

National Council of Jewish Women president demands money back from UN Women's Day Luncheon

By JOANNA PANAGOPOULOS

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The head of the National Council of Jewish Women Australia is demanding her \$199 back from a UN Women's Day luncheon after learning the guest speaker would be former president of Ireland Mary Robinson, whose legacy is associated with an anti-racism conference in Durban that erupted into anti-Israel and anti-Semitic protest.

In an op-ed for The Australian, [NCJWA president Lynda Ben-Menashe](#) said Ms Robinson, the first female president of Ireland and a former UN Human Rights commissioner, presided over the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, which “enabled the first step in the post-Holocaust resurgence of Jew hatred now engulfing the world”.

Ms Robinson has long denied any anti-Israel bias and told the New York Times more than a decade ago that she fought unsuccessfully to prevent Durban turning into an attack on Israel. She has since turned her human rights focus to climate change.

[Opposition education spokeswoman Sarah Henderson](#), who attended an International Women's Day Parliamentary Breakfast on Wednesday, said: “It is astonishing that someone who presided over a UN conference on racism – widely seen as fuelling a rise in anti-Semitism – has been considered for this role”.

Ms Ben-Menashe said she felt the effects of the conference personally.

“My cousin, Tamar, led the South African Jewish caucus, and calls the conference the worst experience of her life”, she said, claiming that “this conference at Durban led to the daubing of ‘F- the Jews’ on the wall of an apartment block in Woollahra I used to

live in, to attempted arson at the synagogue I grew up in, and to a caravan of explosives found in Sydney intended to blow up the building I used to work in – as well as anybody in the vicinity”.

Ms Ben-Menashe said the NCJWA had long asked UN Women Australia to mention the “plight of the Israeli women raped, massacred and abducted on that day” on October 7, 2023.

“We’ve asked a number of times since. Each time they’ve said they couldn’t. They felt bad, of course; Hamas are monsters, of course; but policy is set from on high, etc,” she said.

“They’d be in touch should the situation change, etc. But no matter how many times the situation did change, they never made a statement.

“So I shouldn’t be surprised they chose as their headline speaker the woman whose lack of principle and care at Durban has led us to this point.

“Is it a conspiracy that they are platforming her? Abysmal ignorance? Or a similar lack of principle and care? It’s certainly exclusionary feminism, in which #ALLwomen doesn’t include Jewish or non-Jewish Zionist women like me.”

Ms Ben-Menashe noted that Australia was one of 38 countries that boycotted the 20th anniversary of the conference in 2021, citing fears it could turn to anti-Israel bias.

She said she didn’t know she would be the headline ticket when she bought her ticket to the UN and demanded a refund.

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Joanna started her career as a cadet at News Corp’s local newspaper network, reporting mostly on crime and courts across Sydney’s suburbs. She then worked as a court reporter for the News Wire before joining The Australian’s youth-focused publication The Oz.

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