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ANIC welcomes the Appointment of Aftab Malik as The Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia

The **Australian National Imams Council (ANIC)** welcomes, and supports, the announcement of **Aftab Malik's** appointment as the **Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia in Australia**. This appointment comes at a critical time, with **Islamophobia, anti-Muslim, and anti-Palestinian sentiment** at unprecedented levels. The Australian Muslim community has been exposed to **prejudice** and **hate** over a long period of time, particularly since the horrific massacre by an Australian citizen of 51 worshippers in mosques in **Christchurch on 19 March 2019**.

Aftab Malik has a history of working closely with ANIC, as well as other Muslim leaders and community organisations. ANIC is confident that his expertise, background in religious scholarship, and experience in policy will contribute to addressing the rise in Islamophobia and related discrimination. However, as stated by Mr Malik at the announcement last night, *"Islamophobia does not occur in a vacuum. It can be nurtured by ignorance, fear and hatred that festers in a permissive environment where abusing Muslims is quite normal."*

Bilal Rauf, Senior Advisor, said: *"Islamophobia is crippling and targets the most vulnerable of our society, for instance, women wearing the hijab, children with Muslim names and people for whom English is not the first language. The experience of it is made worse by the regrettable action of segments of the media and political leaders who see it as acceptable to use divisive and Islamophobic narratives to stoke the flames of division and rupture our society and its social cohesion. The appointment of the envoy is an opportunity to shine a light into the suffering of those who have endured in silence. As proud Australians, we stand or fall together. We call upon our fellow Australians to stand with us against such hatred, ignorance, and narrow-mindedness."*

Every Australian, including Muslims, has the right to **feel safe**, whether in **public** or **private spaces**. The appointment is an important step in the right direction. There is much more work to be done, including establishing protective laws to **guard against religious discrimination** and **vilification**. This includes addressing the heightened levels of distress and anguish being experienced by some many because of the unprecedented suffering in **Palestine** and **Lebanon** and the inconsistent responses of political leaders to such suffering.

ANIC looks forward to working with the Special Envoy to identify and address issues of Islamophobia, anti-Muslim, and anti-Palestinian sentiment.

For any media inquiries, please contact ANIC's Spokesperson, Bilal Rauf, on 1300 765 940 or spokesperson@anic.org.au