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Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights
PO Box 6100
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Go8 Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities

As I outlined at the Committee hearing of 29 November 2024, the rise of antisemitism globally and in Australia since 7 October 2023 has been shocking and our universities have not been immune to this rise and the breakdown in social cohesion more broadly.

Whilst we recognise that this is a broad societal issue, in no way can we ignore the fact that, as leading universities we have a responsibility to ensure respectful disagreement in a safe and secure context which does not impinge upon free speech. This has not always occurred and, as I informed the Committee on 29 November 2024, while we did have long standing policies and procedures in place to address racism on campus and support impacted students and staff, clearly these weren't sufficient in a period of heightened tension.

We have recognised the need to better understand, be better equipped and take necessary action in both preventing and responding to antisemitism on campus. Our universities are taking proactive steps to reexamine, update and implement policies and procedures where necessary. Some of these include:

- Development and commitment to clear principles regarding demonstrations on campus;
- Undertaking revisions to regulations with regard to prohibiting encampments;
- Revising student complaint procedures;
- Ensuring clear communications with university communities regarding expectations of staff and student behaviour;
- Improving dialogue with student and community groups; and
- Sharing of best practice.

I welcome the opportunity to outline in this submission some of these steps in more detail.

Please note that The Go8 consents to this submission being published in full.



Executive Summary and Recommendation

- The Go8 acknowledges the findings of and evidence given to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs inquiry into the *Commission of Inquiry into Antisemitism at Australian Universities Bill 2024 (no.2)* and has worked – in part with the Australian Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism (ASECA) and her office – to address the concerns of our Jewish students and staff. We also commit to continuing engagement in recognition that responses will need to evolve in relation to a changing context.
- While we recognise that antisemitism on campus partly reflects a broader societal issue, we are cognisant of the fact that as Australia’s leading research-intensive universities, educating the professionals and leaders of the future – the Go8 has a responsibility to work closely with Government to address all forms of racism.
- Go8 universities are committed to doing our part – and have undertaken a range of initiatives at both a collective and institutional level, as outlined in this submission and in the evidence provided at the public hearing on the 29 November 2024.
- **Recommendation 1:** . That the Committee note the efforts of the Go8 in actively responding to the concerns of Jewish students and staff, the ASECA and other stakeholder groups, and our commitment to ongoing improvement.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the Committee recognise this work as our contribution to a suite of broader initiatives that are needed across Australian society, including schools, the media, and other key sectors and led by Government to address issues of social cohesion in broader society.

The Go8 reiterates upfront that we reject all forms of hate and prejudice, including antisemitism, which are absolutely unacceptable and put Australia’s social cohesion as a nation at risk.

The Scanlon Research Institute *Mapping Social Cohesion 2024* report notes that, while social cohesion has remained steady over the last 12 months, it is sitting around six points lower than its average during the 2010s and at its equal lowest since the first *Mapping Social Cohesion* survey in 2007.¹

This speaks to the increased complexity of the environment in which our universities are operating and in which this inquiry is taking place. This is not to deflect from our role in helping to build and maintain social cohesion – a role we take very seriously – but to recognise that Australia in 2024 is not the Australia of past decades and is facing increased domestic and international pressures.

¹ James O’Donnell, Qing Guan and Trish Prentice, *Mapping Social Cohesion*, Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2024, <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion-2024>



This is not just our view. It is also reflected in comments by Mike Burgess, Director-General of ASIO, who said that “there is increased temperature in our security environment and inappropriate behaviour that is being normalised”.² We were also alarmed by his assessment that “‘all’ of the nation’s most recent terror cases ‘were allegedly perpetrated by young people’, including one as young as 14”.³ With most domestic students commencing university at around the age of 18 or older, that means that they have had five or more years in which to become radicalized or impacted before they ever set foot on a university campus.

Go8 universities have long had policies, procedures and other instruments in place to make clear our values and manage incidents of discrimination, vilification, racism and other unacceptable behaviours. What has become clear since the events of 7 October 2023 is that the context in which these instruments operate has shifted. To that end, we and our member universities have undertaken a range of initiatives to address and redress this situation, some of which are outlined in this submission against the terms of reference.

We note the evidence provided by some parties at that hearing that universities have not taken any or only minimal action to address incidents of antisemitism on campus. We offer this submission and our own appearance at that hearing as evidence that this is not the case. This is not to say that we consider it job done – we recognise this to be a complex issue that will take ongoing effort to address – but do not believe this to be an accurate representation.

As the Go8 Chief Executive I was asked during the hearing as to what might be considered a successful outcome of addressing antisemitism and other forms of racism on campus. This is a highly pertinent and important question, but also a complex one. Ideally, it would mean a campus on which all staff and students are safe and enabled to conduct rigorous debate which – while it might be by its nature uncomfortable – does not result in harassment, discrimination, or other unacceptable behaviours. While this may well be our goal, it would be naïve to assume this can be achieved easily or quickly.

The work that the Go8 has undertaken to date and will continue to undertake – as outlined in this submission and in our evidence given on the 29 November – is the start. By establishing a definition of antisemitism that can be adopted across our membership, supported by targeted training, we can increase awareness and strategies to manage antisemitism when it occurs on campus. The Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation submission to the *Commission of Inquiry* noted that “Antisemitism is a maker of social discord, and when Jews are targeted, it is a harbinger of increased prejudice against other religious, ethnic, and other minority groups”.⁴ This suggests that different forms of discrimination may be linked, and that strategies developed to combat antisemitism may also, if only indirectly, assist to address other forms of racism or discrimination.

However, it is also critical to realise that this social discord is not limited to Australian university campuses. While the Go8 is committed to taking action within our own domain, this must be supported by broader initiatives across schools, the media, and other key components of broader society and led by Government.

² ABC *Insiders*, 11 August 2024

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-10-11/asio-chief-warns-about-social-media-role-radicalisation-children/104461708>

⁴

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/AntisemitismBill/Submissions



Go8 Developed Working Definition of Antisemitism and Training Packages

As outlined in my evidence to the Committee on 29 November, the Go8 has worked with the ASECA on two major pieces of work:

- The development of a working definition of antisemitism applicable to an Australian university context; and
- The development of antisemitism training packages for university leaders and front-line staff involved in student conduct and complaints and student safety and wellbeing.

Definition

I am pleased to confirm the Go8 Board has now considered and endorsed a working definition of antisemitism, as provided to the Committee in my letter of the 10 December 2024. The definition has also been shared with stakeholder groups including the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS), the Jewish Council of Australia (JCA) and the Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network (APAN).

It will now be progressed by Go8 universities through their own institutional consideration and approval processes as a matter of priority, ahead of the commencement of 1 Semester 2025.

The development of this working definition has been challenging and complex. We recognise there are a diversity of views across the community. Any definition – in and of itself – can only work as a tool to assist in developing a shared and common understanding of how antisemitism can manifest on a 21st century Australian campus, and as such, will need to be flexible to accommodate changing circumstances. This is why we are calling it a working definition – it is not a case of ‘set and forget’.

We acknowledge that the preferred position of the Special Envoy is for universities to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition; however, a number of our members raised concerns regarding the implications of IHRA for academic freedom. Instead, we have taken the approach – as noted in my letter – of consulting widely with experts in hate speech and discrimination law, and with select eminent members of the Jewish community. The definition we have crafted is both guided by the IHRA definition and captures the essence of IHRA while addressing the practical concerns of our member universities. We have heard the calls from our Jewish students and staff for urgent action, and have chosen to take an approach of not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good.

The Go8 working definition represents our best efforts to achieve the delicate balance between adopting a definition that captures the essence of IHRA and can be operationalised in a university setting, while upholding academic freedom and associated obligations.

This is an iterative process, and at the request of the Envoy, the applicability of the definition to the Australian university context will be reviewed with a report back to ASECA.



It has been raised with us during stakeholder consultations that the Australian Government formally endorsed the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism in 2021. However, we also note the evidence provided to the Committee on the 12 December by Mr Robert French AC, Chancellor of the University of Western Australia, that the definition is "non-legally-binding working definition" and the need to be clear about what "adoption" in the context of adoption by universities would mean.⁵

The Go8 working definition has been developed to provide guidance in education and training within a university setting. The Government may wish to examine the role of a definition in a legal context as a way of demonstrating leadership and guidance. We note that Mr Robert French has provided comments to the Committee regarding an operational definition of antisemitic conduct suitable for use in a law or an enforceable rule of conduct.⁶

Training Packages

We have also made significant progress on the development of antisemitism training packages as outlined to the inquiry.

Under the leadership of the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University, the Go8 has developed and agreed to implement **training packages** for university leaders and frontline staff in student-facing roles. This training is guided by real case studies gathered from across the Go8 to ensure its relevance.

The first pilot was rolled out on Thursday, 5 December and the second, to senior leadership from across the Go8 network, was held on Monday, 9 December. Feedback from these two sessions will now be collated and assessed with a view to a nationwide roll out in February 2025.

Terms of Reference

University frameworks for the prevention of, and response to, antisemitism at universities, including rules, policies and other measures introduced to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students, staff and academics; and

The effectiveness and adequacy of those frameworks.

Universities actively engage in combatting antisemitism and other forms of racism through statutory obligations, relevant clauses in Enterprise Agreements, internal policies, university regulations and bylaws, staff and student codes of conduct, and other policies and initiatives.

Statutory provisions include the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) and the racial hatred provisions of ss18c and D, as well as relevant state anti-discrimination law with its own anti-vilification provisions in criminal law. The Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act, for example, is separate from the anti-discrimination legislation (Equal Opportunity Act) and has both civil and criminal prohibitions.

⁵ Hansard, PJCHR, Thursday 12 December 2024, p.24,

https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/commjnt/28661/toc_pdf/Human%20Rights%20Joint%20Committee%202024%2012%2012.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22committees/commjnt/28661/0000%22

⁶ Letter of Mr Robert French to the Chair of the PJCHR, 13 December 2024.



Universities are obliged to comply with relevant provisions of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (Cth), including s19.115 requiring higher education providers to have policies upholding freedom of speech and academic freedom, implemented both in Enterprise Agreements and in internal policy. Several jurisdictions also have human rights acts with which universities are obliged to comply.

The codes of conduct prohibit, and enable the university to take disciplinary action against, discrimination, intimidation, harassment, bullying and threatening behaviour, and which require staff and students to maintain high standards of behaviour.

In addition to these, and in response to the events of this year and concerns of our Jewish community, the Go8 has:

- Consulted with multiple stakeholders, including the APAN, JCA, AUJS in addition to the ASECA and our own internal Go8 Jewish students and staff. The Go8 will continue to engage with key stakeholders in the coming year as we refine and develop our approach.
- Co-authored and signed the **Berlin Statement**,⁷ which confirms the commitment of global research-intensive universities – such as the Go8 – to be places where the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom are cherished and upheld, but where racism in any of its forms, including antisemitism, are never tolerated. Our co-signatories include 168 of the world's university research powerhouses from the Russell Group in the UK, Association of American Universities, Canadian U15, League of European Research Universities, German U15 and the Japanese Research Universities 11.
- Affirmed the Go8 **Principles on Demonstrations on Campus**,⁸ outlining our commitment to maintaining the right to peaceful protest and freedom of expression, while rejecting all forms of hate, prejudice, racism and religious intolerance, including antisemitism.

Individual initiatives amongst our member universities include (noting the following list is not exhaustive):

- The **Australian National University** has recently changed its policies to disallow encampments (sleeping or living outside of designated accommodation on university premises or affiliated colleges on campus is not permitted) and is currently reviewing its disciplinary policies and procedures.
- The **University of Adelaide** has changed its rules to restrict public access for protest purposes, posted signs on campus and communicated the policy to staff and students.
- The **University of Melbourne** recently amended its Property Policy to prohibit camping in university buildings or on its property. The University also has a SafeZone app which allows the user to share their location with the university security team to access rapid assistance; and the Speak Safety portal allows individuals to make complaints about inappropriate behaviour while remaining anonymous
- The **University of Queensland** has created a new position of Pro Vice Chancellor (Campus Culture and Leadership) to lead the development of the anti-racist commitment, to work with academic staff and liaise with student-facing services on campus. It has also updated its security protocols, in order to strengthen procedures and protocols to manage protests, demonstrations and encampments on campus.

⁷ https://go8.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2024-07_GRIUN_Berlin-Statement.pdf

⁸ <https://go8.edu.au/group-of-eight-principles-on-demonstrations-on-campus>



- The **University of Western Australia** has introduced two new policies: University Behaviour Policy and Procedures, developed to add context to the broader statements contained in the Code of Conduct; and a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy, which addresses discrimination and harassment and recognises the legal protections for anyone with a Protected Attribute including race, ethnicity, nationality, native language, and religion.
- **Monash University** has committed \$1 million over a two-year period to support an action-based research program to investigate specifically the nature and experience of antisemitism, islamophobia and related prejudice and develop and test programs and initiatives that support social cohesion on campus. Rolling recommendations to be made to the University.
- The **University of Sydney** Senate commissioned Mr Hodgkinson AM SC, a pre-eminent Senior Counsel in workplace health and safety, to review its policies and procedures following the end of the encampments earlier this year. The Hodgkinson Report has now been delivered. It acknowledges that the University has undertaken a number of initiatives in response, and makes recommendations which the university has accepted in principle and is now working on a blueprint for consultation and delivery.
- **UNSW Sydney** has this year, reviewed its Anti-Racism and Anti-Religious Vilification Policy and its Code of Conduct and Values.

The support provided to students, staff and academics experiencing antisemitism at universities:

Go8 universities offer a range of support services to students and staff experiencing antisemitism or discrimination, including on-campus escort services, counselling, mental health and psychological services, Employee Assistance programmes (staff), and procedures for academic consideration.

Recent initiatives in addition to these include:

- The University of Melbourne has introduced:
 - The University has introduced a fast-track response (via the free **SafeZone App**)⁹ in the event of an emergency. The app allows the user to quickly share their location and details with the University Security team who will be able to arrange the right assistance.
 - The **Snap Send Solve** free mobile app allows the user to report cleaning, maintenance or IT equipment issues on any University of Melbourne campus. The app allows the user to take a photo of a problem area on campus (e.g. offensive posters, stickers and graffiti on campus) with their mobile phone and send it directly to our campus support teams to be resolved.
 - Through the Safer Community Program, staff and students can also access the **Speak Safely Portal**¹⁰ which allows individuals to make complaints about different forms of inappropriate behaviour (in particular sexual assault and harassment) with the option of remaining anonymous, while preserving evidence.
- All of these programs (SafeZone app, Snap Send Solve and Speak Safely portal) are advertised on posters across campus with a QR code included to enable instant access.

⁹ <https://www.unimelb.edu.au/security/safezone>

¹⁰ <https://elker.com/portal/unimelb>



- Monash offers students its **bSafe app**, which offers access to 24/7 counselling services, emergency services on and off campus, security support (e.g. request urgent on-campus help or arrange an escort 24/7), disclose an incident, access support services at Monash, and get information such as step-by-step guides on how to access support.¹¹
- The University of Queensland has a single portal on their website that is open to anyone wishing to We have a single portal on our website that is open to anyone who wishes to register a complaint about UQ staff or students. Complaints are tracked, triaged and directed to the appropriate process. In the case of students, most complaints would be dealt with against the UQ Student Code of Conduct.¹² In the case of a complaint against a staff member, most complaints would be dealt with against the UQ Staff Code of Conduct.¹³ Disclosures can also be made to staff or supervisors, or through HR directly.
- Students at the University of Western Australia can use the Student Wellbeing team to raise concerns or be supported through making a report or complaint by self-referring through the Learning Management System, or can be referred directly by a staff member. Under the new University Behaviour Policy students can Report Inappropriate Behaviour and access further support information on the linked landing page.¹⁴

International experiences and best practices in dealing with antisemitic activity at universities:

The Go8, as Australia's leading research-intensive universities, is a member of the Global Research-Intensive Universities Network (GRIUN), a collaboration between the leading research intensive universities from the UK, US, Japan, Germany, Canada and across Europe.

The GRIUN met in Berlin in June. At this meeting it was clear that the issues confronting Australian campuses in 2024 have not occurred in isolation. As noted above, and under the leadership of the Go8, GRIUN crafted and co-signed the Berlin Statement, a document that recognises the global nature of these disruptions and the need for global leadership to address them. The Berlin Statement:

- Confirms the importance of standing fast to the principles of free and open inquiry and testing the boundaries of knowledge through rigorous, evidence-based research;
- Asserts the importance of an environment of robust civility, where ideas can be developed and debated, but where antisemitism, islamophobia and racism in any of its forms, as well as intimidation and harassment are never tolerated.

The Berlin Statement makes clear to the global community that freedom of speech and academic freedom, and the need to contest ideas – while critically important to the pursuit of knowledge – cannot be used as a smoke screen for unacceptable behaviours or for sowing division.

¹¹ <https://www.monash.edu/students/support/safety-security/bsafe-app>

¹² <https://policies.uq.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=145>

¹³ <https://policies.uq.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=91>

¹⁴ <https://www.uwa.edu.au/about/leadership-and-governance/integrity-and-standards/report-inappropriate-behaviour?undefined>



Conclusion

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate – as we did in our submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs inquiry – that while universities are a product and reflection of broader society, we are also anchor institutions with a responsibility to educate and shape future generations.

We must set an example on campus and for society - our universities must be places where people can agree or disagree well, where everyone is safe and welcome while maintaining freedom of speech and academic freedom.

The priority of Go8 universities has been and will always be the safety and wellbeing of our students and staff and I reiterate our strong commitment to eradicate antisemitism on campus and create a university environment free from racism in all its forms.

We offer this submission as evidence that we are actively working in concert with our university students and staff, stakeholder and community groups and seeking to harness our own expertise to respond to the concerns of our communities and improve our approach.

Yours sincerely

VICKI THOMSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE