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PRESS RELEASE

As Australian Muslims, we stand in solidarity with the Australian Jewish community after the horrific shooting at Bondi Beach. We recognise and empathise with their grief, fear, uncertainty, and anger.

We understand the strong motivations behind the proposed *Combatting Anti-Semitism, Hate and Extremism Bill 2026*, including the desire to make the Australian Jewish community feel safer. However, we believe these laws will not achieve that objective. Instead, they risk driving political criticism underground, where extremist rhetoric cannot be openly challenged, ultimately making the broader community less safe. Criminalising free speech also fosters a culture of fear and suppression.

These proposed laws are not the solution. Rushing legislation through Parliament without proper scrutiny is irresponsible and dangerous. We urge the government not to act in this “knee-jerk” manner. Ordinarily, legislation of this nature would involve months of community consultation, an exposure draft for public feedback, and a Senate inquiry process with public submissions and hearings. In this case, none of this has occurred, with only a three-day window for public submissions.

Australians, like those in the US and the UK, have previously allowed fear of terrorism to justify laws that stripped away fundamental rights, including expanded surveillance, secret detentions, restrictions on free speech, and the banning of organisations. Once such laws are passed, they are rarely, if ever, rolled back. This erosion of civil liberties harms every Australian, including members of the Jewish community.

That is why we oppose so-called ‘hate speech’ laws that impose limits or tests on the right to criticise governments.

As Muslim lawyers, we affirm that all Australians must always retain the right to speak out against government injustice, wherever it occurs. There should be no uncertainty about the right to criticise our own government when it acts oppressively, or other states that commit atrocities, whether in Asia, Africa, Europe, or the Middle East.

There should be no uncertainty about the right to condemn acts such as deliberately starving civilians as collective punishment; shooting children; maiming innocent people; bombing aid workers; kidnapping and killing medical professionals; or destroying hospitals, water facilities, schools, and kindergartens. None of this speech should be criminalised.

The right to speak out against injustice must not depend on which country commits it, nor on the religion or cultural background of those responsible. No government or nation should be shielded from criticism. Nor should this right be restricted simply because speech may offend or distress others.

The standard we walk past is the standard we accept.

Our sincere request, as Australian Muslim lawyers, to the Australian community — Jewish and non-Jewish — is to resist acting from fear and anger, and to protect what is precious about being Australian.

Our message to government and to the Australian people is this: one of the greatest acts of courage is speaking truth to power. Let us hold firmly to that right, however uncomfortable the facts may be, as a defining feature of a truly free and democratic society.

Aisha Nancy Novakovich

Lawyer and Executive Committee Member

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15 January 2026