



# Submission to the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion

Submitted by Australian National Imams Council (ANIC)

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## 1. Introduction

The Australian National Imams Council (**ANIC**) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion.

ANIC acknowledges the important role of the Royal Commission to recommend reforms and measures to assist in reducing antisemitism and, critically, improve social cohesion and community safety forward. In this regard, ANIC notes the fourth term of reference in the Letters Patent dated 9 January 2026 which requires the Commission to, inter alia, make recommendations “... *that would contribute to strengthening social cohesion and countering the spread of ideologically motivated extremism in Australia.*”

Further, as observed by the Commissioner in her opening statement on 24 February 2026, the first term of reference is broad and requires a wide-ranging inquiry, including into the drivers to extremism. It is directly related to the fourth term of reference. Relatedly, Counsel Assisting, Richard Lancaster SC, in his opening statement, referred to social cohesion as “*the national consensus in support of democracy, freedom and the rule of law*” and that multicultural society can only subsist by the acceptance of these values.

It is respectfully submitted that an important corollary of the above observations is that a narrow focus on antisemitism alone, without a proper regard for the underlying factors which may drive division and hatred more generally, can have the unintended consequence of further entrenching division and undermining social cohesion. In particular, in a context where there are other aggrieved communities and disenfranchised individuals, a singular focus on one community will likely heighten the very experiences of other aggrieved



communities and individuals, particularly the youth, feeling marginalised and disregarded as steps are seemingly taken to enhance the protections for one community only. Regrettably, such an approach has been apparent in decisions, including in respect of legislative measures, by the NSW State Government.

For instance, the amendments to s.93z of the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW) extended protection against acts which incite hatred upon the basis of race or ethno-religious group, but not religion. The step of amending s.93z was also against the majority recommendation of the Faith Affairs Council which recommended that the NSW Government defer the amendment to allow for consultation.<sup>1</sup> The NSW Government did not heed this recommendation and request. In effect, this amendment prioritised legal protections for some groups over others, despite the alarming increase in Islamophobia and hate-based conduct in New South Wales.

One effect of the rushed amendments to s.93z has been to make some communities feel further marginalised. While such steps have given an outward show of support, in the longer-term, it is unlikely that they have assisted. Arguably, they have undermined social cohesion and pushed communities and people apart rather than bringing them together.

Regrettably, there has been a similar approach at the federal level. For instance, the *Combatting Antisemitism, Hate and Extremism (Criminal and Migration Laws) Act 2026* (Cth), which took effect on 21 January 2026, included significant legislative reforms such as increasing penalties for hate-motivated offenses and establishing a new framework to prohibit extremist groups, was focused on hatred of a target group distinguished by “race, or national or ethnic origin”. It is apparent that this legislation was also principally focussed on one community. While such a step was not unwarranted in the circumstances at the time, it is unfortunate that other communities were neglected. The implicit message to those communities, particularly the Australian Muslim community at a time when it is facing unprecedented levels of Islamophobia, was that they mattered less, if at all. Such an underlying approach and basis is hardly conducive of social cohesion. Anecdotally, it has had the opposite effect of pushing communities away and into a state of self-preservation.

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<sup>1</sup> The recommendation of the Faith Affairs Council is referred to in ANIC’s release dated 1 December 2023: <https://www.anic.org.au/news/anic-concerned-about-rushed-approach-to-amending-section-93z-of-the-crimes-act-nsw/>.



The task of confronting antisemitism, indeed hate in all of its forms, is about a collaborative approach and concern for all aggrieved communities. ANIC is of the view that an approach which seeks to recognise, and address, the grievances and sufferings of other communities will enhance the broader commitment and upholding of the values of democracy, freedom and the rule of law. It will minimise the perception of a different treatment of certain communities or a differential, or inconsistent, application of the law to protect some, while not others; call for scrutiny and accountability in respect of some, while not others.

ANIC considers that these experiences underpin much of the radicalisation and feelings of resentment which have taken root in some individuals.

In making this submission, ANIC has focussed on putting forward recommendations which have a broader benefit and application. The recommendations are practical in nature which are aimed at strengthening community resilience, improving policy responses, and ensuring that all forms of hate are addressed in a fair, consistent and effective manner.

The submission also addresses the significantly increased experiences of Islamophobia in the current environment which has created a greater anxiety within the Australian Muslim community.<sup>2</sup> The growing challenge of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred has profound implications for social cohesion in Australia. To confront hatred, there is a need to consider the role of public discourse and institutions in shaping community attitudes, and the effectiveness of existing legal and policy frameworks in protecting social cohesion. It is hoped that the Commission can provide an opportunity to bring a focus to the, at times, inconsistent governmental and enforcement agency responses which, it is respectfully submitted, have had the effect of undermining a broader commitment to, and respect for, the values of democracy, freedom and the rule of law which are so integral to our society and country.

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, see Nino Bucci, "Islamophobia on the Rise in Australia and Majority of Incidents Are Not Reported, Report Says," *The Guardian*, August 17, 2025 at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/aug/17/islamophobia-on-the-rise-in-australia-and-majority-of-incidents-are-not-reported-report-says-ntwnfb>



## 2. About ANIC

ANIC is the peak body representing Muslim religious leadership in Australia. ANIC represents Imams and Islamic scholars serving mosques and Muslim communities across all Australian states and territories.

Through its network of mosques, educational institutions and community organisations, ANIC provides religious guidance, community leadership, interfaith engagement and policy advocacy on matters affecting Australian Muslims and broader social cohesion.

ANIC has long played an important role in promoting responsible religious leadership, strengthening community resilience, and fostering constructive relationships between faith communities in Australia.

Following the terrorist attack in Bondi, ANIC and the broader Muslim community unequivocally condemned the attack and stood in solidarity with the Australian Jewish community against this evil act.<sup>3</sup> ANIC reaffirmed that violence targeting individuals because of their faith is to be strongly condemned and is in direct contradiction to the values of both Islamic and Australian values.<sup>4</sup>

This submission calls on the Commission to recognise the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred and make recommendations aimed at addressing this challenge through education, responsible leadership, strengthened legal protections and community engagement. In doing so, this submission contributes directly to the Commission's mandate to identify systemic drivers of division, assess institutional responses, and recommend measures that strengthen social cohesion and mutual respect across all communities in Australia.

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, see ANIC's "Statement Condemning the Bondi Shootings and Expressing Solidarity with the Victims and all Affected Communities," accessed May 5, 2026, <https://anic.org.au/statement-condemning-the-bondi-shootings-and-expressing-solidarity-with-the-victims-and-all-affected-communities/>

<sup>4</sup> For instance, see ANIC's statement "*ISIS Is an Evil and Dangerous Terrorist Organisation With No Connection to Islam*" (PDF, December 16, 2025) at <https://anic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/ISIS-Is-an-Evil-and-Dangerous-Terrorist-Organisation-With-No-Connection-to-Islam.pdf>



### 3. The Demographic Reality of the Australian Muslim Community

The Muslim community in Australia has grown significantly over the past several decades.

According to the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, more than 800,000 Australians identify as Muslim, representing one of the fastest-growing religious communities in the country. Current demographic projections indicate that the Muslim population in Australia is expected to exceed one million people within the coming years.

Equally important is the demographic structure of this population:

- 45 percent of Australian Muslims are under the age of 25.
- 62 percent are under the age of 35.
- Nearly 80 percent are under the age of 45.

This demonstrates that the majority of Muslims in Australia are young and increasingly Australian-born or raised.

Australian Muslims contribute across all sectors of society, including healthcare, education, business, academia, public service and community organisations.

Despite these contributions, many Muslim Australians report feeling marginalised or unfairly targeted in public discourse.<sup>5</sup> Negative political narratives and sensationalist media coverage can contribute to a perception that Muslims are outsiders rather than integral members of Australian society.<sup>6</sup>

### 4. The Role of ANIC

ANIC, through its network of mosques and community institutions, plays an important role in promoting responsible religious leadership, supporting social cohesion, and engaging

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australian-islamophobia-report-says-muslim-hate-has-hit-unprecedented-levels-2025-09-12/>

<sup>6</sup> For instance, see Fethi Mansouri, "Muslim Communities in Australia and the 'Mainstreaming' of Outer-Group Suspicion and Apprehension," *Melbourne Asia Review*, accessed May 6, 2026, <https://melbourneasiareview.edu.au/muslim-communities-in-australia-and-the-mainstreaming-of-outer-group-suspicion-and-apprehension/>



constructively with other faiths and communities, as well as with government and civil society.

Imams are often the first point of contact for individuals and families facing social challenges. Their responsibilities include:

- providing pastoral care and counselling
- mentoring youth and addressing social issues affecting young Australians
- supporting families and community wellbeing
- promoting civic responsibility and respect for Australian law and institutions
- engaging in interfaith dialogue and community engagement

Through these roles, Imams help foster a strong sense of belonging among Muslim Australians and encourage positive participation in Australian society.

ANIC places a strong emphasis on strengthening the sense of belonging and connection among Australian Muslims both to their faith of Islam and to their country, Australia. ANIC recognises that a strong sense of belonging plays a crucial role in building healthy communities and strengthening social cohesion.

Through religious guidance, education and community programs, Imams encourage Muslims to develop a balanced identity that embraces their Islamic faith while also recognising their responsibilities as citizens and contributors to Australian society.

ANIC also plays an important role in bringing communities together and strengthening relationships between different faith groups. ANIC regularly engages with leaders from other religious communities through interfaith initiatives, dialogue forums and collaborative community programs.

These engagements help build mutual understanding, reduce prejudice and promote respect between communities.

## **5. Contribution of Muslim Australians to Australian Society**

Muslim Australians contribute positively to many aspects of Australian society. Members of the Muslim community serve across a broad range of professions and sectors, including as



doctors, nurses, lawyers, educators, engineers, business owners, academics, public servants, emergency service workers, and community leaders. Through these roles, they make valuable contributions to Australia's economic, social, educational, and civic life.

Muslim charities and community organisations also provide a wide range of essential services across Australia, supporting not only the Muslim community but the broader Australian society. These organisations deliver humanitarian aid, youth engagement programs, family support services, mental health assistance, food relief initiatives, refugee support, chaplaincy services, and community wellbeing programs.

By way of example, Muslim organisations and mosques regularly organise food hampers and community kitchens for struggling families, provide emergency financial assistance for individuals facing hardship, facilitate youth mentorship and leadership programs aimed at reducing social isolation and anti-social behaviour, and offer counselling and family support services for those experiencing domestic challenges, grief, addiction, or mental health difficulties.

Muslim charities have also actively contributed during times of national crisis and natural disasters through fundraising campaigns, the distribution of essential supplies, and support for affected families in partnership with broader Australian relief efforts.

Mosques often function not only as places of worship but also as important community hubs that provide educational programs, youth activities, counselling services, charitable initiatives, and opportunities for social connection and volunteering. Many Islamic organisations also work closely with government agencies, local councils, schools, police, interfaith groups, and non-government organisations to strengthen social harmony, civic participation, and community resilience.

These institutions contribute significantly to community wellbeing, social cohesion, and the broader Australian multicultural landscape.



## 6. The Impact of Islamophobia

In recent years, Australia has witnessed a concerning rise in Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment.<sup>7</sup> Muslim Australians have increasingly been subjected to hostility, discrimination and abuse in public spaces, workplaces, schools and online environments.

Mosques and Islamic institutions have also been targeted through threats, vandalism and intimidation. Muslim women, particularly those who wear the hijab, have frequently been subjected to verbal abuse in public spaces.<sup>8</sup>

Evidence gathered through national reports and community consultations indicates that these incidents are not isolated. Many Muslim Australians report being verbally abused, labelled as terrorists, and subjected to hostility in everyday settings.<sup>9</sup>

These experiences have contributed to a growing sense among many Muslim Australians that they are being marginalised or unfairly targeted in public discourse. Islamophobia undermines social cohesion, erodes trust between communities and institutions, and threatens the safety and wellbeing of Australian citizens.

## 7. Growing Sense of Marginalisation

Many Muslim Australians increasingly feel that they are being unfairly singled out in national conversations about security, identity and social cohesion.

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, see Jason Om and Raveen Hunjan, “*Islamophobia Is on the Rise Across Australia, New Report Finds*” ABC News, March 12, 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-13/report-finds-rise-in-islamophobic-assaults-abuse-and-threats/105042290>

<sup>8</sup> For instance, see Adeshola Ore, “*‘I’d Rather Be Bored than in Danger’: Muslim Women Change How They Behave in Public Because of Racist Attacks in Australia*” *The Guardian*, September 22, 2025, at <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2025/sep/22/id-rather-be-bored-than-in-danger-muslim-women-change-how-they-behave-in-public-because-of-racist-attacks-ntwnfb>

<sup>9</sup> *Vile Act of Vandalism at Brisbane Mosque Captured on CCTV* YouTube video, 2:08. December 19, 2025 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-03-10/muslim-community-left-traumatised-after-attack-on-dinner/106431706>  
<https://www.news.com.au/national/victoria/courts-law/brendan-nicholls-man-accused-of-road-rage-attack-on-imam-ismet-purdic-denied-bail/news-story/89b0b044212171cd0d0c6450b6379427>  
<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/inaz-janif-islamophobia-muslim-women-children-attacked-in-public/106201320>



Community consultations have revealed that many Muslims feel they are viewed through a lens of suspicion and are expected to constantly defend their faith or identity. Some families report avoiding certain public spaces due to concerns about hostility or discrimination.

This sense of marginalisation is particularly pronounced among young Muslims. Given that a large proportion of the Australian Muslim population is under the age of 35, the experiences of Muslim youth are especially important when considering the long-term strength of social cohesion in Australia.

Many young Muslims report feeling that their identity as both Muslim and Australian is frequently questioned in public discourse. Repeated associations of Muslims with extremism in political debate, security discussions and media coverage can contribute to feelings of exclusion and alienation among younger generations.

Negative political narratives can have a particularly harmful effect when they portray Muslims in sweeping or hostile terms. Statements by certain political figures suggesting that Muslims are incompatible with Australian values reinforce the perception that Muslim Australians are outsiders rather than equal members of society. Regrettably, the statements of some media representatives has not assisted.

Media reporting can also contribute to this environment when Muslim communities are disproportionately associated with security concerns, while their positive contributions to Australian society are rarely mentioned.

Other factors contributing to this growing sense of marginalisation include:

- persistent Islamophobic abuse and harassment online;
- discrimination in employment and public spaces;
- hostility directed at visibly Muslim individuals, particularly women wearing the hijab;
- threats and vandalism targeting mosques and Islamic institutions; and
- the broader international political climate influencing community tensions in Australia

The above factors create an environment in which some young Muslims feel that they are not fully accepted within Australian society.



This sense of alienation can carry serious long-term consequences. Feelings of exclusion weaken social trust, undermine confidence in institutions, and erode the sense of belonging that is essential for a healthy multicultural society.

Addressing these concerns requires responsible leadership, balanced public discourse, and policies that ensure all Australians feel respected, protected and included. These issues are directly relevant to the Terms of Reference concerning the impact of discrimination and exclusion on social cohesion, particularly among younger Australians, and highlight the need for targeted policy responses that address both the causes and long-term consequences of marginalisation. They also feed into the drivers compelling some, unjustifiably, into extremist ideas.

## 8. Examples of Anti-Muslim Incidents

Several incidents illustrate the seriousness of the challenges faced by Muslim communities.

Mosques across Australia have received threatening messages and letters, including references to violent attacks similar to the Christchurch massacre. Lakemba Mosque and other Islamic centres have been subjected to threats circulated online.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, a Ramadan Iftar gathering in Ballarat, Victoria, was disrupted when an individual, reportedly a white supremacist, stormed into a community dinner, threatened children, assaulted attendees and directed hateful anti-Islamic abuse toward those present.<sup>11</sup>

Incidents such as these highlight the growing climate of hostility and intimidation that many Muslim communities are experiencing.

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<sup>10</sup> Adeshola Ore, "Lakemba Mosque Facing Most Alarming Situation Since Cronulla Riots as Ramadan Begins, Muslim Leader Says" *The Guardian*, February 18, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2026/feb/18/lakemba-mosque-facing-most-alarming-situation-since-cronulla-riots-ahead-of-ramadan-muslim-leader-says-ntwnfb>

<sup>11</sup> Australian Associated Press, "Muslim Community in Shock after Police Opt Not to Arrest Man Accused of Crashing Ballarat Iftar Dinner" *The Guardian*, March 11, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2026/mar/11/muslim-community-in-shock-after-police-opt-not-to-arrest-man-accused-of-crashing-ballarat-iftar-dinner-ntwnfb>



Islamic schools and community centres have also been targeted. Reports have documented bomb threats against Islamic institutions and acts of vandalism against mosques.<sup>12</sup>

**Other incidents include:**

- mosques vandalised with hate symbols and extremist graffiti<sup>13</sup>;
- pig heads thrown into Muslim cemeteries<sup>14</sup>;
- firebombing attacks against Islamic centres<sup>15</sup>;
- online threats directed toward mosques and Islamic schools; and
- harassment of Muslim women in public spaces

Such incidents create fear and insecurity within communities.

## 9. Political and Media Narratives

Public discourse plays a powerful role in shaping social attitudes.

Statements by political figures suggesting that there is “*no such thing as a good Muslim*” send deeply harmful messages to Muslim Australians and reinforce negative stereotypes.<sup>16</sup>

In some cases, public commentary has also promoted narratives that link the crimes of individuals to broad concepts such as “radical Islam” or “extremist Islam”, creating the impression that the faith of Islam itself is responsible for the actions of a small number of

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Messenger, “Premier Condemns Religious Intolerance as Muslims in Queensland Face Heightened ‘Fear and Anxiety’” *The Guardian*, September 9, 2025 at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/sep/09/queensland-premier-david-crissafuli-condemns-religious-intolerance-muslims-face-heightened-fear-anxiety>

<sup>13</sup> 9 News Australia. “Vile Act of Vandalism at Brisbane Mosque Captured on CCTV” YouTube video, 2:08. December 19, 2025 at <https://www.9news.com.au/national/mosque-vandalism-brisbane-white-supremacist-symbolism-police-queensland-news/21182e07-278e-4fe6-9d9a-58dd3ff55590>

<sup>14</sup> “South-Western Sydney Muslim Cemetery Desecrated with Pig’s Heads after Pig’s Heads after Bondi Terror Attack” *news.com.au*, December 15, 2025 at <https://www.news.com.au/national/muslim-cemetery-desecrated-with-pigs-heads/video/abfa71a32003c75799afcb4ad3632a1d>

<sup>15</sup> Caitlin Cassidy, “Islamic Community Calls Out ‘Anti-Muslim Hate’ after Suspicious Fire at Site of New Victorian Mosque” *The Guardian*, March 26, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2026/mar/26/kilmore-mosque-fire-victoria-ntwnfb>

<sup>16</sup> Jo Adetunji, “Pauline Hanson’s No ‘Good’ Muslims Comment Shows How Normalised Islamophobia Has Become in Australia” *The Conversation*, February 24, 2026 at <https://theconversation.com/pauline-hansons-no-good-muslims-comment-shows-how-normalised-islamophobia-has-become-in-australia-276639>



individuals. Such framing can contribute to a climate in which an entire religious community is collectively blamed for acts committed by individuals.

This form of collective blame is deeply harmful. It places unfair pressure on Muslim communities to constantly condemn actions they did not commit and reinforces the perception that Muslims as a whole are somehow responsible for the actions of extremists or criminals. This dynamic was particularly apparent following the Bondi attacks, where in some public commentary the actions of an individual were quickly connected to wider narratives about Muslims and Islam rather than being treated solely as the crime of an individual.

When such rhetoric is amplified in public debate, it can contribute to an environment where hostility toward Muslims becomes normalised.

Media narratives can also contribute to this problem when Muslim communities are repeatedly associated with extremism or security concerns while their contributions to Australian society are overlooked.

Responsible public discourse should clearly distinguish between the criminal actions of individuals and the beliefs of an entire faith community. Failing to do so risks reinforcing prejudice, deepening mistrust and undermining social cohesion.

Political leaders and media organisations therefore have an important responsibility to promote responsible discourse that encourages unity rather than division and avoids narratives that fuel suspicion or hostility toward entire communities. Consideration should also be given to mechanisms that strengthen accountability for public statements and reporting that unfairly stigmatise religious communities, including stronger media standards, clearer regulatory oversight and parliamentary codes of conduct that discourage rhetoric which fuels prejudice or discrimination.

This aligns with the Terms of Reference examining the role of political, media and public institutions in contributing to or mitigating social division, and underscores the need for accountability frameworks that promote responsible and balanced public discourse.



## 10. Rise of Anti-Palestinian Sentiment

Recent global events have also contributed to a rise in anti-Palestinian hostility in Australia.

Many Australians of Palestinian heritage have reported experiencing harassment and hostility when expressing support for Palestinian human rights or humanitarian concerns relating to the conflict in Gaza.

However, this hostility has not been limited to Australians of Palestinian background. Increasingly, Australians from a wide range of backgrounds, including Muslims of other ethnicities and non-Muslim Australians, have also reported being subjected to hostility or public criticism when advocating for Palestinian human rights or expressing concern about the humanitarian situation.

ANIC is also concerned about the growing tendency in some public discussions to conflate criticism of the policies or actions of the State of Israel with antisemitism. While antisemitism must be unequivocally condemned and addressed wherever it occurs, legitimate political criticism of government actions or advocacy for Palestinian human rights should not be automatically characterised as antisemitic. The label of antisemitism should not be weaponised to stifle appropriate and legitimate criticism of, and protest activity relating to, a concern for the humanitarian rights and suffering of Palestinians or Palestine.

Antisemitism involves harassing, intimidating, discriminating against, or advocating violence toward Jewish people because they are Jewish, whether based on their religion, ethnicity or identity. Such conduct is completely unacceptable and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

At the same time, legitimate political advocacy, including criticism of the actions of governments, concern for humanitarian issues, or criticism of political ideologies such as Zionism, should not be mischaracterised in ways that silence lawful public debate.

A number of Jewish organisations in Australia have also raised concerns about this issue. The Jewish Council of Australia (JCA) has stated that “*antisemitism is the hatred of Jewish people as Jews... it is not antisemitic to criticise Israel’s military actions or support Palestinian freedom.*” It has cautioned that in some contexts “*genuine concerns are being manipulated... to silence criticism of Israel,*” and that definitions which “*conflate criticism of*



*Israel with racial prejudice” risk suppressing legitimate speech.* The Council has also cautioned that *“trying to teach Australians that criticism of Israel is antisemitism will only deepen division and isolate our community.”*<sup>17</sup>

A number of Jewish scholars, writers and public intellectuals have also cautioned against conflating Jewish identity with the policies of the State of Israel. For instance, Australian Jewish journalist, Antony Loewenstein, has consistently argued that equating criticism of Israel with antisemitism risks both silencing legitimate debate and reinforcing harmful stereotypes about Jewish people as a monolithic group tied to a single political position. Similarly, Holocaust survivor and physician, Dr Gabor Maté, has publicly stated that opposing the policies of the Israeli government or Zionist political ideology should not be interpreted as hostility toward Jewish people, and that such conflation can in fact contribute to antisemitism by blurring the distinction between a diverse faith community and a nation-state.<sup>18</sup>

Israeli historian Professor Ilan Pappé has also noted that conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism undermines both the fight against real antisemitism and the space for legitimate political critique.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, writer Naomi Klein has stated that it is both inaccurate and dangerous to equate Jewish identity with the policies of the Israeli state, emphasising that doing so can deepen division and misdirect legitimate concerns into prejudice.<sup>20</sup>

These perspectives highlight an important point. Conflating Jewish identity with the actions of any government risks reinforcing collective assumptions about Jewish people, which can itself contribute to antisemitism. Maintaining a clear distinction between a people, a faith, and a state is therefore essential both for protecting Jewish communities and for preserving the integrity of public discourse.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org.au/jewish-coalition-opposes-antisemitism-plan/>

<sup>18</sup> The Grayzone, “Gabor Maté on the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and Why Fewer Jews Identify with Israel” YouTube video, November 6, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TBBhPUwrCU>

<sup>19</sup> Ilan Pappé, “Lobbying for Zionism on Both Sides of the Atlantic” (London: Oneworld, 2024).

<sup>20</sup> Naomi Klein, “We Have a Tool to Stop Israel’s War Crimes: BDS” *The Guardian*, January 10, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/10/only-outside-pressure-can-stop-israels-war-crimes>



There are also growing concerns among Jewish scholars, legal experts and community organisations regarding the application of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (**IHRA**) definition of antisemitism. While intended to address genuine antisemitism, critics have argued that aspects of its interpretation risk blurring the line between antisemitism and legitimate political criticism of the State of Israel. A number of Jewish academics and organisations have therefore expressed reservations about its use in policy and law, noting that overly broad application may suppress free expression and academic debate. Alternative frameworks, such as the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, have been supported by many Jewish scholars as providing a clearer distinction between antisemitism and legitimate criticism of state policies. These concerns highlight the importance of ensuring that definitions used in public policy are precise, balanced, and capable of addressing antisemitism without restricting lawful democratic discourse.

Such conflation risks undermining meaningful democratic discussion and can contribute to the marginalisation of individuals and communities who are engaging in lawful advocacy or expressing humanitarian concerns.

Advocacy for humanitarian causes or expressions of political opinion should not lead to discrimination, harassment or attempts to silence individuals or communities.

Australia's democratic traditions recognise the right of citizens to express political views peacefully and lawfully, including on matters of international concern. Protecting this space for respectful civic engagement is essential for maintaining a healthy democratic society.

These issues are directly relevant to the Terms of Reference concerning the balance between combating hatred and protecting democratic freedoms, including freedom of expression; highlighting the importance of ensuring that responses to antisemitism do not unintentionally contribute to other forms of marginalisation or division; ensuring that the grievances and trauma of some communities is not silenced to appease another community; and, ultimately, ensuring that social cohesion is not undermined, but rather strengthened through any recommendations.



## 11. Consistency, Fairness and Community Trust in Addressing Hate

An important foundation of social cohesion is the perception that responses to hatred, discrimination and violence are applied fairly and consistently across all communities.

Experiences of Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism are often closely connected to broader public debates about antisemitism. While antisemitism must be addressed clearly and decisively, it is important that responses do not unintentionally suppress legitimate expressions of concern about humanitarian crises or political developments overseas.

In recent public discussions, some measures introduced to address antisemitism have relied on broader interpretations that risk capturing criticism of the policies or actions of the State of Israel or expressions of solidarity with Palestinians. In certain contexts, expressions such as wearing the keffiyeh or publicly expressing concern about the humanitarian situation in Gaza have been treated as controversial or inappropriate.

For many Australians, particularly those with family connections to conflict-affected regions such as Gaza, Lebanon and Syria, these issues are deeply personal. Many Australians from these backgrounds have relatives who have been displaced, injured or killed as a result of ongoing conflicts. When individuals feel unable to express grief, distress or humanitarian concern without fear of being mischaracterised, this can create frustration and deepen feelings of marginalisation.

Where responses to antisemitism are perceived as restricting lawful expressions of solidarity or humanitarian advocacy, this may unintentionally contribute to resentment and polarisation within parts of the community. Such outcomes can undermine the very goal of strengthening social cohesion.

Examples of situations where concerns have been raised about the use of antisemitism allegations to suppress legitimate expressions of humanitarian concern include incidents in which students wearing the keffiyeh at schools were disciplined or restricted, and cases where performers or public figures wearing the keffiyeh as a symbol of solidarity with Palestinians were criticised or subjected to disciplinary action. These incidents illustrate how cultural symbols associated with Palestinian identity or expressions of concern about humanitarian suffering can become contentious and misinterpreted in public debate.



In some public debates, there has also been a tendency to interpret large public demonstrations or expressions of concern about international conflicts primarily through a lens of antisemitism, rather than recognising the diversity of motivations among participants. Public demonstrations across Australia have attracted large numbers of Australians from a wide range of cultural, religious and political backgrounds who have expressed humanitarian concerns regarding civilian suffering in conflict zones.

Understanding these concerns in their full context is important for maintaining public trust and ensuring that legitimate civic participation is not mischaracterised.

Social cohesion can also be affected when responses by governments or institutions are perceived as inconsistent across different communities. A perception that the experiences of some communities are recognised while others are overlooked can create feelings of inequality or exclusion.

Examples that have been raised within community discussions include the decision by the New South Wales Premier to illuminate the Sydney Opera House in the colours of the Israeli flag following the events of October 7, while similar gestures of recognition have not been made when tragedies affecting other communities have occurred, including in parts of the Middle East. Such decisions can contribute to perceptions among some communities that expressions of solidarity are applied unevenly.

Concerns have also been raised about legislative responses such as the extension of provisions under section 93Z to protect particular ethno-religious attributes, while other religious communities experiencing rising levels of hatred, including Islamophobia, may feel that their experiences are not being addressed with the same level of urgency. As a matter of fact, they are not.

More broadly, when policy responses, public symbolism or legal protections appear to prioritise some forms of hate while overlooking others, this can weaken confidence in the fairness and consistency of public institutions.

Maintaining fairness and consistency in how hatred, discrimination and violence are addressed is therefore essential for strengthening social cohesion.



A balanced approach that simultaneously confronts antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of hatred, while protecting lawful civic expression and humanitarian advocacy, will help ensure that all Australians feel respected, protected and included within the national community.

As noted above, the issues which have been highlighted are relevant to perceptions of unfairness and disregard, particularly among younger Australians. In this context, they can feed into the drivers compelling some, unjustifiably, into extremist ideas

Therefore, it is critical that the responses to hatred are effective, proportionate and applied consistently, and that they contribute to building trust, fairness and unity across all segments of Australian society.

## **12. Legal Gaps in Protection Against Religious Hate**

Another important issue requiring attention is the gap in legal protections relating specifically to hatred and vilification based on religion.

Australia has established important legal protections against discrimination through legislation such as the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth). However, these protections primarily address discrimination based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin. While these protections are important, they do not fully address the reality that many individuals are targeted because of their religious identity.

For many Muslim Australians, incidents of hostility and abuse are explicitly framed around their religious identity. Visible markers of faith, such as wearing the hijab, attending a mosque, or publicly identifying as Muslim, often become the basis for harassment, discrimination, or threats.

At the federal level, Australia does not currently have comprehensive legislation that directly addresses vilification or hatred based specifically on religion. State and territory protections vary significantly across jurisdictions.



Strengthening legal protections relating to religious vilification would ensure that individuals are protected from hatred and discrimination on the basis of their faith in the same way that Australians are protected from discrimination based on race.

This directly addresses the Terms of Reference relating to the adequacy of current legal frameworks and the need to identify gaps in protections that may undermine social cohesion or leave communities vulnerable to harm

### **13. Recommendations**

**ANIC respectfully requests that the Royal Commission consider the following measures as an aspect of its recommendations:**

1. Recognition of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred as serious threats to social cohesion in Australia.
2. Support for the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the National Response to Islamophobia Report produced by the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia.
3. Expansion of federal and state legislation to ensure Australians are protected from hatred and vilification based on religion as well as race.
4. Support for the implementation of the National Anti-Racism Framework proposed by the Race Discrimination Commissioner.
5. Provision of government funding and support for initiatives aimed at combating Islamophobia, including education programs, research initiatives and public awareness campaigns.
6. Development of national education initiatives that promote religious literacy and understanding of Muslim communities and other faith groups.
7. Promotion of responsible public discourse by political leaders and media organisations and introduce stronger accountability mechanisms, including enhanced media standards, regulatory oversight and parliamentary codes of



conduct, to discourage rhetoric or reporting that unfairly stigmatise religious communities.

8. Support for interfaith initiatives and community programs that promote dialogue and cooperation between communities.
9. Addressing of online hate and harassment targeting religious communities.
10. Support for research and improved national data collection to better understand and address Islamophobia and religious discrimination.
11. Ensuring that efforts to combat antisemitism maintain a clear distinction between antisemitism, which involves hostility or discrimination toward Jewish people, and legitimate criticism of governments, political ideologies such as Zionism, or international conflicts.
12. Establishment of a nationally consistent, principle-based framework to guide institutions, regulators and public bodies in identifying and responding to hate speech and dehumanisation across all protected groups, ensuring clarity, fairness and consistency while safeguarding freedom of expression.
13. Establishment of an independent Hate Crime Scrutiny Panels to review the classification, investigation and prosecution of hate-related incidents, improving transparency, consistency and community confidence in law enforcement responses.
14. Development of a national online hate accountability framework requiring digital platforms to take reasonable and proportionate steps to prevent, detect and respond to harmful content targeting individuals and communities on the basis of protected attributes, while maintaining safeguards for lawful expression.
15. Adoption of a clear national principle of consistency and proportionality in government responses to incidents of hatred, violence and discrimination, ensuring that all communities are treated with equal concern, recognition and support.



## **14. Conclusion**

Australia's multicultural success depends on mutual respect, responsible leadership and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

The overwhelming majority of Muslim Australians are proud Australians who contribute positively to every aspect of society. However, the rise of Islamophobia threatens not only Muslim communities but the broader values that define Australian society.

Addressing Islamophobia is therefore not simply about protecting one community. It is about protecting the integrity of Australia's multicultural democracy and ensuring that every citizen can live safely, freely and with dignity.

ANIC remains committed to working constructively with government, civil society and other faith communities to strengthen social cohesion and promote a more inclusive Australia and looks forward to working constructively with the Commission to promote social cohesion, mutual respect, and stronger relationships between Australia's diverse communities.

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