and methodology, the education offered at the SJM is designed to emphasise the positive lessons to be learned from a world where all definitions of right, wrong, legal and illegal were distorted, undermined and found to be meaningless.

From educating about this chapter in history and racism in general, we aim to break down any barriers that may exist and to strengthen the fabric of our multicultural communities and Australian society, to create communities of respect and to open doors to a better understanding of human rights and to promote tolerance among individuals.

We are aware that the Sydney Jewish Museum has limited contact with tertiary student however, we are deeply concerned that former secondary school student visitors to the museum are now attending university campuses where they are exposed to inflammatory discourse, including simplistic slogans that take a simple view of highly nuanced issues and at times make use of long-established antisemitic tropes. We would encourage university campuses to reach out to education leaders like the SJM and look to develop new programs that ensure a continuum of understanding and tolerance from secondary through to tertiary education. Our expertise in this matter is recognised internationally and we would welcome the opportunity to assist the universities in finding a solution to these pressing problems.