



ANIC Appalled and Deeply Concerned by the Combating Antisemitism, Hate and Extremism Legislation

21 January 2026

The Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) is appalled and concerned about the recently passed Combatting Antisemitism, Hate and Extremism (Criminal and Migration Laws) Act 2026 and the very real risk that it could be applied unfairly against the Australian Muslim community.

ANIC is alarmed that this law was rushed through Parliament at extraordinary speed, leaving little time for proper scrutiny, debate, or consultation. By giving ministers broad powers, lowering legal thresholds, and creating vague offences, the Act puts fundamental freedoms at risk, including the right to practise religion, associate with others, and speak freely. Laws meant to protect communities should not come at the cost of fairness, trust, and social cohesion. Rushing legislation like this risks fuelling fear, division, and a rising wave of Islamophobia and discrimination in Australia, threatening the safety and dignity of Australian Muslims.

ANIC unequivocally condemns the horrific terrorist attack at Bondi and reiterates our continued sympathy for, and solidarity with, the Australian Jewish community who were targeted in this act of terror. Since the Bondi attack, the Australian Muslim community has once again been thrust into a familiar and distressing cycle of fear, suspicion, and scrutiny. This level of collective suspicion is rarely applied to other communities when individuals associated with them commit heinous and abhorrent acts.

Based on the information available, the perpetrators appear to be inspired by ISIS, an organisation founded on terror, hatred, and the deliberate targeting of innocent people. ISIS has inflicted immense harm on communities across the world, including Muslims, who have been among its primary victims. ANIC has consistently and publicly condemned ISIS since its emergence and has clearly stated that it is an evil terrorist organisation with no connection to Islam, its teachings, or its values.

In the aftermath of the attack, sections of the media and some elected political leaders and representatives have repeatedly used terms such as "radical Islamic extremism" or "radical Islam" to describe the incident. This language effectively attributes the cause of the attack to Islam as a religion, or at minimum associates violence with Islam and the Muslim community more broadly. This framing is irresponsible and analytically simplistic. It ignores the complex and well-documented social, political, psychological, and economic factors that contribute to acts of violence and terrorism, and advances a misleading narrative that places collective suspicion on an entire faith community.

ANIC is of the view that this rapidly introduced legislation fails to meaningfully address the underlying drivers of violence and extremism. Instead, it adopts a narrow approach that disproportionately focuses on religious extremism as the primary causal factor. The consequence of this approach is not greater safety, but increased fear, division, and hostility directed towards the Australian Muslim community. We call for responses that counter violence and extremism effectively in all their forms, wherever they arise and whoever is responsible, rather than responses that reinforce misleading and harmful associations with religion.

Islamophobia and antisemitism are both real, harmful, and must be unequivocally rejected. Each targets individuals and communities on the basis of their faith, identity, and belonging, and each has resulted in violence, trauma, and loss of life. Confronting hatred requires a consistent and principled approach that affirms the equal dignity of all religious communities and recognises the profound harm caused by crimes motivated by religious hatred.

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As Australia's peak national body, ANIC is deeply troubled that the Bill confines aggravating factors for hate-motivated crimes to race while excluding religion, particularly at a time when Australia has witnessed a significant spike in Islamophobic and anti-Muslim incidents. This exclusion fails to reflect the reality that many attacks against Muslim Australians, including recent assaults on Imams, abuse of visibly Muslim women, threats against mosques, and harassment of worshippers, are directly motivated by hostility toward religious belief, religious identity, and religious practice.

Casting suspicion on ordinary religious language because of its misuse by fringe individuals risks politicising faith and unfairly constraining lawful religious practice. Clear distinctions must be maintained between Islam as a religion and terrorist groups that selectively appropriate Islamic language for propaganda.

Islamophobia does not require spectacular acts of violence to be harmful. The normalisation of stereotypes, pejorative labels, and inflammatory language steadily erodes social trust and cohesion.

ANIC has consistently called for the inclusion of religion as a protected attribute to ensure equal protection under the law. The Australian Muslim community continues to live with the real-world consequences of political rhetoric, with ill-informed assertions contributing to a documented surge in Islamophobic incidents, including online abuse, verbal and physical attacks on Muslim women, assaults on Imams and community leaders, arson attacks on homes, and threats and vandalism directed at mosques.

ANIC is concerned by changes that lower the threshold for visa cancellations and significantly expand ministerial discretion, granting broader powers to the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. In the absence of clear standards and safeguards, these powers risk arbitrary application and may disproportionately impact particular religious and ethnic communities.

Further concern arises from provisions allowing decisions about banned organisations to be made by authorities directly involved in shaping counter-terrorism policy. There is a real risk that these powers may be used to advance foreign policy objectives or to restrict Australians' ability to lawfully challenge government policy, including on global humanitarian issues.

While ANIC acknowledges the importance of addressing genuine threats to public safety, powers of this magnitude must be accompanied by robust procedural safeguards to prevent misuse.

ANIC is also concerned by the expansion of offences relating to "violent extremist material", a term that remains inadequately defined. Ambiguity in criminal law creates fear and uncertainty, particularly for religious leaders, educators, and community workers, and risks capturing legitimate religious teaching, political discourse, and community engagement.

Finally, the Muslim community notes with deep disappointment the inconsistency in legislative urgency. The Christchurch Mosque massacre, carried out by an Australian extremist who entered a mosque and murdered more than 50 innocent Muslim worshippers and who was radicalised domestically, did not prompt a comparable legislative response. Muslim Australians and other vulnerable communities should not be uniquely targeted, nor made to feel collectively suspect, under laws that claim to address hate and extremism.



This disparity has contributed to a deep sense of unequal recognition and unequal concern, which undermines confidence that Australia's legal and political institutions apply the same standards of protection and urgency to all communities.

Laws and language that divide Australians weaken our collective ability to respond to violence and extremism and undermine the values we seek to protect. ANIC expects that future public messaging and policy development will be informed by evidence, fairness, and engagement with affected communities.

Social cohesion is not incidental to national security; it is foundational.