



**ASECA**

AUSTRALIA'S SPECIAL ENVOY  
TO COMBAT ANTISEMITISM

# Defining antisemitism in Australia



March 2026



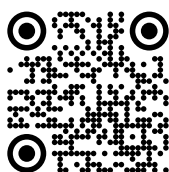
“Antisemitism erodes and is contrary to values that define Australia: fairness, freedom and mutual respect. It is a hatred that manifests itself in harmful words, and can lead to violent and deadly actions. It undermines the basic right for all Australians to live free from discrimination and hate and attacks the very foundations of a thriving democracy. As such, it poses a threat not just to Jewish Australians but to our entire nation.”

Jillian Segal AO, Australia’s Special  
Envoy to Combat Antisemitism

### **Australia’s Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism**

Whilst antisemitism has been a persistent and recurring hatred over many centuries, Australia has traditionally been a largely welcoming home for all, including its Jewish population. However in the months after the October 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel which saw over 1,200 people murdered and 251 taken hostage, there was a significant increase in antisemitic incidents around the world. Australia has not been immune, with antisemitic activity rising to deeply troubling levels around the country including hate speech, vandalism, arson, assault and ultimately, in December 2025, mass murder.

In July 2024, the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese appointed Jillian Segal AO as Australia’s first Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism (ASECA). The Special Envoy’s role is to engage with the Australian Jewish and broader Australian community, and provide advice directly to the Prime Minister and government in relation to combatting antisemitism in Australia



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# Defining antisemitism in Australia

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“The rise of antisemitism is abhorrent and there is no place for the kind of hate speech and attacks we have seen recently in our country.”

**Prime Minister Anthony Albanese,**  
March 2025

“While antisemitism and extremism can lead to violence, violence is not the beginning of the harm they do. Abuse, prejudice and discrimination can take a devastating toll on the wellbeing of individuals and communities.”

**Australian Government Response to the Special Envoy’s Plan to Combat Antisemitism,** December 2025

## Introduction

Since the Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023, there has been a worldwide explosion of Jew hatred, or antisemitism. Around the world, including in the US, UK and Europe, we have seen physical attacks on Jews manifesting in murder, arson, assault, harassment and intimidation. Jewish citizens have been intimidated, doxed and attacked verbally and virtually. There has been little respite.

Unfortunately Australia has not been immune from this eruption of hate. In 2024 & 2025 alone, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry recorded over 3,000 antisemitic incidents,<sup>1</sup> excluding online content (an annual increase in 2024 of over 315% on the year before). These included firebombings of synagogues and childcare centres, acts of violent intimidation, graffiti, physical and verbal attacks and more.

On Sunday 14th December 2025, this hatred manifested in the deadliest terror attack on Australian soil – a mass shooting which resulted the murder of 15 and injury of 39 innocent people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, attending a Channukah celebration on Sydney’s Bondi Beach.

As a result, the Australian Jewish community has been traumatised and in many cases lives as a fearful, ‘othered’ minority. We have seen a withdrawal of Australian Jews from communal, academic, artistic and business life. Antisemitism has presented a clear threat to Australia’s renowned and cherished values of social cohesion, fairness and freedom.

*“It dominates my life, almost every waking hour and some sleeping. Fear of the future, thoughts of dying to escape it all, a sense of futility, a hopelessness, can’t see it ever ending let alone going back to what it was ... Waiting for the knock on the door.”*

(age 65-74, QLD)<sup>2</sup>

Jew hatred is not new, however, and having existed for two millennia is often described as the “world’s oldest hatred”.<sup>3</sup> As a phenomenon which has changed shape over the centuries, one of the most common challenges when dealing with antisemitic hate is defining it.

Providing and explaining a widely accepted working definition of antisemitism (and the definition adopted by Australia) is the aim of this Explainer.

1 Executive Council of Australian Jewry Reports of Antisemitic Incidents, November 2024 & 2025. Methodology employs Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1991) definitions.

2. Quote from National Council of Jewish Women Australia Lived Experience of Antisemitism Survey, Jul-Aug 2025.

3. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Antisemitism in History, From the Early Church to 1400”, Holocaust Encyclopedia.

## Jews in Australia

The Jewish people are a broad and diverse group, encompassing an ancient people, religion and culture. Judaism traces its origins to the ancient lands of Judea and Israel over 3,000 years ago. The three major Jewish ethnic groups today hail from the Middle East and North Africa (Mizrachi), Northern and Eastern Europe (Ashkenazi), and Spain and Portugal (Sephardi).

According to the 2021 Census, there were approximately 117,000 Jews in Australia, representing approximately 0.46% of the overall Australian population. Whilst small, it is, however, the eighth largest Jewish community globally.<sup>4</sup>

The history of the Australian Jewish community dates to the First Fleet, and is made up of successive waves of immigration, including:

- Refugees escaping anti-Jewish violence in Tsarist Russia in the 19th and early 20th centuries
- Jews fleeing from, or survivors of the Holocaust in Europe from the 1930s to the 1950s
- Jews fleeing persecution, or being expelled from Middle Eastern countries migrating from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Iran in the 1940s to 1960s
- Those leaving behind the apartheid regimes in South Africa in the 1970s – 1990

Jews have been proud, consistent and outsized contributors to Australia. In public service, such as Governor General Sir Isaac Isaacs; Mahla Pearlman, the first female judge in a State court; Indigenous rights lawyer Ron Castan; and arguably Australia's greatest General, Sir John Monash.

**Jewish Australians have been active participants in the nation's public life, and have counted leaders in the arts, science, business, politics, the law, philanthropy, indigenous rights, military, and community.**



Jews in Australia represent approximately 0.46% of the overall Australian population. Whilst small, it is, however, the eighth largest Jewish community globally.

<sup>4</sup> David Graham, "The Jewish Population of Australia: Key findings from the 2021 Census", JCA, Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, Monash University, June 2024.

## Antisemitism in Australia

*In terms of threats to life, [antisemitism is] my agency's number one priority because of the weight of incidents we're seeing play out in this country... It's the volume of incidents that we are dealing with."*

Mike Burgess, ASIO Director General, Feb 2025  
Senate Estimates Hearing

Australia has been a largely welcoming home for its Jewish population for most of its European history. The history of antisemitism in Australia, however, "is almost as long as European settlement itself".<sup>5</sup>

Waves of visible antisemitism generally rise and fall during periods of unrest either domestically or internationally but have been on the increase for many years. The modern wave of physical attacks began in the 1980s, including bombing of the Hakoah Club (1982), arson attacks against multiple synagogues (1992 and 2024), and foiled attacks by Al Qaeda (2000).

Annual records kept by the elected peak body of Australian Jewry have found religiously and ethnically motivated hate crimes against Jewish people have risen each year since 2015, with a 316% increase in incidents (excluding online hate) since 2023 – 2024.

Since October 2023 Australia has seen over 3,000 incidents including firebombings of childcare centres, synagogues and cars, graffiti, vandalism, physical intimidation and harassment.<sup>6</sup>

**THE AUSTRALIAN** 🇦🇺 16 Jan 2025

### Rise of menacing minority: anti-Semitism scourge in Australia among worst in the West

Australia is experiencing a surge in anti-Jewish sentiment that is among the worst in comparable Western democracies, global research has found, as Anthony Albanese puts himself at odds with his hand-picked cabinet members to fight the scourge.



Labor MP Josh Burns' office was targeted with graffiti. *ABC News, 19 June 2024*

5 Professor Suzanne Rutland, "The Long Dark History of Antisemitism in Australia", 2023.

6. Executive Council of Australian Jewry 2024 & 2025. Reports of Antisemitic Incidents. See footnote 1.

## Examples in Australia

The thousands of antisemitic incidents recorded in Australia in recent years have included arson attacks (on synagogues, cars, a childcare centre); verbal and physical attacks on individuals ranging from schoolchildren to the elderly; graffiti; signs; hate speech in public and professional forums and more.

On 8th October 2023 there was a rally on the steps of the Opera House with crowds lighting flares and calling “Where’s the Jews” and “F\_ck the Jews”.

This started a two year period of intense antisemitic activity which culminated in Australia’s worst ever terrorist attack at Bondi Beach on 14th December 2025, where 15 innocent people were murdered and 39 injured by alleged Islamist shooters whilst attending a Jewish Channukah celebration.

The following are a very small number of recent examples.



Burnt out remains of Adass Israel Synagogue (Melbourne, VIC) after being destroyed by arson attack in December 2024



Rally at Sydney Opera House, October 8 2023, where participants chanted “Where’s the Jews” and “F-ck the Jews” AAP Image / Dean Lewins, 9 October 2022



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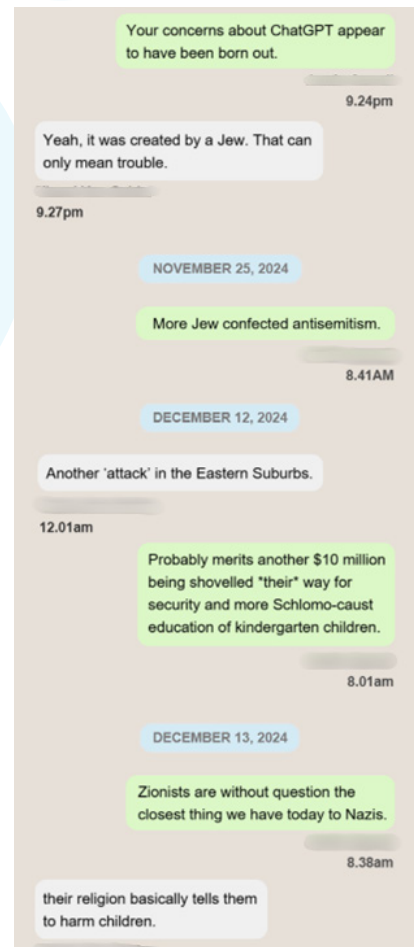
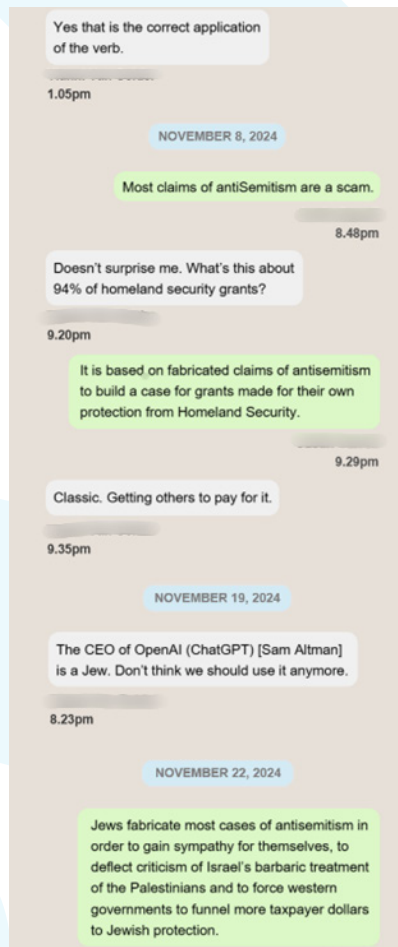
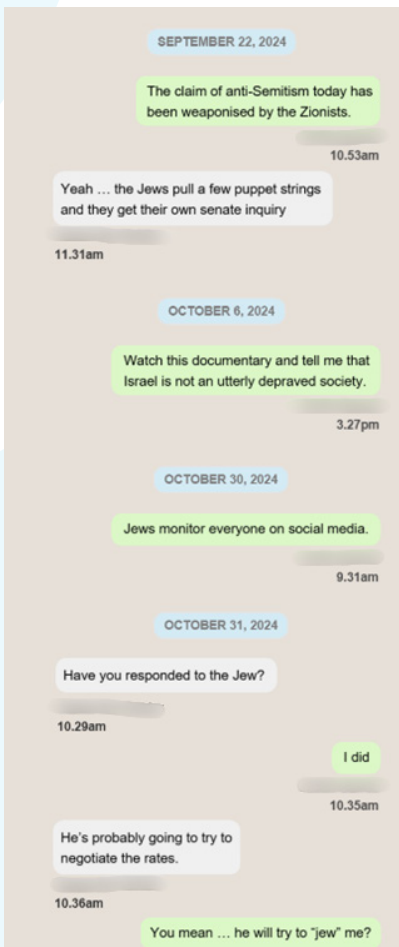
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## Examples in Australia (continued)

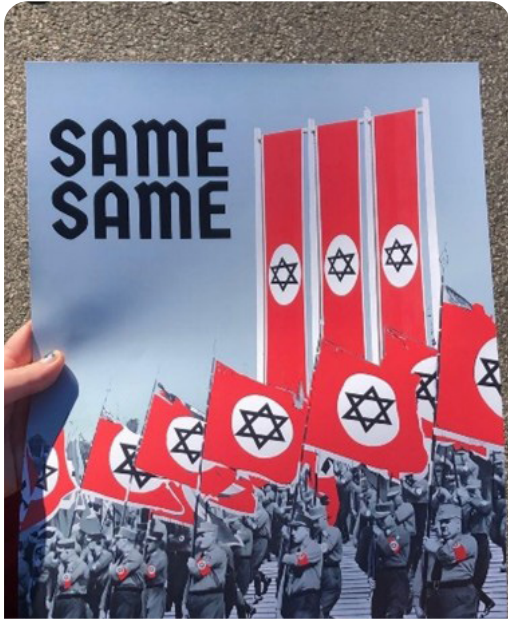


Graffiti targeting a Jewish home in Clayton, Vic, Nov 2023

*Julie Nathan, Executive Council of Australian Jewry, 'ECAJ Report on Anti-Jewish Incidents in Australia 2024', Page 18*



September 2024 text exchange between two Sydney lawyers exposed by The Australian newspaper in April 2025



Poster highlighted on Instagram



Banner above bridge (Salisbury, SA) in April 2024

*Julie Nathan, Executive Council of Australian Jewry, 'ECAJ Report on Anti-Jewish Incidents in Australia 2024', Page 4*



Graffiti in Gold Coast, Qld, June 2025

*Julie Nathan, Executive Council of Australian Jewry, 'ECAJ Report on Anti-Jewish Incidents in Australia 2024', Page 23*



Placard at Melbourne rally, Nov 2023

*Julie Nathan, Executive Council of Australian Jewry, 'ECAJ Report on Anti-Jewish Incidents in Australia 2024', Page 22*



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## Examples in Australia (continued)



Neo Nazi rally, Sydney Parliament House, Nov 2025



On 14th December 2025, in Australia's worst ever terrorist attack, two alleged Islamist gunmen murdered 15 innocent people and injured another 39 attending a Jewish Channukah celebration at Sydney's Bondi Beach

**Annual records kept by the elected peak body of Australian Jewry have found religiously and ethnically motivated hate crimes against Jewish people have risen each year since 2015, with a 316% increase in incidents (excluding online hate) in 2023 – 2024 alone.**

## Why do we need a definition of antisemitism?

The nature of antisemitism has changed shape over many hundreds of years, and ranges from subtle and casual speech to violent extremism. What is clear, however, is that you can't fight what you can't define.

A definition of antisemitism is important for a number of reasons, including:

- Create a consistent and shared understanding
- Provide 'guardrails' for policy
- Protect freedom of speech as distinct from incitement to hatred
- Data collection and monitoring

A major source of contention in recent times over definitions of antisemitism is the argument that antisemitism is being wrongly conflated with anti-Zionism. It is important to clarify that legitimate criticism of Israel is not antisemitic.

However, as will be discussed in greater depth, there are a number of ways in which the word "Zionist" may be used as a cover for "Jew", or that the right of Israel to exist at all is being challenged.

## Why the IHRA definition?

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism is one of the most broadly adopted formal definitions of antisemitism in the western hemisphere.

*As at November 2025, it has been adopted by 45 countries around the world (including 25 out of 27 EU member states), plus over 1,240 government and non-government organisations.<sup>7</sup>*

In 2013, then Prime Minister Julia Gillard signed Australia to the London Declaration Against Antisemitism (which included the IHRA working definition), and in 2019 Australia became the 33rd member of IHRA under then

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Australia adopted the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism in 2021. Then Labor leader (now Prime Minister) Anthony Albanese endorsed the definition in July 2021 (and again in January 2026), and then Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced government support in October 2021. It has also been adopted by

### Fast Facts:

- Founded in 1998, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) is an intergovernmental organisation committed to strengthening, advancing and promoting Holocaust education, remembrance, and research worldwide. IHRA is not a Jewish organisation.
- The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) represents Australia at IHRA. The Head of the Delegation is the level of Ambassador. The Australian delegation includes DFAT representatives and independent experts appointed by DFAT.
- The Global Guidelines on Combating Antisemitism, which Australia signed in 2024, recognise the IHRA definition as a tool to understand antisemitism's various manifestations.
- The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism states that "criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic".
- The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism is not a legal instrument and does not impose any limits on freedom of expression. Rather it is a tool to help identify and understand antisemitism.
- The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism is not 'black and white'. Whether something is antisemitic depends on the language and context and should involve a nuanced, fact-driven, context-dependent process.
- In Australia, the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism is endorsed by most major Jewish community organisations as reflecting their lived experience of antisemitism.

<sup>7</sup> "The IHRA Working Definition in the Post-October 7 World: Trends and Case Studies", Combat Antisemitism Movement, 2024.



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## The IHRA working definition of antisemitism (verbatim)

**“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”**

To guide IHRA in its work, the following examples may serve as illustrations:

Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity.

However, criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic.

Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for “why things go wrong”. It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanising, demonising, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective – such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas

chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).

- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterise Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Antisemitic acts are criminal when they are so defined by law.

Criminal acts are antisemitic when the targets of attacks, whether they are people or property – such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries – are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Jewish or linked to Jews.

Antisemitic discrimination is the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others and is illegal in many countries.

# The IHRA definition (and misconceptions explained)

IHRA explicitly calls out that the definition itself is not legally binding. It is intended to help “educate and sensitize [sic] administrations, politicians, judges, police, teachers, media and civil society society”.<sup>8</sup>

The working definition itself is a simple, two-sentence statement. It is straightforward and simple to understand.

*“The IHRA working definition defines antisemitism as ‘a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews’. There is no difficulty with this... it is very similar to those found in major dictionaries...”*

*Justice Chamberlain, UK High Court, Husain vs Solicitors Regulation Authority (2025)*

It is the second section of the working definition, including the 11 illustrative examples, which attract the most comment.

The language used is extremely nuanced. It notes the examples “**may** serve as illustration”, and that they “**could, taking into account the overall context, include...**” the subsequent examples.

There is explicit understanding that context needs to be taken into consideration.

Also, the second section specifically states that “criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic”.

Where IHRA draws the line (again, taking into account context) is denying Israel’s right to exist, equating Israel with the Nazis, or holding Australian Jews responsible for particular actions of the Israeli government.

The IHRA working definition is a useful tool by which to understand where free speech crosses the line into hate speech. It does not propose specific law reform or enforcement regimes.

Any accepted definition requires input from both the academic work of scholars and the lived experience of targets. The IHRA definition recognises both.

## Jewish connection to Israel and Zionism

The Jewish people’s connection to their indigenous homeland, the land of Israel, is the basis for Zionism – the belief that the Jewish people have the right to self-determination in some part of their ancestral homeland. This connection was recognised by the United Nations General Assembly in 1947.<sup>9</sup>

### The UN resolution reaffirmed the historical and ancestral ties of the Jewish people to the land of Israel, underscoring the legitimacy of their claim and the importance of their self-determination.

The concept described by the term ‘Zionism’ dates back thousands of years. Zion, as a synonym for the land of Israel and Jerusalem in particular, is found over 150 times in the Hebrew Bible.

The longing for return is central to rabbinic Judaism. It developed after the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 AD/CE and the extensive exile of Jews from their land. This longing is expressed in prayers, every life cycle celebration, festivals and holy days, and almost all aspects of religious practice.

Modern political Zionism is built on the historical and religious connection to the land of Israel, leading to the establishment of the State of Israel.

**Jewish self-determination does not exclude Palestinian self-determination** or sovereignty, nor does it imply support for specific Israeli governments or government policies. Most Jews around the world, while inevitably having diverse opinions on Israeli

<sup>8</sup> International Holocaust Remembrance Association FAQs “What has its impact been?”.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 181(II), November 29, 1947.



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politics and policies, affirm Zionism as central to their Jewish identity.<sup>10</sup>

Zionism is neither a 'left-wing' or a 'right-wing' ideology: it is part and parcel of the internationally recognised right to self-determination.

In Australia, more than 90% of Jewish people believe Israel has the right to exist as a democratic Jewish state – the essence of Zionism.<sup>11</sup>

*“Not all Jews live in Israel, not all Israelis are Jewish, and not all Jews are Zionists. There are also non-Jewish Zionists, such as Christian Zionists. Moreover, within the different groups, there are diverse opinions about the [Middle East] conflict and possible solutions.*

*Many Jews, both inside and outside Israel, support the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. The same is true for many Zionists.*

*In today's context, the word Zionist is not only used as an insult but also as a disguised form of antisemitism: a code word in conspiracy theories and stereotypes about power, money, or secret plots. In this way, criticism of Israeli policy and antisemitic imagery sometimes risk becoming intertwined.”*

Anne Frank House “Are all Jews Zionists?”  
August 2025

## Conclusion

Australia is an extraordinary country with a rich history of multiculturalism. We are a patchwork quilt of cultures and faiths, ethnicities and races; from the strong and unbroken legacy of our First Nations Peoples, to the new immigrants arriving every day.

We are a nation which values equality, freedom, safety and a 'fair go' for all. All hatreds, including antisemitism, are completely contrary to these principles and values

As the 'world's oldest hatred', antisemitism is a blight on any free society in which it is allowed to flourish. The confronting antisemitism seen in Australia since the attacks of October 7, 2023 is not spontaneous or new, and nor is Australia immune from this ugly global dynamic.

*“Antisemitism is not just a threat to Jews; it attacks the foundation of our nation; the fairness, equality and respect we have for one another. It is contrary to all the Australian values we hold dear. When hatred goes unchallenged our democracy is at risk.*

*The response must be clear and unequivocal – there is no place for antisemitism in modern Australia.”*

*Jillian Segal AO, Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism.*

Any fight against hatred in general, and antisemitism specifically, must begin with the ability to clearly define the problem.

Whilst there are a number of definitions of antisemitism, the IHRA Working Definition outlined here remains the most widely endorsed across western democracies, including Australia.

*“I pray for the day that Jews are treated the same as everyone else and no longer demonised”*

(age 55-64, Vic)<sup>12</sup>

10. Barry Strauss, “Jewish Roots in the Land of Israel/Palestine”, Hoover Institution, 2020.

11. “Surveying Australian Jews on Israel”, The Jewish Independent, 2023.

12. Quote from National Council of Jewish Women Australia Lived Experience of Antisemitism Survey, Jul-Aug 2025.





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ASECA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their cultures and to their Elders past and present.