Australian National Imams Council (ANIC)

Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security

Inquiry into the Nature and Drivers of Radicalisation in Australia

Date: 30 October 2026

Submitted by: Australian National Imams Council

Contact: office@anic.org.au

1. Executive summary

The Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry into the nature and drivers of radicalisation in Australia.

ANIC's position is unequivocal: terrorism, ideologically and politically motivated violence and violent extremism, incitement to violence and attacks against innocent people are unacceptable, regardless of the perpetrator's religion, race, ethnicity, ideology or claimed justification.

At the same time, ANIC rejects attempts to attribute the criminal conduct of individuals or organisations to an entire religion or community. Responsibility must be established through evidence of conduct, involvement or legal culpability, not inferred from religious identity, cultural background or incidental association.

ANIC's central submission is that pathways to radicalisation and violent extremism must be countered collectively, comprehensively and consistently, not selectively. Australia requires an approach that protects every community, addresses the full range of violent extremist threats, preserves lawful religious and political expression, and maintains confidence in the fairness of public institutions.

Faith and religious communities must not be treated as collectively responsible for individuals who claim to act in their name. Nor should religious identity become a substitute for evidence when assessing threats, communicating about criminal conduct or designing prevention policies.

ANIC draws on the experiences of Australian Muslims to illustrate these broader concerns. Its previous submissions have raised concerns about collective blame, religious hatred, hostile public commentary and the repeated association of an entire community with security threats. These experiences demonstrate why safeguards against collective suspicion must apply to all faith and religious communities.

The responsibility for prevention cannot rest solely with police, intelligence agencies, families or religious communities. Political leaders, media organisations, digital platforms, educational institutions and other influential bodies must also recognise their responsibilities for public safety and social cohesion.

ANIC therefore proposes a coordinated framework built on a collective national effort involving governments, law enforcement and security agencies, faith and community organisations, educators, families, media organisations and digital platforms. This framework should combine evidence-based enforcement, trusted early intervention, protection against hatred, responsible public communication, platform accountability and sustained investment in community capability.

Preventing violent extremism must be a shared responsibility across Australian society, not a burden placed disproportionately on any community.

2. ANIC's role and the basis of this submission

ANIC is a national religious and professional membership organisation representing Muslim Imams, Islamic scholars and Shaykhahs across Australia. Its work includes religious guidance, professional development, community advocacy, interfaith engagement and cooperation on matters affecting community wellbeing and safety.

ANIC makes this submission from its experience as a Muslim peak representative religious organisation, while advocating principles that should protect all Australians, regardless of their faith, belief or background.

Examples concerning the Australian Muslim community are included to illustrate the practical consequences of collective blame, religious hatred and inappropriate associations between faith and criminal conduct. ANIC does not suggest that these concerns are confined to Muslims or that every community experiences them in the same way.

Community concerns and reported incidents are presented as such. They should not be treated as population-wide statistical findings or findings of criminal guilt.

3. Understanding pathways to violent extremism

3.1 Distinguish pathways to violent extremism from religious commitment and lawful dissent

For this submission, ANIC uses "pathways to violent extremism" to distinguish the process of moving towards support for, preparation for or participation in extremist violence from merely holding unconventional, strongly expressed or controversial views.

A person's religious observance, conservative beliefs, political disagreement or desire for substantial social change must not, by itself, be treated as evidence of a security threat.

The relevant concern is an evidence-based connection to violence, the risk of violence or unlawful conduct associated with violent extremism. Risk assessments should be grounded in individual behaviour, credible evidence and context, rather than assumptions based on religious or community identity, lawful affiliation or incidental association. Shared beliefs, attendance at a place of worship, participation in a public event or ordinary social contact must not, by themselves, establish support for violence or involvement in unlawful conduct. Where associations are relevant to an assessment, their nature and significance should be examined through evidence, not presumed guilt.

This distinction does not prevent authorities from examining ideology where it is relevant. ANIC does not ask agencies to disregard evidence about an offender's motivations, recruitment networks or use of religious claims. It asks that those matters be attributed accurately to the individuals and organisations concerned, rather than to a faith or community as a whole.

3.2 Examine interacting influences without creating a community profile

ANIC supports an approach that examines the interaction of personal circumstances, social relationships, grievances, identity, exposure to propaganda and networks that encourage violence.

The Committee should examine how recruiters exploit these circumstances, rather than assume that any single experience predicts violent conduct. It should consider not only the grievances that extremist actors invoke, but also how they encourage individuals to regard violence as legitimate, necessary or personally meaningful.

Discrimination, disadvantage, grief, mental distress or social isolation must not be treated as automatic indicators of radicalisation. Neither should mental illness or disability become a substitute for individual assessment.

No grievance justifies violence. Equally, understanding how a grievance may be exploited is not the same as endorsing it or excusing criminal conduct.

3.3 Apply consistent standards across all threats

ANIC supports consistent attention to ideologically motivated violent extremism, white supremacist and neo-Nazi violence, violence motivated by racial or religious hatred, and violence arising from political, conspiratorial or mixed motivations.

ANIC calls for crimes and terrorist attacks to be publicly described by reference to the conduct involved and those responsible, rather than labelled in ways that associate criminality with a faith, religion or community.

Where perpetrators claim religious justification, their claims must not be presented as representative of that religion or its followers. Specific extremist motivations may be identified where relevant and supported by evidence, without attributing responsibility to an entire faith or community.

ANIC is concerned that collective suspicion and repeated stigmatisation may deepen feelings of isolation and exclusion, weaken a sense of belonging, and erode trust in public institutions. These experiences may create grievances that extremist actors seek to exploit, potentially contributing to pathways towards violent extremism. This does not mean that people experiencing discrimination or exclusion are likely to become violent, nor does it justify violence. Effective prevention must therefore strengthen inclusion, trust and equal treatment, rather than reinforce alienation and collective suspicion.

Consistency does not require identical expenditure or identical interventions for every threat. Resources should follow credible evidence about risk, seriousness and likely harm.

However, the standards used to identify, investigate, classify and communicate about threats must apply consistently, regardless of the religious, ethnic or political identity of the alleged perpetrator or the community targeted.

All forms of violent extremism must be confronted with equal resolve, and all communities must receive equal protection.

4. Religious hatred, collective blame and the targeting of communities

4.1 Religious hatred is a community safety concern

Hatred directed towards people because of their actual or perceived religious identity must be recognised within Australia's approach to community safety and the prevention of violence.

This includes Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, antisemitism and hostility directed towards people of other faiths or beliefs. The appropriate response should depend on the conduct, the seriousness of the threat, and the applicable legal threshold, not on the identity of those affected.

Faith communities must be recognised as potential targets of violence and intimidation, as well as partners in preventing harm.

The Committee should examine threats against religious communities, organised intimidation, dehumanising narratives and the environments in which hostility is encouraged. It should also examine whether affected individuals and institutions have effective access to protection, reporting channels and remedies.

ANIC seeks protection for people, not immunity for religious ideas or institutions from lawful criticism. Religious disagreement, theological debate and legitimate scrutiny must remain distinct from threats, harassment and unlawful vilification.

4.2 How discussions of radicalisation can create collective suspicion

The concern is not that radicalisation should remain unexamined. ANIC supports serious scrutiny of violent extremism and cooperation to prevent it.

The concern is that public discussion can shift from the conduct of particular individuals to suspicion of an entire faith or community. Religious, ethnic or cultural identity can become the focus of the conversation, overshadowing the diversity, everyday lives and contributions of people who have no connection to the conduct in question.

No community should be required to repeatedly demonstrate its loyalty or answer for crimes committed by individuals with whom its members have no connection.

Religious leaders may choose to condemn violence as an expression of their principles and responsibilities. Such condemnation must not be treated as acceptance that their community bears collective responsibility for the conduct.

Language and terminology matter, particularly when identifying and describing acts of hate, violence and extremism. The words and labels used must be accurate, consistent, and carefully considered to ensure that the actions of individuals are not attributed to an entire faith, religion, or community. The Australian Muslim community has repeatedly borne the brunt of this, particularly when individuals accused of committing crimes have a perceived or actual connection to Islam or Muslims. In such cases, Muslims are too often treated with suspicion, subjected to collective blame, and expected to answer for the actions of individuals. Crimes must be identified and described consistently, without selectively associating them with particular religious or cultural identities. The actions of individuals must never be used to stigmatise an entire community, fuel prejudice, or undermine social cohesion.

4.3 Reject guilt by association without obstructing legitimate scrutiny

Attendance at a place of worship, participation in an educational event or contact with a religious leader does not, without further evidence, establish that an institution or leader encouraged an individual's conduct.

The same principle applies to families, schools, charities and community organisations.

Where credible evidence establishes involvement in unlawful conduct, it should be investigated. Religious status must not provide protection from legitimate scrutiny. Equally, incidental association must not substitute for evidence.

Protection from religious hatred is a fundamental right that must be upheld equally for all Australians. Every community deserves safety, dignity, and respect.

4.4 Experiences of Australian Muslims illustrate these concerns

ANIC's previous submissions provide examples of the concerns the Australian Muslim community continues to raise.

Its May 2026 submission to the Royal Commission [i] highlighted reported threats against mosques and Islamic institutions across Australia, including threats of violence, intimidation, and references to attacks similar to the Christchurch massacre. These threats have affected mosques, Islamic centres, schools, community facilities and community members, raising serious concerns about the safety and security of Muslim communities and their places of worship.

The same submission raised concerns about Muslim women wearing the hijab being subjected to verbal abuse, and Muslims being labelled as terrorists or encountering hostility in everyday settings.

It also recorded community concerns that Muslims, particularly young people, feel their identity and belonging are repeatedly questioned in discussions about security and national identity.

These examples are relevant not because one community should receive exceptional treatment, but because they illustrate the need for safeguards that protect every community from religious hatred, collective suspicion and guilt by association.

5. Language matters: terminology, titles, headlines and religious symbols

5.1 Describe the threat without assigning guilt to a faith

ANIC recommends nationally consistent guidance for language concerning terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism.

Criminal acts should be attributed to the people and organisations responsible, rather than described in ways that make a religion or its followers appear collectively culpable.

Where an organisation claims religious justification, public communication should identify the organisation, its conduct and the evidence of its claimed motivation. It should not present the organisation's interpretation as the position of an entire faith or community.

ANIC has raised this concern in relation to labels such as "Islamic terrorism" or "Muslim terrorism". The principle applies equally to terminology concerning any other religion or community. ANIC strongly rejects the use of terms such as "Islamic terrorism", "Islamic extremism" and "Muslim terrorism" when describing acts of violence, terrorism or criminal conduct committed by individuals or organisations who claim an association with Islam.

Islam is a faith that upholds the sanctity of human life, justice, compassion and the prohibition of unlawful violence against innocent people. Terrorism, violence and the deliberate targeting of innocent civilians are contrary to these fundamental Islamic teachings and principles.

ANIC maintains that terrorism and violent extremism must never be attributed to Islam or any other religion. Such terminology creates a misleading association between a faith

followed by billions of peaceful people and the criminal actions of individuals or organisations who seek to misuse religious identity to justify violence.

ANIC has also consistently raised serious concerns about the use of terminology such as "religiously motivated violent extremism" and has repeatedly called for its replacement with more accurate and appropriate terms, such as "politically motivated violent extremism" or "ideologically motivated violent extremism". The continued use of religiously framed terminology risks associating violence and terrorism with religious identity rather than the criminal ideology, motivations and conduct of perpetrators. This has particularly serious consequences for the Australian Muslim community and faith communities, which continue to experience suspicion, negative stereotyping and collective blame when acts of violence are associated with Islam or faith.

ANIC is further concerned that the continued use of such terminology creates an environment in which the Australian Muslim community may continue to bear the brunt of public suspicion, hostility and collective blame, even following acts of violence perpetrated by individuals who have no connection whatsoever to Islam or the Muslim community. The repeated association of religion, particularly Islam, with terrorism and violent extremism risks establishing a broader public perception in which Muslims are viewed through a security lens, regardless of the identity, ideology or motivations of the actual perpetrators. This unfairly places the Muslim community under suspicion for crimes with which it has no association and reinforces harmful misconceptions, contributes to Islamophobia and undermines social cohesion, community trust and the fundamental principle that individuals, not entire faith communities, must be held accountable for criminal conduct.

Those who commit acts of terrorism or violent extremism must be held individually accountable for their crimes. They should not be afforded the legitimacy, religious recognition or credibility that may arise from describing their actions as "Islamic" or "religious". Perpetrators of violence do not deserve the privilege of having their crimes associated with, or presented as representative of, a religion whose teachings they violate.

The use of such terminology risks granting violent individuals and organisations the very religious legitimacy they seek to claim. It can also amplify their propaganda, reinforce their false narratives and contribute to the misconception that their actions are religiously sanctioned.

ANIC is particularly concerned that the Australian Muslim community has repeatedly borne the consequences of this language. When individuals accused of terrorism or

serious criminal conduct have an actual or perceived connection to Islam, their religious identity can become a defining feature of public commentary. Muslims are then too often subjected to suspicion, collective blame and expectations that they condemn or explain crimes for which they bear no responsibility.

This approach places an unfair burden on Australian Muslims, contributes to the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, and risks exposing mosques, Islamic institutions, religious leaders and ordinary community members to hostility, intimidation and threats.

No Australian should be treated as responsible for the actions of another person simply because they share the same faith, cultural background or religious identity.

Titles, policy headings, briefing materials and training resources should distinguish between a religion and those who misuse it.

Where motive remains under investigation, official statements should say so. Uncertainty should not be replaced by speculation based on a person's name, appearance or background.

5.2 Religious language and symbols require context

Sacred expressions, religious clothing, scriptural quotations and historical symbols should not, in isolation, be treated as evidence of support for terrorism or violent extremism.

The misuse of a religious symbol by an extremist organisation or individuals must not automatically deprive an entire faith community of its legitimate religious expression.

For example, ANIC's July 2023 submission to this Committee raised concerns about the misappropriation of Islamic expressions and symbols by ISIS.[ii] It warned against conflating widely used religious expressions with support for that organisation, and identified the risk of confusion, prejudice and inappropriate restrictions. ANIC's position on ISIS has always been clear and unequivocal. ISIS is an evil, dangerous terrorist organisation whose ideology, actions and atrocities are fundamentally contrary to the teachings and principles of Islam. ANIC categorically rejects any attempt by ISIS to claim religious legitimacy or represent Islam and Muslims.[iii]

This illustrates a broader need for religious literacy in risk assessment, school referrals, policing and automated content moderation.

ANIC recommends access to qualified religious and linguistic expertise where context is material. Assessments should consider the complete communication, accurate translation, surrounding conduct and any demonstrated connection to unlawful activity.

This is not a proposed exemption for terrorist or extremist propaganda. It is a safeguard against confusing ordinary religious expression with such propaganda.

6. Responsibilities of political leaders and public institutions

Political leaders and public institutions should condemn violence consistently, reject collective blame, distinguish verified facts from allegations and avoid presenting religious or ethnic communities as collective threats.

ANIC recommends that parliamentary standards and government communication guidance expressly address these responsibilities.

Following a serious incident, leaders should express sympathy for victims, support a lawful investigation, and make it clear that collective blame and retaliation against innocent people are unacceptable. Statements should avoid premature conclusions about motive or institutional involvement.

Political debate concerning security, immigration, international conflicts or religion should not portray an entire community as disloyal, dangerous or incompatible with Australian society.

Where a public statement contains a material factual error or an unsupported allegation against a community institution, there should be a timely and appropriately prominent correction.

Political leaders and parties should establish transparent processes for responding to discriminatory generalisations and serious misinformation by their representatives.

Responsibility must also apply to religious leaders and community representatives. ANIC accepts that religious leaders and community representatives should exercise care in public statements, consider the impact of their words and reject language that could reasonably be understood as endorsing harm or violence. This is consistent with ANIC's documented expectations of responsible religious leadership.

Public leadership should allow disagreement without turning communities against one another or undermining social harmony.

7. Responsibilities of media organisations and public commentators

ANIC supports independent journalism, freedom of speech, scrutiny of public institutions, and the reporting of matters that genuinely affect public safety.

It does not seek protection from investigation or criticism. It seeks accuracy, fair attribution and consistent standards for all communities.

The Committee should recommend that relevant media standards bodies and industry organisations review guidance on terrorism, violent extremism, religious identity and collective blame.

That guidance should apply to headlines, photographs, thumbnails, captions, broadcasts, podcasts and social media summaries, not merely the body of an article.

Images of unrelated places of worship, religious symbols, leaders or congregations should not imply involvement in an incident. Where serious allegations concern a religious leader, institution or community organisation, a reasonable opportunity to respond should be provided, subject to legitimate urgency and public-interest considerations.

Corrections should address both the original presentation and the reach of inaccurate or misleading reporting, including misleading headlines, social media posts, and the inappropriate use of images, religious symbols, expressions, places of worship or other religious imagery that associate criminals and terrorists with a particular faith or religious community. Such representations can reinforce harmful stereotypes, fuel religious hatred and prejudice, and unfairly attribute the actions of individuals to an entire faith or community. Corrections must be equally prominent, clearly communicated and proportionate to the reach and impact of the original reporting.

Publishers should maintain effective processes for addressing threats and targeted harassment in comment sections under their control, while preserving legitimate discussion.

These standards should apply equally to influential online commentators, social media content creators and established news organisations. Responses to harmful or misleading content must be fair, consistent and proportionate, with clear distinctions between professional accountability, platform rules, civil remedies and criminal offences.

Enforcement must focus on the conduct involved rather than selectively targeting or stigmatising any particular faith or community. This is particularly important given the ongoing experiences of the Australian Muslim community, which continues to bear the

brunt of unfair scrutiny, negative stereotyping, collective blame and the association of Islam with terrorism and violent extremism. No community should be subjected to different standards of accountability or treated with suspicion because of its religious identity. The same principles of fairness, responsibility and equal treatment must apply to all Australians.

8. Online hate, violent extremist content and platform accountability

8.1 Examine both recruitment and targeting

The Committee's examination of online radicalisation should address both the recruitment of people into extremist violence and the targeting of communities through threats, intimidation and organised hatred.

ANIC recommends a proportionate accountability framework covering social media, video-sharing services, gaming-related services and messaging providers according to their functions and demonstrated risks.

Online threats against one faith community must be treated with the same seriousness as equivalent threats against another. Religious hatred should not be overlooked because it is directed at a community that is itself frequently discussed in national security debates.

At the same time, criticism of religion, political disagreement or offensive expression must not automatically be classified as extremist and terrorist content.

8.2 Make reporting usable and responses proportionate

Individuals and institutions facing credible threats need accessible reporting, acknowledgement and escalation pathways.

ANIC recommends designated escalation arrangements for serious threats against places of worship, schools and community facilities. Providers should preserve relevant evidence where lawful, communicate meaningful outcomes where possible and cooperate with competent authorities in accordance with legal requirements.

Coordinated harassment and the malicious publication of personal information should be addressed through appropriate platform, civil or criminal mechanisms, depending on the conduct and applicable thresholds.

9. Protecting children and young people, including in gaming environments

ANIC supports a child-safeguarding approach that recognises both the seriousness of extremist recruitment and the developmental needs of children.

The Committee should examine movement between public content, gaming communities, private groups and messaging services, including the points at which children can obtain assistance or providers can intervene safely.

Recommended measures include age-appropriate safety settings, effective reporting, proportionate moderation, support for parents and educators, and specialist responses to grooming, coercion and threats.

Digital literacy should teach young people to recognise manipulation, check sources, resist dehumanising narratives and seek help. It should also support young people who experience religious or identity-based abuse, rather than presenting them only as potential subjects of radicalisation.

Schools and community organisations should receive guidance distinguishing safeguarding concerns from ordinary religious practice, political interest and adolescent exploration.

A child should not receive a security label simply for becoming more observant, for discussing an overseas conflict, or for expressing an unpopular view.

Support should involve families where safe and appropriate, while recognising that some children need independent assistance.

ANIC recommends that children's and young people's perspectives inform program design. Disability or mental health needs should prompt appropriate support and individual assessment, not presumptions of dangerousness.

10. Religious freedom, democratic participation and international conflicts

ANIC recommends that political and religious expression be assessed in context, rather than through isolated words or assumptions about the speaker.

The Committee should affirm that lawful sermons, theological discussion, peaceful protest, criticism of governments and humanitarian advocacy are not, by themselves, evidence of violent radicalisation or violent extremism.

People should be able to express grief, concern and lawful political views about events overseas without being presumed to support violence or violent extremism. Their religious or cultural identity must not determine whether those expressions are treated as legitimate.

One example raised in ANIC's previous submissions concerns Australians expressing humanitarian concern or advocating for Palestinian rights. ANIC has expressed concerns that such advocacy is being mischaracterised, including among people with family connections to conflict-affected regions.

The legitimacy of a political cause does not excuse threats, unlawful incitement or the targeting of others. Equally, the existence of extremist actors claiming a cause must not discredit everyone advocating peacefully on that issue.

Assessment frameworks should consider complete statements, reliable translations, surrounding conduct and applicable legal thresholds.

Social cohesion should not require silence about injustice or agreement with government policy. It should provide the conditions in which Australians can disagree lawfully, safely and with mutual respect.

11. Equal protection, civil remedies and legal safeguards

11.1 Preserve the distinction between different forms of harm

ANIC supports the use of appropriate civil remedies to address unlawful vilification, while maintaining a clear distinction between civil and criminal offences. Criminal penalties should focus on serious conduct, particularly incitement to violence, threats and other forms of criminal behaviour. Civil remedies should provide proportionate and effective responses, including the removal of harmful material, enforceable undertakings, public apologies and compensation where appropriate. This approach ensures accountability while safeguarding freedom of speech and expression, protecting fundamental rights, and preventing the unnecessary criminalisation of conduct that is better addressed through civil processes.

Criminal enforcement should address conduct meeting criminal thresholds. Accessible civil remedies should address unlawful discrimination and vilification. Education, professional standards, community engagement and proportionate platform measures should address other harmful conduct where appropriate.

A call for stronger protection against religious hatred must not become an indiscriminate call to criminalise offensive opinions or legitimate disagreement.

11.2 Audit protection and enforcement

ANIC recommends an independent assessment of whether Commonwealth, state and territory arrangements adequately protect people targeted because of actual or perceived religious identity.

That assessment should distinguish discrimination, vilification, threats, incitement, hate-motivated offences and terrorism. It should examine gaps in both legal coverage and practical access to remedies.

The question should not be limited to whether offences exist. It should include how reports are recorded, investigated, classified and communicated to affected people.

ANIC recommends independent hate-crime scrutiny arrangements to examine systemic consistency and improve practice, without directing individual prosecutions or compromising judicial independence.

The objective should be equal protection across communities, not competing claims for preferential treatment.

11.3 Protect procedural fairness

ANIC recommends clear criteria, reasons where legally possible, meaningful avenues of challenge and independent oversight for significant counter-extremism decisions.

Historical lawful speech, religious affiliation or incidental association should not, by themselves, establish present dangerousness.

New measures should undergo genuine consultation and assessment of necessity, proportionality, effectiveness and impact on lawful religious and political participation.

Consultation should include affected faith communities and other relevant organisations before policy decisions are finalised, rather than merely seeking their endorsement afterwards.

12. Supporting religious leaders, protecting institutions and building capability

ANIC recommends sustained investment in the capability of religious leaders, youth leaders, volunteers and the governing bodies of faith and community institutions.

Relevant training should cover safeguarding, responsible communication, online safety, governance, mentoring, emergency preparedness and appropriate referral practices.

ANIC's experience demonstrates the important role religious organisations can play in strengthening community safety, security and resilience. Through its Community Safety and Security Committee, ANIC has undertaken initiatives including professional development, safety education, threat assessments, emergency preparedness, emergency response planning and cybersecurity awareness. ANIC has also supported protective security improvements for mosques, Islamic institutions and community facilities through the Commonwealth Government-funded Security Uplift for Muslim Communities Program. These initiatives highlight the value of genuine partnerships between government, religious institutions and community organisations in preventing threats, improving preparedness and ensuring that places of worship and community facilities remain safe and welcoming environments.

ANIC has also raised concerns that some of its members have been publicly identified as targets by ISIS, demonstrating that religious leaders themselves can face threats from violent extremist organisations. This illustrates why religious leaders must be recognised as potential targets of violent extremism, not simply as people expected to prevent it.[iv]

Support and engagement with religious institutions must respect their independence, religious integrity and established roles within their communities. Religious leaders should not be expected to act as law enforcement officers, intelligence collectors or substitutes for qualified mental health professionals. Their primary responsibilities are to provide religious guidance, spiritual care, pastoral support and community leadership. Any partnership with government or relevant agencies must recognise these boundaries, preserve community trust and ensure that religious institutions are not used as extensions of law enforcement or intelligence-gathering operations.

Ordinary youth, educational, and community programs should be supported for their social value, rather than requiring every activity to be justified through a counterterrorism or counter violence extremism lens or framework.

Protection for public places of worship, religious schools and other community facilities should be based on assessed risk. Governments should provide clear reporting contacts, timely advice and coordinated assistance following serious threats.

After major incidents, protective planning should consider both the immediate victims and communities at risk of retaliatory hostility. Support should include physical safety, psychological assistance and communication that rejects collective blame.

13. Coordination, Evidence, and Implementation

13.1 Establish Sustained Partnership

ANIC recommends establishing a standing national mechanism linking relevant government agencies with representative faith and community organisations, youth representatives, women's organisations and specialist services.

This mechanism should build on effective existing arrangements rather than duplicate them. Its remit should include prevention, community safety, online harms, public communication and the impact of government policies on community trust and social cohesion.

Participation must involve genuine consultation, policy development, decision-making and evaluation, rather than merely seeking community endorsement of decisions already made.

Importantly, these partnerships must respect and preserve the independence, religious integrity, autonomy and established governance structures of faith institutions. Religious organisations and their leaders must remain free to fulfil their religious, spiritual, pastoral and community responsibilities without inappropriate government interference, political pressure or expectations that they act as extensions of law enforcement or intelligence agencies.

Partnerships must be built on mutual respect, transparency, trust and clearly defined responsibilities, recognising religious institutions as independent and valued community partners rather than instruments of government policy.

Engagement with faith communities must also extend beyond security, counterterrorism, and counter-violent extremism concerns. Their significant contributions to education, welfare, charitable services, youth development, civic participation, social cohesion and broader Australian society should form an integral part of ongoing government relationships and engagements.

13.2 Improve evidence and measure unintended consequences

The Committee should support consistent reporting that distinguishes complaints, verified incidents, investigations, charges and findings.

Community-reported information should complement official data, with its methodology and limitations made clear. Reporting should allow examination of different forms of religious hatred without treating all experiences as identical or obscuring the circumstances of particular communities.

Evaluation should examine prevention outcomes, help-seeking, victim experiences, discriminatory impacts, incorrect referrals, appeal outcomes and confidence in institutions.

Attendance figures, content removals and referral totals should not be treated as sufficient evidence of effectiveness.

Data collection must protect privacy and avoid creating unnecessary repositories of information about lawful religious or political activity.

13.3 Require an implementation plan

ANIC recommends that the Government publish a clear and comprehensive implementation plan outlining its response, including specific commitments, responsibilities, timelines and measurable outcomes.

This should be accompanied by annual public progress reports and independent evaluations of major initiatives within reasonable timeframes to assess their effectiveness, transparency, accountability and impact on affected communities.

Faith and community organisations should be meaningfully involved in monitoring and evaluation to ensure that measures achieve their intended objectives, protect fundamental rights and strengthen community trust and social cohesion.

14. Consolidated recommendations

The Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) recommends that the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security:

1. Adopt consistent, evidence-based approaches to preventing pathways to violent extremism, clearly distinguishing genuine threats of violence from lawful religious beliefs, political expression and peaceful dissent.

2. Address all forms of terrorism, violent extremism and ideologically motivated violence consistently, without selectively targeting or associating criminal conduct with any particular faith, religion or community.
3. Review and replace the terminology “religiously motivated violent extremism” with more accurate and appropriate terms, such as “politically motivated violent extremism” or “ideologically motivated violent extremism”. Such terminology contributes to the rise of Islamophobia; anti-Muslim hatred reinforces harmful misconceptions and undermines social cohesion and community trust.
4. Strengthen protections against religious hatred, including Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, and hatred directed towards other faith communities, ensuring equal protection, accountability and access to appropriate remedies.
5. Develop nationally consistent guidelines for responsible terminology, official statements, media reporting, headlines and the use of religious symbols and imagery, ensuring that criminal actions are not attributed to entire faith and religious communities.
6. Strengthen accountability for political leaders, media organisations, online commentators and digital platforms in addressing misinformation, collective blame, harmful stereotyping, online threats and incitement to violence, while protecting legitimate public debate and freedom of expression.
7. Protect religious freedom, freedom of speech and expression, peaceful protest, theological teaching, academic discussion and lawful political and humanitarian advocacy and debates, ensuring that religious observance, political disagreement, lawful affiliation or incidental association is not, by itself, treated as evidence of violent extremism.
8. Strengthen online safety and youth protection measures, particularly against extremist recruitment, manipulation, harassment and exposure to violent content across social media, gaming and messaging platforms.
9. Maintain clear distinctions between criminal offences, unlawful vilification and other harmful conduct, ensuring proportionate civil remedies, procedural fairness, independent oversight and protection of fundamental rights.
10. Invest in the safety, security and capability of religious institutions, including professional development, governance, safeguarding, emergency preparedness

and cybersecurity, while respecting their religious integrity, independence, autonomy and established governance structures.

11. Establish sustained national partnerships between government agencies, faith and community organisations, youth representatives, women's organisations and specialist services, ensuring genuine participation in policy development, implementation and evaluation. These partnerships must respect the independence and religious integrity of faith institutions and must not treat religious leaders as extensions of law enforcement or intelligence agencies.

12. Require transparent implementation plans, annual progress reporting, independent evaluation and consistent data collection to measure effectiveness, identify unintended consequences, prevent discriminatory outcomes and strengthen public accountability.

ANIC emphasises that preventing violent extremism is a shared national responsibility that requires a collective effort across government, law enforcement, religious and community organisations, educators, families, media organisations, digital platforms, and the wider Australian public.

Australia's approach must protect all communities equally, hold individuals accountable for their actions, preserve fundamental freedoms and strengthen social cohesion without creating collective suspicion, discrimination or division.

The responsibility for terrorism and violent extremism must rest with those who commit, support or incite violence, not with the faith, religion or community they claim to represent.

No religious or faith community should bear the consequences of crimes committed by individuals, particularly when those individuals have no connection to that community.

15. Conclusion

ANIC reiterates its unequivocal rejection of terrorism, violent extremism, incitement to violence and attacks against innocent people.

The protection of human life is a shared responsibility. It requires effective security institutions, responsible leadership, trusted communities and fair treatment.

Pathways to violent extremism must be countered collectively, not selectively. All credible threats must be taken seriously, and no community should be held responsible for the conduct of individuals merely because they share a religion, ethnicity or background.

No Australian should feel that a national conversation about radicalisation automatically places their faith, loyalty or belonging under suspicion.

The experiences raised by the Australian Muslim community illustrate why these principles require practical safeguards. The objective must be protection for every community, not preferential treatment for one.

Political leaders, media organisations, digital platforms, religious leaders and public institutions must recognise their respective responsibilities. Language matters. Titles and headlines matter. The treatment of victims, the handling of allegations and the consistency of public responses matter.

Australia must protect people from extremist violence without allowing prevention itself to become a source of collective suspicion or exclusion.

ANIC remains committed to constructive engagement with governments, relevant agencies, other faith communities and the wider Australian public. Its objective is an Australia in which every person is protected equally, lawful disagreement is respected, and public safety is strengthened by trust rather than division.

Submitted on behalf of the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC)

---

[i] Submission to the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion

[ii] ANIC Submission - Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security - Prohibited Hate Symbols and Other Measures

[iii] ANIC Statement - ISIS Is an Evil and Dangerous, Terrorist Organisation With, NO Connection to Islam

[iv] Prominent Australian sheikhs named as targets by Islamic State