

# ROYAL COMMISSION ON ANTISEMITISM AND SOCIAL COHESION

## SUBMISSION OF FREE PALESTINE MELBOURNE

12 JUNE 2026

### INTRODUCTION

1. This submission is filed on behalf of Free Palestine Melbourne (**FPM**).
2. FPM is a non-profit Victorian community anti-apartheid organisation formed in 2020, dedicated to raising public awareness of and advocating for the Palestinian people's hundred-year struggle for freedom and efforts for peace and justice in Palestine. FPM strongly supports the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and freedom in accordance with international law and human rights. FPM assists with organising 'Free Palestine' rallies in the city of Melbourne.
3. FPM is opposed to all forms of racism and discrimination, and our leaders include adherents to a range of faiths, including Muslims and Jews. FPM organisers are volunteers who come from a diverse range of professions.
4. FPM seeks to assist the Commission with the following aspects of its term of reference:
  - a. Investigating the nature and prevalence of antisemitism in institutions and society, and examining its key drivers in Australia including

religious and ideologically motivated extremism and radicalisation

(a)(i);

b. Identifying opportunities to enhance the responses of governments to antisemitism including, but not limited to, best practice approaches to de-radicalisation and strengthening social cohesion (a)(ii); and

c. Making recommendations to counteract and prevent manifestations of antisemitism (a)(iii).

5. Overall, this submission responds to allegations and misconceptions made, both within the Commission's Interim Report and some of its witnesses, that protests in support of a free Palestine within Australia are antisemitic in nature.

6. Given the seriousness of the allegations made and the potential consequences to social cohesion in Australia, FPM seeks that the Commission consider its submission as a matter of procedural fairness. Australia is a democratic and multicultural society. The protection of political protest in Australia is essential for democracy, freedom and the rule of law (social cohesion, as defined by the terms of reference).

7. In support of this submission, FPM attaches the following documents:

a. Statement of Adnan Mansour dated 10 June 2026;

b. Expert Report prepared by Dr Effie Karageorgos dated 25 May 2026;

- c. Expert Report on the slogan '*From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free*' prepared by Dr Abdul Bashid Shaikh and Professor Mustafa Sheikh dated 2 June 2026;
  - d. Expert Report on the term '*Intifada*' prepared by Dr Abdul Bashid Shaikh and Professor Mustafa Sheikh dated 2 June 2026; and
  - e. Expert Report on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion by Professor Ghassan Hage dated 15 May 2026.
8. These submissions are divided into the following parts:
- a. Part I – The role of political protests in furthering democracy, freedom and the rule of law in Australia;
  - b. Part II – The conflation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism;
  - c. Part III – The meaning of the terms '*From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free*' and '*Intifada*'; and
  - d. Part IV – Findings and Recommendations.

**PART I – THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PROTESTS IN FURTHERING DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM AND THE RULE OF LAW IN AUSTRALIA.**

9. The right to protest is essential for any democracy. It reflects the central tenets of Australianness that were established from Federation in 1901.<sup>1</sup> The restriction of protest has a larger negative impact on social cohesion than

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Effie Karageorgos, 'Report for the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion' at page 12.

protest itself.<sup>2</sup> The Australian Constitution contains an implied freedom of political communication and in Victoria, the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities contains the freedom of thought consciousness and belief, the freedom of expression, and the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.<sup>3</sup>

10. Australia has a strong and proud history of protests including against the South African War of 1899-1902, during the Eureka Stockade, the First World War, the Vietnam War and Moratorium rallies, the Iraq War of 2003 to the 'Free Palestine' rallies of today. This extends to student protests at university campuses as they serve 'as a microcosm of society as a whole – a legitimate location for the promotion of democratic values.'<sup>4</sup>
11. Protest organisations in the anti-Vietnam era were once alleged to be a threat to social cohesion. It is now well known that they served a noble and extremely valuable purpose for the time. As the Report of Dr Karageorgos demonstrates, many who exercised their democratic right to dissent during the Vietnam War later assumed prominent social and political roles that further demonstrated their dedication to social cohesion.<sup>5</sup> It is an example that, 'contradicts the strawman argument common since the Vietnam War era that saw activists branded un-Australian and anti-soldier for wishing for an end to Australian military involvement in Vietnam.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, see pages 10-13 for discussion on the Moratorium campaign in NSW.

<sup>3</sup> *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, ss 14, 15 and 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, at page 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, at page 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, at page 14.

12. The 'Free Palestine movement' is similar to other large-scale protest movements in Australia. We have again seen attempts to brand activists as 'un-Australian' or 'dangerous.' The rallies have been largely peaceful and involved a broad cross-section of Australians that cooperate with authorities.
13. The movement contains a strong mass of 'quiet protesters' who include existing activists and 'non-activists' who will only participate in protest during times of incredible need, particularly in circumstances of violence against civilians.<sup>7</sup> While protests in Australia have occurred long before 7 October 2023, the recent widespread concern for Palestine as an anti-war movement has not been seen since Vietnam or 2003 Iraq War.<sup>8</sup> It follows that the Free Palestine movement can fairly be described as a significant anti-war movement attracting mass appeal in Australia.
14. While the concern for Vietnam and Iraq was direct military commitment, the concern for Palestine has been both the significant loss of life in Gaza and Australia's complicity in the recent decimation of the Gaza Strip and its people (through our political support for Israel and supply of F-35 fighter jet parts.) These concerns have been compounded by the finding of the International Court of Justice that genocide in Gaza is plausible<sup>9</sup> and the UN Independent

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, at page 118

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v Israel) (Provisional Measures, Order of 26 January 2024) [54].

International Commission of Inquiry of the Occupied Palestinian Territory conclusion that Israel is committing a genocide.<sup>10</sup>

15. Similar to the protests against the Vietnam War, the protests for a free Palestine have encompassed a broad and diverse group of people. Attendees at the rallies since October 2023 have been attended by groups such as the Australian Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), the Jewish Council of Australia, the Loud Jew Collective, Jewish Greens, Mums for Palestine, Healthcare Workers for Palestine, Greek Australians for a Free Palestine, Unionists for Palestine, Students for Palestine, University Staff for Palestine and a number of First Nations organisations, to name a few.
16. The 26 January 'Invasion Day' rallies have consistently held a strong presence from Free Palestine supporters. On 26 January 2024, First Nations People stood in solidarity with Palestinians at the Invasion Day rally, where both Aboriginal and Palestinian flags were seen amongst a large crowd, symbolising the shared struggle for liberation between Indigenous Australians and Palestinians.
17. Likewise, the Sydney Harbour Bridge 'March for Humanity' on 3 August 2025 was extremely significant in the history of protests, not just in Australia, but globally. It is estimated that approximately 300,000 people from a broad cross-section of society attended the March, notwithstanding the rainy and cold weather. Despite the fact that protesters were ordered to 'turn around' by

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<sup>10</sup> UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel  
<<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessionsregular/session60/advance-version/a-hrc-60-crp-3.pdf>>.

Police whilst marching on the Harbour Bridge, the event remained remarkably peaceful and orderly.

18. As Dr Karageorgos states:

For 300,000 Australians to overcome their own 'biographical availability' to participate in a globally significant protest on 3 August 2025 shows us the extent of belief in the Palestinian cause. The March for Humanity was the largest single rally in one location in Australian history, involved a large cross-section of Australian society. Moreover, it was carried out peacefully and respectfully, emphasising the commitment to social cohesion among every person who attended the rally, and its organisers.<sup>11</sup>

19. The above illustrates that the Free Palestine movement is not a fringe movement that attracts violent or antisemitic people. In the context of protests within Australia, it is a significant movement that has attracted mass appeal from a broad cross-section of society.

## **PART II - THE CONFLATION OF ANTI-ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM**

20. Antisemitism is real and clearly exists in Australia, like other forms of racism and prejudice. However, antisemitism is not institutionalised in Australia in the same way that colonial and anti-immigration racism have been.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dr Effie Karageorgos, 'Report for the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion,' pages 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> Professor Ghassan Hage, 'Expert Report on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion at page 4.

21. Supporters of Israel will often argue that anti-Zionism is antisemitism. As Dr Hage states in his report, the equation of anti-Zionism with any form of racism against Jews is untenable.<sup>13</sup>
22. The term 'Jews' is not synonymous with the term 'Zionists' as not all persons of the Jewish race or religion identify as Zionists. It is well known that there are many Jewish people within the anti-Zionist movement, both in Australia and abroad. Supporters of Zionism are not exclusively persons of the Jewish race or religion. Zionism is a nationalistic and political ideology particular to the State of Israel.
23. Such a conflation is dangerous for antisemitism. As stated in the Commission's Interim report, a conflation between Jewish Australians and the foreign State of Israel may lead to antisemitic incidents.<sup>14</sup>
24. Further, the conflation of antisemitism and anti-Zionism dangerously seeks to suppress criticism of the State of Israel. It is politically driven by an agenda supporting an ethnocratic Jewish State in the Middle East - a concept that is unacceptable and dangerous for those who believe in the equality of all people. Zionists often illogically attack its critics by defending Israel's 'right to exist' - a right that no State has at law. It ignores that the real criticism of Zionism is the belief in an ethnocratic state, which does not believe in the equality of *all* people within its territories. Australians have the right to criticise such a concept. Such critique is entirely consistent with democracy, freedom and the

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* at page 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* at page 19.

rule of law. Those who seek to conflate antisemitism and Zionism are not genuinely concerned with 'social cohesion' within Australia - they are more concerned with the suppression of criticism against Israel.

25. As Dr Hage states, it:

"cannot be said while wanting the accusation of 'new antisemitism' to still carry the moral weight of the accusations directed at the 'old antisemitism' as those who are deploying it wish. The traditional antisemitism has that weight precisely because it is considered a particularly nasty variety of racism, of hating Jews as Jews and wishing to see them hurt for the mere fact that they are Jews. Once we move away from such a definition the category 'antisemitism' loses any analytical, political and moral significance it can have as 'racism.'"<sup>15</sup>

#### Evidence of witnesses at the Commission

26. There have been several witnesses who have given evidence at the Royal Commissions, particularly during Hearing Block 1, about the 'concern' they have felt by Free Palestine rallies within the major cities of Australia. We note that such evidence was untested without cross-examination and any real exploration as to why it made them feel uncomfortable.

27. There is a vast array of publicly available videos and photographic evidence of the Free Palestine rallies from the last 2.5 years available on social media and news reports. It is important to note that the rallies are not about Jewish people - they are about freeing Palestine from an illegal occupation and the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid* at page 9.

mass killings of its population by Israel. None of the video or photographic evidence confirm the extremely serious claims made about the antisemitic statements made during protests. As that evidence was left completely unchallenged by the Commission and is not corroborated by other independent evidence, it can carry little to no weight in ascertaining whether those incidents occurred.

28. The described fear by some witnesses of entering the CBDs of major cities because of the rallies or even the sight of a *keffiyeh* (a traditional Arab head covering) is only coherent if it assumes that Palestinian identity, solidarity or standing against Anti-Palestinian racism is somehow inherently anti-Jewish. If it is accepted that Palestinian identity, solidarity or standing against Anti-Palestinian racism is inherently anti-Jewish, then, and only then, can a display of positive Palestinian identity or solidarity be construed as antisemitic. But of course, there is *nothing* inherently anti-Jewish about standing in support of Palestinian equality and against anti-Palestinian racism.

29. Most concerningly, some witnesses sought to espouse Islamophobia within their complaints of antisemitism. Witnesses have given examples where descriptions of 'gangs of young Muslim men'<sup>16</sup> were offered. How it was understood the men were Muslim or gang members was not interrogated by the Commission.

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<sup>16</sup> *Transcript*, [42]- [44.]

30. The casual and at times, overt Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism was a consistent theme throughout the evidence concerning protests before the Commission. It is deeply concerning that the Commission has provided a ground for this type of commentary without challenge.
31. It cannot be ignored that there has always been a visible presence of Jewish people at Free Palestine rallies, both as speakers and attendees. FPM has never received complaints from any Jewish speaker or attendee feeling unsafe at its rallies. Speakers at the rallies have routinely made it abundantly clear that they are anti-Zionism, not anti-Jewish.
32. Those who identify as Zionist may feel uncomfortable with the presence of Free Palestine rallies because of the direct criticism of Zionism. But, that is not antisemitism. Providing space for a variety of political opinions, regardless of any discomfort of its opponents, is a necessary part of any democracy.

**PART III - THE MEANING OF THE TERMS 'FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA, PALESTINE WILL BE FREE' AND 'INTIFADA'**

33. There has been evidence at the Commission claiming that the slogan '*From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free*' and the use of the term, '*intifada*' is antisemitic. This position has no logical nor factual basis.

From the river to sea, Palestine will be free

34. The ordinary meaning of the words '*From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free*' is not violent. They refer to the freedom of a place and people that, as a

matter of law and fact, has been under occupation for several decades in contravention of International Law. It refers to the geographical area from the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

35. The Report of Dr Abdul Bashid Shaikh and Professor Mustafa Sheikh outlines the history of the slogan that has been invoked by both Israeli and Palestinian political parties.<sup>17</sup> In the Australian context, APAN has extensively published on the meaning of the term, noting that '[i]t is a call for liberation from oppression, not hatred towards Jews as a people.<sup>18</sup>' This is consistent with the use of the term in the United States.<sup>19</sup>

36. As Dr Shaikh and Professor Sheikh highlight, those who claim the slogan is antisemitic in nature 'are only able to make this argument once they have abstracted it entirely from its historical and contemporary context,<sup>20</sup> - it is a call for the liberation of Palestinians. As argued above, there is *nothing* inherently anti-Jewish about standing in support of freedom and equality for *all* people residing between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Ironically, to argue as much is an act of anti-Palestinian racism.

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<sup>17</sup> Professor Mustapha Sheikh and Dr Abdul Bashid Shaikh, 'Expert Opinion on the slogan "From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free"' at 2.2 and 2.3

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, see 3.2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* at 3.3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid* at 4.4.

## Intifada

37. The second report of Dr Shaikh and Professor Sheikh outlines the literal, as well as the contextual meanings of the term, 'intifada.' It is a term that is not exclusive to Palestine nor in any way intrinsically tied to armed struggle.<sup>21</sup>
38. Within Palestinian political and social discourse, 'intifada' is a broad and symbolic register for collective resistance to occupation and domination. It is not synonymous with violence nor a directive of particular acts.<sup>22</sup>
39. Dr Shaikh and Professor Sheikh highlight that:

In segments of Western political and media discourse, the term has increasingly been subjected to a process of securitisation, whereby its meaning is narrowed and redefined through the lens of counter-terrorism and public order. In this framing, intifada is often abstracted from its linguistic roots and historical plurality, and instead read as a proxy for violence, extremism or terrorism (Smith 2006). This reductionist interpretation has the effect of transforming a political descriptor into a presumed threat, such that its utterance is treated as inherently suspect regardless of context, intent or accompanying conduct.

This divergence illustrates a broader pattern identified in critical security studies, whereby political language associated with Muslim or anti-colonial struggles is reclassified as dangerous through repetition, insinuation and association, rather than through evidence of harm.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Professor Mustapha Sheikh and Dr Abdul Bashid Shaikh, 'Expert Opinion on the Term "Intifada"' at 1.5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* at 2.2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* at 2.3.

40. In Australia, the term 'intifada' is invoked symbolically – as a call for resistance to occupation, apartheid and structural injustice, not violence.<sup>24</sup>
41. Therefore, to associate the term 'intifada' or 'globalise the intifada' with antisemitism is deeply ignorant and dismissive of the literal and contextual meanings of 'intifada.' It relies upon the acceptance of Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism. Resistance to occupation, apartheid and unlawful state-sanctioned violence committed by Israel is the lawful right of the Palestinian people. Again, to argue that there is something inherently anti-Jewish to advocate for the above resistance and ultimately, for the Palestinian people to demand equality for *all* people within the Occupied Territories of Palestine, amounts to anti-Palestinian racism.
42. A society like Australia, that truly values democracy, freedom and the rule of law cannot, in good conscience, accept that Palestinians or any supporters in Australia demanding Palestinian equality is of itself a violent or antisemitic act. That is anti-Palestinian racism and offends a significant number of Australians who care deeply about the subjugation of a people by a State that has a well-documented history of breaching international humanitarian law and is credibly regarded to be currently committing a genocide.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* at 3.1.

## **PART IV - FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

43. FPM entirely support measures that adequately address antisemitism and all forms of racism in Australia. However, any measures must be based on reliable and credible evidence that has been tested. Islamophobia and Anti-Palestinian racism must be vigorously rejected by the Commission in considering its recommendations. Any recommendations must protect the right of political communication and protest in order to enhance social cohesion.
44. FPM supports the proposed findings and recommendations at paragraph 189 of the submission made on behalf of the Australian Palestine Advocacy Network and urges the Commission to adopt them in full.

Free Palestine Melbourne

12 June 2026