



## **Australia's National Children's Commissioner 'deeply concerned' for wellbeing of Jewish children in Australia.**

**12<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

Anne Hollonds, the National Children's Commissioner for Australia, has made a statement sharing her 'deep concern' for the wellbeing of Australian Jewish children.

Her unprecedented comments follow a surge in antisemitism in Australia. The country has recently been rocked by a spate of antisemitic attacks on Jewish schools, synagogues, a daycare centre, and other locations. It's led to high-visibility policing around Jewish schools in Sydney and on schoolbuses, reports of Jewish parents moving children to non-denominational schools and preschools for fear their children will be unsafe in Jewish institutions.

In a statement made exclusively for the National Council of Jewish Women of Australia (NCJWA), National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds said: 'Every child has a right to be safe, to have opportunities to learn and flourish, and to live in communities which respect and support cultural diversity and expressions of faith.'

'The shocking racism that has affected Jewish communities over recent months is deeply concerning, especially the impact on Jewish children.'

'The targeting of schools and childcare centres by the perpetrators of this violence is particularly alarming.'

'The fear and distress experienced by Jewish children because of this surge in antisemitism may increase feelings of anxiety, isolation and vulnerability.'

'We want all children to live in a peaceful, caring and inclusive society in which they can thrive. Ending all forms of racism, including antisemitism, is vital to achieving this.'

'I'd like to echo the words of my colleague, Race Discrimination Commissioner Giridharan Sivaraman: *'Rising antisemitic incidents in Australia are abhorrent and serve as a call to action for people across the country to stand together in unity for an anti-racist Australia. Everyone should feel free to live their true selves and practice their faith without fear of persecution, intimidation, violence and discrimination.'*

NCJWA National President Lynda Ben-Menashe said: 'I'm grateful to the National Children's Commissioner for making this strong statement. It is comforting for our community – especially for parents and schoolchildren – to have this recognition, after the incredibly disturbing scenes we have seen of vile antisemitic graffiti on homes, schools and synagogues and firebombing of synagogues and even a childcare centre. 'It's astonishing that the worst violence against Jewish people since the Holocaust, which included the mass rape, mutilation and massacre of women, children and men;

abductions and now the return of tortured and emaciated hostages – that has led to a rise in hate speech and hate crimes against Jewish people such as we have never before witnessed in this country.

'I know all right-minded Australians will join me in thanking Anne Hollonds for calling out the despicable acts targeting Jewish children. With the support of allies such as her and all the decent Australians across this country, we will continue the fight against antisemitism, which poisons societies and brings down governments.'

Ms Hollonds' statement comes after an emotional open letter written last week to all Jewish school students in Australia from Julian Leeser MP. In it, Leeser describes himself as 'a proud Jewish dad of two and Federal Member for Berowra'. To the Jewish children of Australia commencing the new school year, he says

'I know this year you may feel nervous about school for different reasons....while there are a few people who have let hate in their hearts about Jewish people, the overwhelming majority of Australians are open, generous and wonderful to Jewish Australians...

'Whether you're at a Jewish school or the only Jewish child in your class, be proud of who you are...if things get tough this year, remember – you are never alone.'

## NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN OF AUSTRALIA INC

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