

Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights: Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities

Representing the Voices of the Australian Indigenous Community

Date: 21 November 2024

Submitted by:

Introduction

This submission is made on behalf of Australian Indigenous community members who, while not directly affected by antisemitism, wish to stand in solidarity with Jewish students, staff, and academics facing discrimination at Australian universities. Many Indigenous voices remain unheard due to systemic barriers, and this submission seeks to contribute to an inclusive dialogue on human rights and equality in Australia.

We emphasise the parallels between the fight against antisemitism and the broader struggle against all forms of discrimination, including racism and prejudice faced by Indigenous Australians. By addressing antisemitism, we advance a more inclusive and equitable environment for all marginalised communities.

Key Concerns and Observations

1. Prevalence and Nature of Antisemitic Activity

- Antisemitism, like racism, is rooted in ignorance and perpetuated by systemic inequities. Reports from Jewish students and staff reveal a disturbing rise in both overt and covert antisemitic behaviour at universities. This includes verbal abuse, discriminatory graffiti, and exclusionary policies in student organisations.
- Indigenous community members recognise the shared experience of having cultural identity dismissed or vilified, creating a sense of alienation and fear within educational institutions.

2. University Frameworks for Prevention and Response

- Many university policies fail to address antisemitism adequately. Institutions often lack specific provisions for educating students about antisemitism or responding effectively to incidents.
- Indigenous Australians have experienced similar gaps in frameworks addressing racism, leading to underreporting and unresolved cases. Universities must adopt more robust mechanisms to prevent discrimination and ensure the safety of all.

3. Effectiveness and Adequacy of Existing Frameworks

- Current anti-discrimination frameworks are often reactive rather than proactive, addressing incidents only after harm has occurred. There is a need for educational initiatives promoting cultural sensitivity, historical awareness, and respect for diversity.

- Indigenous experiences show that a failure to address these gaps erodes trust in institutional processes and discourages reporting of incidents.

4. Support for Victims

- Victims of antisemitism often report feeling unsupported by university administrations. Providing accessible mental health resources, legal advice, and advocacy is essential.
- Drawing from Indigenous experiences, support systems must also focus on community-building to counter feelings of isolation and alienation.

5. International Best Practices

- Australia can learn from international examples, such as the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism by several countries, which provides a clear framework for identifying and addressing antisemitism.
- Indigenous communities support incorporating global best practices into policies while ensuring they are tailored to Australia's unique multicultural context.

6. Policy and Regulatory Changes

- Universities should mandate cultural sensitivity training for all students and staff, focusing on the intersectionality of discrimination.
- Policies must enforce zero tolerance for antisemitic actions, with clear consequences for offenders.
- Institutions should establish independent bodies to oversee discrimination cases, ensuring impartiality and accountability.

7. Other Relevant Matters

- Indigenous Australians recognise that combating antisemitism strengthens broader efforts to create inclusive universities where all students, regardless of background, can thrive.
- Universities should foster platforms for collaboration between diverse communities, promoting mutual understanding and solidarity.

Recommendations

1. Develop Comprehensive Policies

- Include clear definitions of antisemitism and other forms of discrimination in university charters and policies.
- Establish mandatory reporting and accountability systems for incidents of antisemitism.

2. Promote Education and Awareness

- Introduce programmes to educate students and staff about Jewish history, culture, and the impact of antisemitism.

- Embed anti-discrimination training into curricula, emphasising intersectionality.

3. Provide Victim Support

- Allocate resources for counselling, legal support, and advocacy for victims of antisemitism.
- Create inclusive spaces for affected individuals to share their experiences and find solidarity.

4. Adopt International Best Practices

- Utilise frameworks like the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism to guide university policies.
- Benchmark against international universities that have successfully addressed antisemitism.

5. Engage Diverse Communities

- Foster dialogue and partnerships between Jewish, Indigenous, and other marginalised communities to combat discrimination collectively.
- Establish advisory panels with representation from various communities to guide university policies.

Conclusion

Australian Indigenous communities share a profound understanding of the impacts of discrimination and stand with Jewish students, staff, and academics in calling for safer, more inclusive universities. Addressing antisemitism is not just a step towards justice for Jewish communities but a stride towards a fairer and more equitable society for all.

We urge the committee to consider these recommendations and ensure that the voices of all marginalised communities are amplified and protected.

Contact Details:

Confidentiality Request:

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