AUSTRALIA'S SPECIAL
ENVOY TO COMBAT
ISLAMOPHOBIA

A National Response to Islamophobia:

A Strategic Framework for
Inclusion, Safety and Prosperity
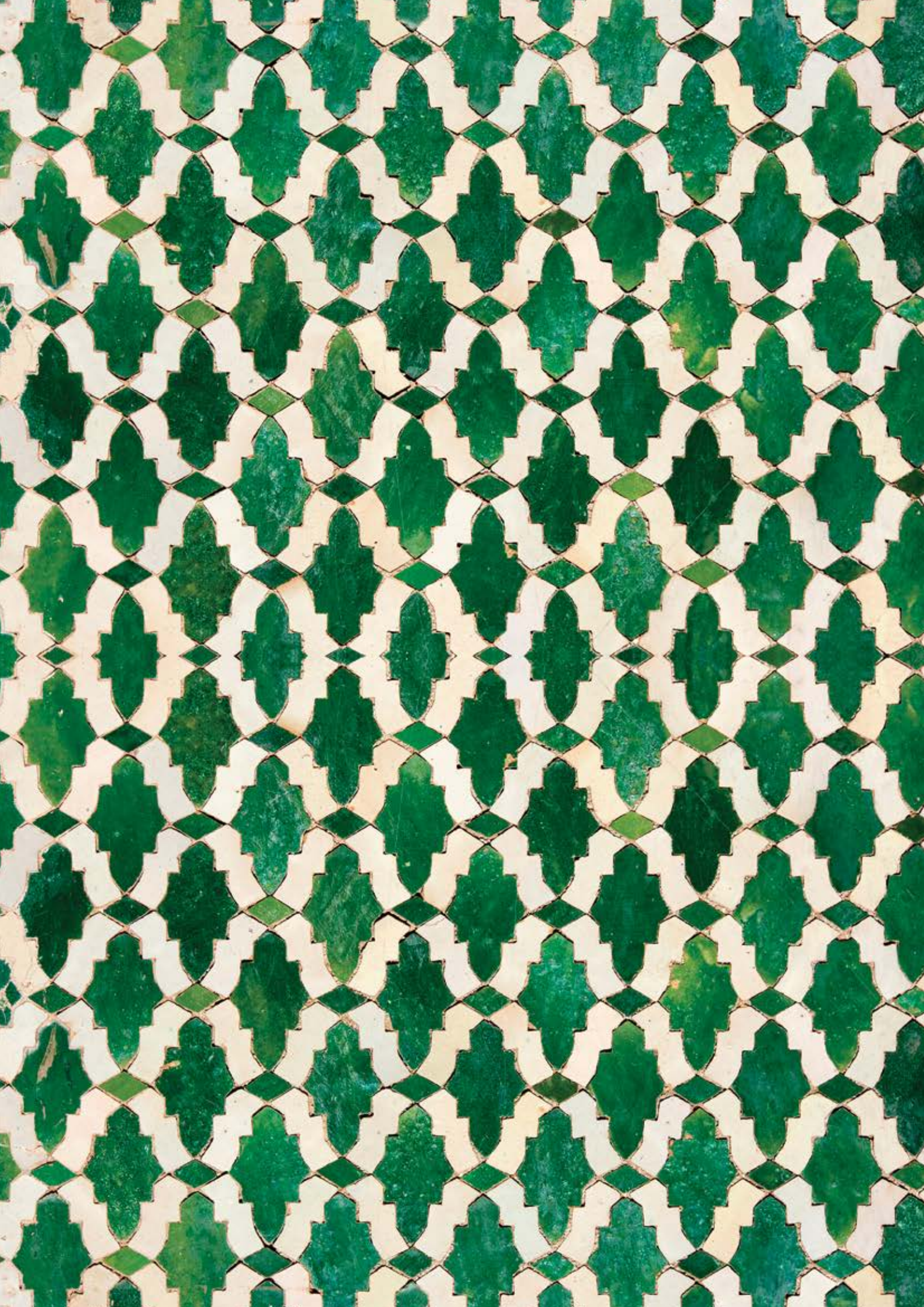
Aftab Malik

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Foreword by
USMAN KHAWAJA

September 2025

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The believer is the one
people trust with their lives
and wealth.

THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

———

It is strange that we should not
realise that no enemy could be
more dangerous to us than the
hatred with which we hate him,
and that by our efforts against him
we do less damage to our enemy
than is wrought in our own heart.

ST. AUGUSTINE

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

Many Australians remain unaware of the deep and enduring relationship that has existed between Muslim communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Historical evidence reveals Muslim Macassan traders from Indonesia journeyed regularly to Arnhem Land from *at least* the mid-1600s, long before the arrival of Europeans.[1]

This longstanding engagement was not one of conflict or threat, but of profound mutual connection and respect.[2] Initially rooted in trade, this relationship blossomed to include intermarriage[3] and the exchange of language and tradition, with words from Muslim prayers woven into Yolngu people's spiritualty, songs and rituals.[4]

In the late 19th century, Aboriginal–Muslim relations grew with the arrival of Cameleers, who transported goods and opened up transport routes across the centre of the country. These relations were built on mutual respect, cultural and religious exchange, and were strengthened by shared values.[5]

The enduring and reciprocal, yet often overlooked, relationship between Muslim and Aboriginal communities deserves recognition. This shared history of material, social, and spiritual exchange echoes in the present, creating space for enduring respect, generosity, and openness.

In acknowledging this shared history, I wish to pay my deepest respects to the traditional owners and custodians of Country throughout Australia. I honour their elders, past, present, and emerging, whose knowledge, cultural authority and wisdom continues to guide us.

Macassans at Victoria, Port Essington by HS Melville. Trade with the Makasar.

Creator: HS Melville.
Copyright: Published in The Queen, 8 February 1862
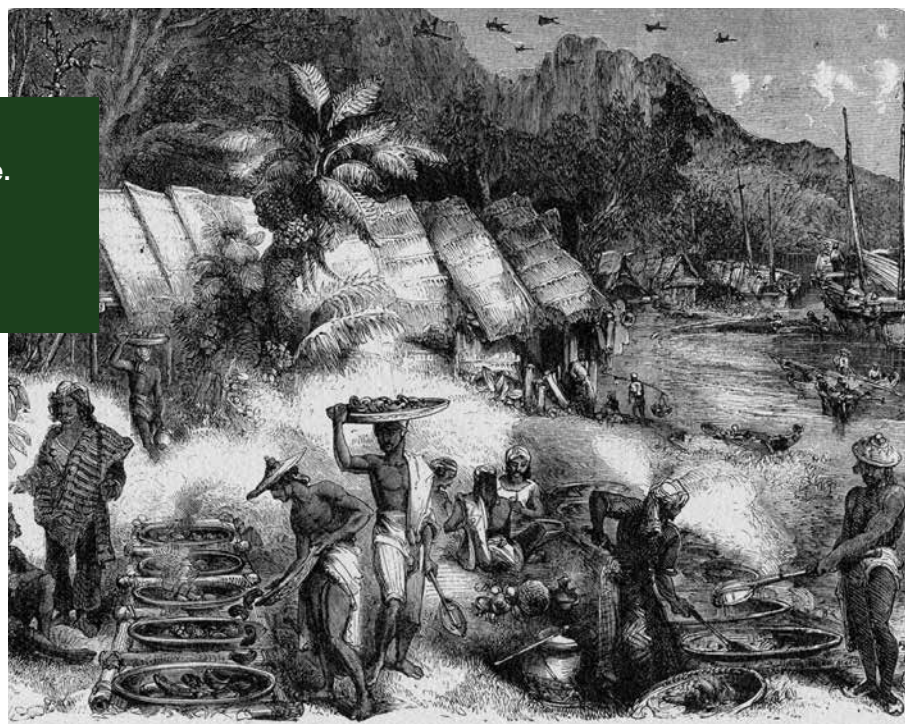
Acknowledgements

These recommendations stand as a testament to the incredible resilience of Muslim Australians (and Muslims living in Australia), who have silently endured hatred, abuse, prejudice and violence for too long, most of which has been either unacknowledged, questioned or denied. Truly a community of communities. These recommendations were made possible by the generous and heartfelt participation of over 100 individuals across Australia who dedicated their time and energy to attend consultations. Many faced their own challenges to attend, yet they chose to overcome them and share their experiences, ideas, and expertise, demonstrating a profound resilience and commitment to challenge Islamophobia. Thank you for trusting me.

Thanks to the experts, academics, scholars and specialists for lending me their expertise and time, for indulging me in discussions and for sharing their goodwill.

I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Special Envoy support team.

Foreword

Islamophobia, or any hate and prejudice, has no place in our society. Since the tragedy that occurred on 11 September 2001, the world has had its eyes not only on the Islamic world, but on Muslims living in their countries too. I still remember going to school the morning of 12 September and, with my schoolmates, trying to figure out what just happened.

But I would never have believed that the day before would have such a profound effect not only on my life in Australia, but for many Muslims around the world. Before that event, people had barely heard of or even tried to understand Islam. To the Western world and from my experience in Australia (with its strong Christian roots), Islam seemed like this out-of-the-world religion that was so different from Christianity. The feeling I got from others was that Christianity was this white, wholesome religion, while Islam was something so foreign it was hard to understand. Although I knew deep down inside that that was wrong.

There are 3 main 'Semitic' religions in the world. Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Their leaders spoke Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic. Throughout history they have been intertwined and linked through Abraham and his sons Isaac and Ishmael, and they remain linked until this day. Other than Christianity, no other major religion but Islam holds Jesus and his mother, Mary, in such high regard: to the point where Jesus is mentioned more times in the Qur'an than Muhammad himself. Why is this important? Well, it's to break the stigma. Jesus was a Semite who most likely spoke and prayed in Aramaic and was a person of colour. Muhammad was also a Semite who spoke and prayed in Arabic. Moses was a Semite who spoke and prayed in Hebrew. Millions upon millions of Muslims around the world pray in a Semitic language every day; as do I. This shows we are not that different. We are one but the same in a long history of monotheism.

There is a reason why I'm pointing out these similarities. Although all 3 religions believe in very similar things, Muslims are treated very differently. Islamophobia has a deep correlation with racism. Most Muslims you will find around the world are people of colour. Hence, when someone thinks about Islam, they think of a person of colour, even though there are many Caucasian Muslims. But it is this feature of 'colour' and difference that allows people, particularly in Australia, to attack people of the Islamic faith without hesitation. Because even though Muslims in Australia love Australia, we don't look 'Australian'.

Some people believe Islamophobia isn't real or doesn't really exist, or maybe it's not considered as important as other prejudices. But I can tell you it's real. And it has become more prevalent than ever over the last few years, and I can provide you with a real-life example.

My mother is a hijab-wearing woman. I respect her and love her very dearly. For the last 10 years, I have seen how people look at her as she is walking down the street, going to the supermarket or the park for a walk. Many times, I purposely walk slightly behind my parents in case someone tries to do something out of hate, just so I can see and respond and defend them adequately. The looks and double takes she gets from people are quite disturbing, and it does rile me up. I believe that there is nothing more difficult than being a hijab-wearing Muslim. They literally wear their religion on their sleeves. As a Muslim man, much like many other people belonging to any faith, no one knows what I am. I walk down in my plain clothes as an Australian, and no one can tell what religion I belong to, only that I am a person of colour. But a Muslim woman who covers her hair is out there for the world to see; she can't hide, and she automatically becomes a target for hate and prejudice. And in today's environment, when Islamophobia is at an all-time high, who knows what someone might do. Honestly, when I think about it and put myself in their shoes, it would be daunting to leave home every time. That's not the Australia I know and love.

"This report offers a practical, evidence-based approach that is rooted in dignity"

But hate is everywhere in today's society. And my mother, of all people, experienced it last year during the Boxing Day Test match. She had come to watch me play with my family. It's always a momentous occasion. Unfortunately, this time 2 young men decided to walk behind my mum and scream obscenities in both ears, simply because she was wearing a hijab. Imagine yourself, just walking along, minding your own business at the MCG and 2 guys walk behind you out of nowhere only to scream insults in your ear. She was terrified. My mum was distraught; she didn't know what to do and she was extremely frightened, shocked and upset by the incident. A security guard saw everything. The guys were detained, and the police were called and they were taken away. But God bless my mum's soul, she didn't want to proceed any further. "I don't want to ruin the rest of these young boys' lives over one incident", she told me. I was furious that someone treated my mother that way, but I respected my mum's wishes, and we kept it quiet and hidden, even from my teammates. But my mum's mercy was inspirational to see. Something she had learned from Islam, the religion of so-called "violence and hate". But don't tell me Islamophobia doesn't exist.

The actions of those 2 individuals were purely based on hate and creating fear, and as I said earlier, nothing is more visible than a woman wearing a hijab. This incident is not solely confined to my mum. Sadly, they occur too often for Muslim women across Australia. There are so many. Take in 2019, for example, where young Fahima Adan had her scarf ripped from her head, with the assaulter yelling "I hate Islam," to which Fahima replied, "I'm Australian as well". Or in 2024 in Adelaide, when a Muslim woman and her toddler were abused in a shopping centre, with a teenage girl asking, "Can I pat your dog?", referring to her toddler in her pram. She then proceeded to try to rip off her head scarf and tell her, "Go back to your country". Or most recently in February 2025, when 2 women were assaulted by another woman, and one was choked by her own hijab as the assailant tried to rip it off.

These are all hate crimes, and all have the same objective to create fear and animosity. But most of all, they are racially driven just as much as they are religiously driven. The common theme of "go back to your country" is something that the government and the whole of Australia must address. We are all Australian, no matter what you look like, or what you wear or what you believe in.

"We are all Australian, no matter what you look like, or what you wear or what you believe in".

If you hadn't heard about these incidents, I wouldn't be surprised. Most of them are not centrepieces in news stories, and get swept under as quickly as they come out. An antisemitic attack against a person of the Jewish faith is no different from an Islamophobic attack on a person of Islamic faith. Yet, particularly by the media and some politicians, these 2 crimes get covered very differently, with one far outweighing the other in terms of exposure and outrage. And it begs the question: Why? Are both these crimes not the same? Or let's talk about the other narrative that is often propagated. Namely, that all crimes or murders committed by anyone remotely connected with Islam are terrorist attacks. Yet a crime committed by a Christian, Jew or person of any other religious background, is just that: a crime. Profiling incidents based on someone's background, particularly those of the Islamic faith or ties with the Islamic faith, is unjust. It creates tension in the community that is not needed and puts into the public a false narrative which further fuels Islamophobia.

These recommendations should serve as a line in the sand for all Australians. It should serve as a reality check that far too many Australians are being discriminated against based on their beliefs and the way they look. This report offers a practical, evidence-based approach that is rooted in dignity, respect and our shared commitment to a more inclusive and just Australia.

At its core, Islamophobia is not just about individual prejudice; it is also institutional, structural and systemic. It affects the ability of Australians who are Muslim, or perceived to be Muslim, to feel safe, valued and included. It erodes trust in our public institutions, weakens social cohesion and undermines the democratic ideals that bind us together.

This report and its recommendations, written by the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, Aftab Malik, are not only timely but necessary. They reflect the voices of fellow Australians (including mine) and the urgent need to act with empathy, courage and resolve. Furthermore, the recommendations are not punitive: they seek to work with people, respect free speech and engender coming to know Muslims better, rather than placing penalties and monitoring people's actions and words.

Let's not allow Islamophobia or any other form of hatred to corrode the values we hold dear. The responsibility of dealing with Islamophobia doesn't lie with a select few, but all of us. But, only a select few, including the Prime Minister and others, can enact real change, and make a long-lasting difference felt for years to come.

I recommend this report to be read by all Australians. I also urge us all to listen, learn and most importantly, act collaboratively as one nation, proud of all its people.

Usman Khawaja

Introduction: Context is Everything

Defining Islamophobia

Many may find it surprising to learn that there is no universally accepted definition of Islamophobia.

The term gained notoriety in 1997 when the Runnymede Trust, a United Kingdom think tank on race and cultural diversity, used it to refer to a "dread or hatred of Islam" (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 1).[6] Since this initial report, a wide range of scholars across various disciplines have worked to define and describe the phenomenon across the globe. This body of work grew following the intensification of Islamophobia following the 11 September 2001 attacks, which marked the Global War on Terror.

Governments in comparable contexts to Australia have sought to establish national definitions. The United Kingdom Government is currently undergoing its second attempt to arrive at a robust definition.[7] The United States' first ever *National Strategy to Counter Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Hate*, defines Islamophobia as "hatred, discrimination, or bias directed at Muslims or those perceived to be Muslim" (The White House, 2024, p. 3).[8] Canada's *Anti-Racism Strategy 2024–2028* defines it as "racism, stereotypes, prejudice, fear or acts of hostility directed towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general" which "can lead to viewing and treating Muslims as a greater security threat on an institutional, systemic and societal level" (Government of Canada, 2024, as cited in Elghawaby, 2024).[9]

The term is contested, and debated,[10] as Islamophobia takes different forms in different national contexts.[11] However, broadly speaking, it is a perceived "fear" (Gabsi, 2024, p. 17)[12] of, and "threat" (Awan & Zempi, 2020, p. 7)[13] from, Islam and Muslims, and encapsulates a range of anti-Muslim behaviours, such as anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Muslim sentiment, and anti-Muslim prejudice. Increasingly, many academics, activists and community leaders define it as (anti-Muslim) racism,[14] in that it propagates negative perceptions of Islam based on religious and cultural signifiers such as dress, name, language, and physical appearance. The consequence of Islamophobia is that it causes Muslims *and* those perceived to be Muslim to experience exclusion, discrimination, hatred, and violence.

The absence of a universal definition should not deter us from acknowledging that Muslim Australians are facing increasing instances of prejudice, discrimination, assault, and attacks. Indeed, academic debate is "less about *what* actually exists than it does *how* we label it" (Lean, 2019, p. 15).[15]

This report does not seek to define Islamophobia, but to convey its pervasiveness and impacts.

Muslim women, who comprise the majority of targets of reported incidents of everyday Islamophobia, have had their hijabs pulled and ripped off. They have been subjected to foul, disgusting and degrading behaviour.

Combating Islamophobia: an urgent priority

Widespread evidence, research and anecdotes have pointed to the persisting negative impacts of Islamophobia in Australia, particularly following the 11 September attacks in 2001.[16] Experts on Islamophobia have highlighted that the prevalence, intensity and impacts of Islamophobia are compounded by sociopolitical events. It is within these contexts that climates of suspicion and fear lead to violence, discrimination and exclusion, threatening the safety, wellbeing and prosperity of Muslims in Australia. The 7 October 2023 attacks in Israel mark the most recent turning point, where Islamophobia has since reached unprecedented levels according to rigorous research and anecdotal incidents.[17]

These recommendations emerged from my national listening tour of diverse Muslim communities during November and December 2024, placing their embodied concerns at the heart of these recommendations. Some of the data that I have gathered indicate that, as in other country contexts in which Islamophobia is a concern, the phenomenon is multidimensional, covering not just discursive and interpersonal hate, but also institutional and structural forms of discrimination.

While some of the recommendations I make cover these multiple dimensions, systematic dimensions of discrimination faced by Muslims require a deeper examination. This could include, for example, key approaches specified in my proposed recommendations, such as addressing discriminatory practices that exclude Muslims from employment, hindering social mobility.[18]

Islamophobia is real and pervasive

My role emerged following a legacy of work that has documented the rise of Islamophobia in Australia, long before the 7 October attacks. Still, it has yet to see their observations or warnings acknowledged and taken seriously. In my role as Australia's first Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia, I travelled across the nation and heard heartbreaking stories about how Islamophobia negatively impacts the daily life of everyday Australians.

In Australia today, Islamophobia is a pervasive, and at times terrifying, reality that has devastating consequences for victims, eroding social cohesion. The normalisation of Islamophobia is so widespread that many incidents go unreported. It manifests online and in person, on social media, within institutions, and in everyday public spaces. From vile, hate-filled graffiti, the vandalism of Muslim property, and the verbal, as well as physical, violence towards Muslim bodies, Islamophobia is a part of everyday life for Muslim communities in Australia. In the online space, we can measure the escalation of Islamophobic hate crimes, following "trigger" events of international and regional significance, manifesting in hate speech, threats to safety and online stalking and harassment.[19]

Muslim women, who comprise the majority of targets of reported incidents of everyday Islamophobia, have had their hijabs pulled and ripped off. They have been subjected to foul, disgusting and degrading behaviour. They have been spat at, punched, choked, pushed, had hot drinks and food thrown at them, and have even been threatened with rape and murder. The visual markers of the Islamic faith serve as identifiers that trigger Islamophobic responses, explaining why certain individuals and groups, such as women, are more likely to become targets for hostility than others.[20]

Mosques have been threatened, with chilling references made to the 2019 Christchurch attacks, and anti-Muslim hate messages have been graffitied on homes and in public spaces, including calls for Muslims to be killed. Muslim school children have not been spared from the consequences of Islamophobic hatred.[21] The Australian Human Rights Commission Report, *Sharing the Stories of Muslim Australians*, captures some of the Islamophobic experiences of children. One in particular concerns a young Muslim family being approached by a stranger on the train who not only verbally abused the parents but also approached the children, saying that he would "love to kill them all" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021, p. 64).[22]

A licence to hate

The evidence documenting anti-Muslim hate is overwhelming. It is propelled by Muslims being perceived as a national security threat[23] and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims by sections of the media[24] and, regrettably, some of our parliamentarians — both intentionally and, perhaps, inadvertently.[25] These messages have provided a social licence to hate Muslims,[26] with many Muslim Australians speaking of harassment and attacks on mosques "following divisive comments by politicians and negative media commentary" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021, p. 11).[27] This has led to their constant "othering,"[28] with massive, multiple implications for Muslim Australians that range from mental health to employment and social exclusion.[29]

Australia reacts to Christchurch Mosque terror attacks.

Photo by Paul Kane/Getty Images

Hate mail received by Omar bin Alkhattab mosque in South Australia, August 2025

Perth mosque attack: Vehicle was gutted in the attack and four others were heat-damaged.

(Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation – Library Sales. Kimberley Howie © 2016 ABC)

As a dominant number of academics, scholars and activists — often with legal, sociological and anthropological backgrounds — have argued, these are all symptoms that point to deeper, underlying institutional[30] and structural[31] forms of Islamophobia. This understanding is also reflected in the definition of Islamophobia by Professor Awan and Dr Zempi, which has been adopted by the United Nations as part of the "International Day to Combat Islamophobia" on 15 March annually.[32] Whereas Muslim women form the majority of targets of everyday Islamophobia, research demonstrates that Muslim men are often disproportionately targeted by structural Islamophobia, particularly in relation to law enforcement.[33]

In stark contrast to the findings of the latest *Islamophobia in Australia report*, a survey released on Australia Day 2025 revealed that only 9 per cent of the Australian public believe that Islamophobia has increased since 7 October 2023 — a decrease from 14 per cent just 3 months earlier.[34] The gap between the lived experiences of Muslim communities and existing evidence of Islamophobia, compared with general public perceptions of this issue in Australia, is deeply concerning. It is exacerbated by voices in public discourse that downplay the seriousness of Islamophobia,[35] while others deny its existence outright.[36]

Palestinian and Arab Australians are being dehumanised

The current discourse surrounding Islamophobia in Australia has taken a deeply disturbing turn, with the targeting of Palestinian and Arab–Australian communities, and their supporters. This framing, especially rampant on social media, includes dehumanisation,[37] which reduces the rich and diverse identities of Palestinian and Arab Australians into abhorrent stereotypes. As a homogenising discursive frame, it often essentialises all Palestinians as Muslim, regardless of whether they belong to Christian or other faith groups within the Palestinian community. This frame arguably triggered, but most certainly contributed significantly to, the wave of Islamophobia following the 7 October attacks, and indeed, has sustained it.

> "I have listened to accounts of Palestinian students and teachers that involve alleged censorship of cultural expression, procedural unfairness, harassment, bullying and intimidation – all of which have resulted in most feeling unsafe and suffering from severe emotional distress".
>
> AFTAB MALIK.

ALL PALESTINIANS

ARE TERRORISTS

OR

TERRORISTS

SUPPORTERS

Exact recreation of a message placed on a placard that was held by a protestor in Australia, 2025, claiming that all Palestinians are terrorists or terrorist supporters.

While at times anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia do intersect,[38] I am wary of using Islamophobia as a proxy for, or to conflate it with, these manifestations of racism, which can also manifest as their own distinct forms of prejudice and discrimination.[39] Nasser Mashni (2024), president of the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), unequivocally states that "Anti-Palestinian racism isn't just another form of prejudice, nor can it be subsumed under the banner of Islamophobia; it's a deep-seated, systematic effort to silence, exclude, demonise and dehumanise Palestinians and those showing solidarity with them."[40] Regardless of this nuance, the persistent attacks on Palestinian and Arab Australian and their supporters[41] are deeply alarming and should be condemned.

A child reacts as people salvage belongings amid the rubble of a damaged building following strikes on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip.

Photo by Mohammed Abed/AFP via Getty Images.

Although anti-Palestinian racism must not be absorbed by Islamophobia, there appears some connection. These connections are demonstrated in how this broader climate of suspicion and alleged discrimination has also manifested within our educational institutions.[42] For example, the presidents of Australia's 2 national peak bodies for Muslim students — the Muslim Student Associations of Australia (MSAA) and the Coalition of Muslim Student Associations Australia (CoMSAA) — have conveyed to me concerns nearly identical to one another, concerns I have heard from other students as well. Muslim female students have explicitly expressed their unease to remain on campus after classes, and instead resign themselves to prayer spaces which they view as "safe zones". Many students are tired of universities' concern with "extremism". Through their efforts to humanise and raise awareness of Palestinians' suffering, they feel abandoned, unwelcome, and silenced. The students and the presidents repeatedly refer to these experiences as Islamophobic. This is all eroding trust between Muslim students and their universities.

Meanwhile, Palestinians are deprived of their moral agency, and the full spectrum of their lived experiences remains unacknowledged.[43] Members from both Palestinian and Arab–Australian communities often speak of the pressure they feel to conceal their identities, being vilified for their views on Palestine, and linked to extremism.[44] I have listened to accounts of Palestinian students and teachers that involve alleged censorship of cultural expression, procedural unfairness, harassment, bullying and intimidation—all of which have resulted in most feeling unsafe and suffering from severe emotional distress. They are fearful of disciplinary measures for asserting their Palestinian identity, or for advocating for Palestinian rights. They feel isolated, dejected, and invalidated. The censorship of what amounts to pro-Palestinian discourse points to a systematic effort across society, in educational settings, at our workplaces, and in sections of our media, to silence and suppress vital voices in public conversations.[45] This is not just a matter of representation, but it undermines the principles of fairness, justice and equity that are foundational to a democratic society.

"It is abundantly clear that the hellish suffering inflicted upon the people of Gaza is mobilising world opinion"

AFTAB MALIK

An estimated 225,000 to 300,000 people marched across the Sydney Harbour Bridge during a pro-Palestinian rally in Sydney on August 3, 2025.

It is abundantly clear that the hellish suffering inflicted upon the people of Gaza is mobilising world opinion, which has left growing numbers "with such an intolerable weight of grief, perplexity and bad conscience" (Mishra, 2025, p.8).[46] This grief over the mass destruction of life is being compounded by what I am hearing from community leaders, activists, youth (as young as 7), students, service providers, and many others in our society—the government's lack of moral action and exactitude. "The destruction of Gaza", writes Peter Beinart, has become "a symbol of our age" signifying "unchecked cruelty and unbearable pain" (Beinart, 2025, p.120).[47]

I have been actively engaging with the National Student Ombudsman and various police forces across states and territories to provide support in addressing these experiences, and the domestic repercussions of those speaking out against the ongoing "crisis" in Gaza. One of the world's largest children's charities (United Nations Children's Fund, 2023) has called Gaza "the most dangerous place in the world to be a child",[48] a "catastrophic humanitarian situation",[49] as described by the International Court of Justice (ICJ, 2024), and either "a genocide in the making" (United Nations, 2023),[50] an "unfolding" genocide" (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024),[51] "an act of genocide" (Human Rights Watch, 2024),[52] or an actual genocide,[53] according to numerous leading international human rights organisations and United Nations experts. The violence in Gaza has been called genocide by a growing number of genocide scholars, including one who, in 2023, called it "a textbook case of genocide" (Segal, 2023).[54]

However one describes the diabolical situation in Gaza, Oxfam has determined that more women and children have died there "over the past year than the equivalent period of any other conflict over the past two decades" (Oxfam International, 2024).[55] The inescapable reality that confronts us all is that despite the stated aims of the Government of Israel, tens of thousands of children have reportedly been either killed or seriously injured in what has been described by the United Nations Children's Fund as a "ruthless war on children" (UNICEF, 2025).[56]

"The destruction of Gaza", writes Peter Beinart, has become "a symbol of our age" signifying "unchecked cruelty and unbearable pain".

I urge the Australian Government to take a clear and public stand against the dehumanisation, hate, racism, and silencing directed at Palestinian and Arab Australian, as well as their supporters. These forms of prejudice often intersect with and are compounded by Islamophobia, further marginalising Muslim communities in Australia. Accordingly, I recommend the establishment of a commission of inquiry to investigate the main drivers, causes, impacts, and lived experiences of anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab racism, and Islamophobia.

Islam and Muslims remain mistrusted

Assertions regarding the inherent violence of Islam are not confined to far-right extremist echo chambers; such claims have also been propagated within scholarly and popular literature. In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, there was an overwhelming proliferation of publications that contributed to narratives depicting Islam as intrinsically associated with violence, extremism and terrorism.[57] Despite more than 2 decades of grassroots initiatives by community organisations and efforts by Muslim scholars, imams and academics to distinguish between terrorism and mainstream Islam,[58] the continued rise in global terror incidents post the 11 September terror attacks perpetuated the obscuring of extremist acts within the broader, diverse spectrum of Muslim beliefs and practices. As such, nearly 25 years after the 11 September terror attacks, questions linger among some public intellectuals about whether a genuine separation exists between extremism and mainstream Islam.[59]

This persistent ambiguity fuels ongoing confusion about the true nature of Islam—and by extension, Muslims—possibly prompting then-prime minister Scott Morrison to express that he was unsure

"if Australians understand Islam very well" (Williams, 2019).[60] Compounding the problem is that public perceptions of Islam have been described as "dominated by misrepresentation and distorted images" (Pratt, 2011, p. 380),[61] resulting in Professor Bryan S. Turner, one of the world's leading sociologists of religions, to conclude that there remains a "considerable misunderstanding of Islam" (Turner, 2023, p. 4).[62] This, in turn, has contributed to a malaise experienced across the Western world, dubbed as "Islam anxiety" by Professor Juan Cole (Cole, 2009).[63]

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terror attacks, a wave of unprecedented counter-terrorism legislation, public expectations and demands to condemn terror attacks, and a socio-political environment that facilitated the growth of Islamophobia, many Muslim Australians feel weary. They also feel isolated, marginalised and disenfranchised, as they are perceived to be framed as the threat from within, and divided along the lines as "good Muslim, bad Muslim" (Mamdani, 2004).[64] Five years after the terror attacks, Maria Vamvakinou MP observed that Australia was experiencing:

> a new climate of fear, suspicion and sometimes open hostility directed towards Australia's Arab and Muslim communities, one in which the 'war on terrorism' has all too often been translated, both in sections of our media and by some members of the Australian community, as a war on Australia's Arab and Muslim population. Since 9–11 there has been an alarming increase in documented cases of racial vilification and racially motivated violence directed at Arab and Muslim Australians. Muslim women in particular who wear the hijab, as well as young schoolchildren, have been the main targets for these attacks. (Cheng, 2017, p. 79)[65]

Vamvakinou's observations remain tragically relevant today; a stark reminder of how deeply ingrained anti-Muslim sentiment has become. The climate of fear, suspicion, and hostility she described, persists. The Islamophobia Register Australia has consistently documented a continued rise in anti-Muslim hate incidents, which saw an "alarming escalation" (Carland et al., 2025, p.75)[66] during 2023–2024. This data confirms that the fear and hostility Vamvakinou described 2 decades ago have not receded, and in many ways have intensified.

This in turn, has contributed to a malaise experienced across the Western world, dubbed as "Islam anxiety".

Conversely, the combination of local and global terrorist attacks, the promotion of a constant fear of, and threat from, local Muslim extremists, confusion, distortion, and misrepresentation of Islam, has generated significant anxiety and fear toward Muslim Australians. This has resulted in them being perceived more negatively than members of any other religious group for an extended period.
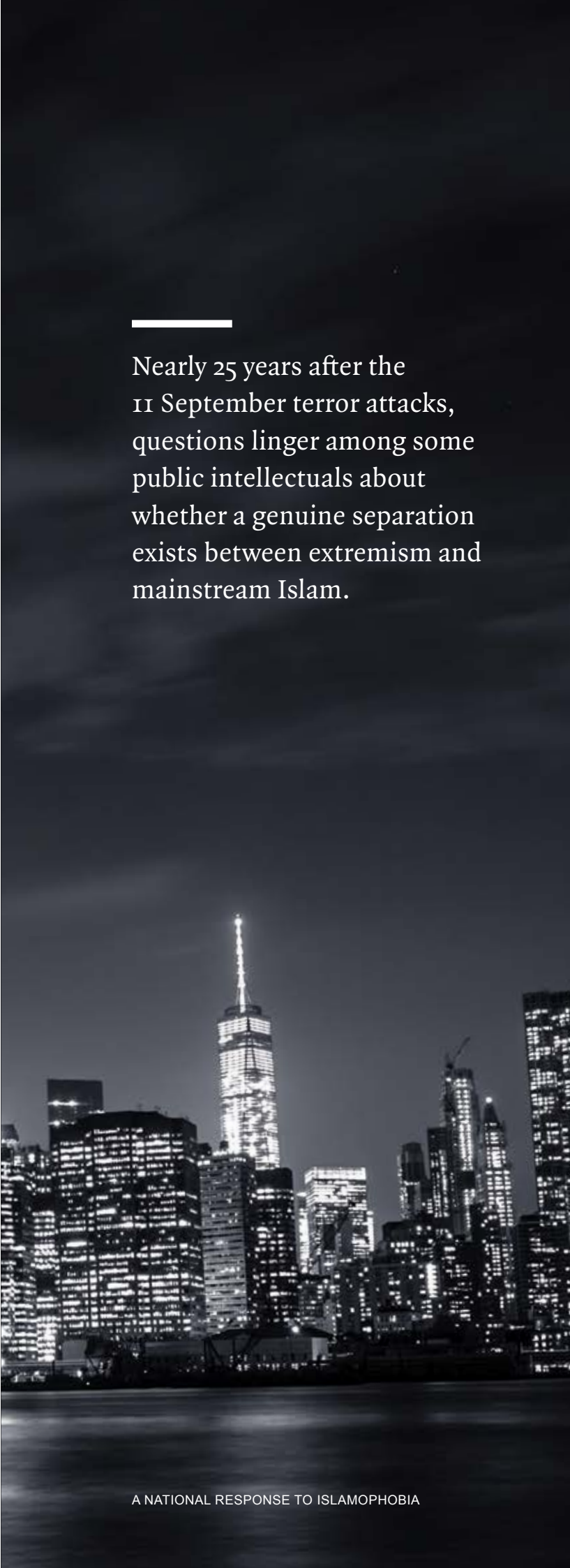
50%

of Australians self-identified as being anti-Muslim in a 10-year study published in 2011

In 2023, the Australian Cohesion Index revealed that only a quarter of Australians hold a positive view about Muslims.

1 in 3

Australians express negative attitudes towards Muslims in 2024

Nearly 25 years after the
11 September terror attacks,
questions linger among some
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whether a genuine separation
exists between extremism and
mainstream Islam.

Polls consistently reveal a bleak reality for Muslim Australians

In a 2007 survey of racist attitudes in Sydney, Muslims were the primary out-group identified among respondents (12.5 per cent),[67] and again in 2015, whereby 32 per cent of respondents to a national survey expressed negative views towards Muslim Australians.[68] Overall, studies on racial attitudes in Australia found that Muslims were viewed most negatively over all other out-groups nationally.[69] A 10-year study published in 2011 found "50% of Australians self-identified as being anti-Muslim" (Carland, 2023, p. 1).[70] Eleven years later, the Scanlon Foundation's 2022 *Mapping Social Cohesion* report revealed that Muslims are perceived with the highest levels of negative sentiment.[71] In 2023, the Australian Cohesion Index revealed that only a quarter of Australians hold a positive view about Muslims.[72] Most recently, in 2024, the Scanlon Institute found that more than 1 in 3 Australians (34 per cent) express negative attitudes towards Muslims, an increase from 27 per cent the year before.[73]

The impacts of Islamophobia are devastating

During November and December 2024, I met with more than 100 Muslim community members, representing academics, experts on Islamophobia, youth, women, religious leaders, Muslim community leaders, Islamic societies and peak bodies from across Australia. I listened to their experiences, fears, challenges and frustrations living as Muslim Australians. Many told me that they were called "terrorists", "murderers" and "killers" by strangers in everyday settings and spaces. The impact of Islamophobia upon Muslims across Australia has often led to persistent psychological strain, resulting in anxiety, depression and suicide ideation for many victims.

The Islamophobia Register Australia records in its most recent report that 92 per cent of victims of Islamophobic incidents "reported one or more long-term impacts on their own lives or that of their family or community". This included feelings such as "fear, anger, humiliation, despair, or sadness" (Carland et al., 2025, p. 25).[74] I heard how families consciously avoided certain public spaces due to fear, and how this engendered a sense of isolation and a lack of belonging. This, too, is corroborated by evidence.[75] I also observed how others struggled with their emotions, feeling trapped between optimism and pessimism when thinking about their place and that of their children, in Australia.

The recommendations are proposed from a multidisciplinary perspective

My recommendations were considered against others made within key Australian and international reports.[76] They reaffirm the insights in the Australian Human Rights Commission's report, *Sharing the Stories of Muslim Australians*, and align with the recommendations in the Commission's *National Anti-Racism Framework*. I also sought critical feedback on my recommendations from 30 national and international experts in Islamophobia, social cohesion, community activism, criminology, news media, psychology, hate crime, anti-racism, mental health and Islam–West relations.[77] The aim was to address Islamophobia from a multidisciplinary perspective, thus addressing the multidimensional impacts and consequences of Islamophobia. The recommendations take a whole-of-society approach, reflecting evidence that shows Islamophobia permeates all levels and corners of society.

What many Muslim Australians are experiencing are not random, isolated events; they are occurring far too often, to far too many Muslims. Islamophobia cannot be addressed by Muslims alone and necessitates urgent government intervention to achieve lasting change and foster a more inclusive society. Islamophobia, like other forms of discrimination, racism and hate, is a societal issue that requires a comprehensive approach to combat effectively. Efforts to combat Islamophobia should be integral to existing broader efforts to promote equality and justice, thus ensuring a cohesive and effective strategy.

I urge the Australian Government to adopt these recommendations in their entirety and, in doing so, reflect its commitment to addressing Islamophobia in a systematic manner. All Australians have the right to practise their religion and express their political beliefs freely, without fear of violence, racial discrimination, hatred or persecution.

Investigation underway into online threat made against Lakemba Mosque

ABC News, 20 March 2025

Severed pig's head left in toilet near mosque at University of Western Australia

ABC News, 7 Dec 2015

Islamic centre firebombed and tagged with "Islamic State" graffiti

The Age, 11 Dec 2016

Sydney Islamic School Targeted In Online Bomb Threat

CityHub, 7 March 2025

Reclaim supporters welcome mosque blaze

SBS News, 17 April 2015

Pig's head thrown at Newcastle mosque

Newcastle Herald, 20 Nov 2014

Islamic school in Sydney's south-west targeted by man wielding knife

The Guardian, 26 Sept 2014

Canberra Islamic Centre vandalised

Region Canberra, 14 April 2014

Brisbane's Holland Park mosque vandalised with swastika, accused Christchurch shooter's name on walls

ABC News, 11 Sept 2019

Perth mosque attack: Car firebombed, anti-Islam graffiti sprayed in 'act of hate'

ABC News, 29 Jun 2016

Islamic leaders question why police didn't lay more serious charges after Brisbane mosque threat

The Guardian, 5 Oct 2022

Brisbane Islamic centre covered in graffiti

The Courier Mail, 25 Sept 2014

Criticism of Islam or Muslims, when grounded in respectful and lawful debate, must remain protected as a fundamental exercise of free speech.

Freedom of speech is a critical pillar of a free society

It is imperative to affirm that these recommendations are not aimed at censoring legitimate, lawful discourse or even the dislike or critique of Muslims or Islam. Instead, they are intended to address the serious issue of prejudice, racism and hate that incite discrimination, hostility or violence. Criticism of Islam or Muslims, when grounded in respectful and lawful debate, must remain protected as a fundamental exercise of free speech.

Despite the unprecedented levels of Islamophobia that the Muslim community is enduring and their laudable resilience,[78] I am cautious that Islamophobia should not become another meaningless plastic word, nor accusations of it be wielded as a weapon to silence or suppress respectful discussions and debate. Upholding this distinction is essential to safeguarding democratic values, ensuring the freedom of expression, and preserving the integrity and effectiveness of efforts to combat genuine hate crimes, discrimination and vilification. Freedom of speech is a cornerstone of our society, but it should not be abused.

In fighting hatred, do not espouse hatred

As I look towards tomorrow and beyond, I believe that meaningful change is possible. The resilience, courage and voices of Muslim Australians, paired with the insights and support of experts and allies, serve as a powerful foundation upon which to build a more inclusive society. These recommendations seek to remedy the challenges that everyday Muslim Australians endure and have accepted as part of their reality as Muslims living in Australia.

Importantly, Islamophobia not only impacts Muslim communities but also has far-reaching implications for all Australians. It creates suspicion, fear and hate. It legitimises prejudice and dehumanisation, corroding social cohesion. Together with specific, targeted measures, a responsive commitment and collective effort, I am confident that we can foster a society where anti-Muslim hate and prejudice are acknowledged, challenged and rectified.

Both my Office and I will advocate for policies and initiatives that not only protect Muslim Australians against individual acts of discrimination but also challenge structural and institutional inequalities. This will be a daunting task, especially in a time described as a "disorienting present" (Brown, 2023, p. 4)[79] marred by polarisation, contempt, and where everyone "feels that they are somehow being violated and victimized" (Aly & Stephens, 2022, p. 1).[80]

Combating hatred, particularly after enduring prolonged experiences of racism, prejudice and bigotry, inevitably takes a significant emotional toll. Friedrich Nietzsche cautioned us "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you" (Nietzsche, 1886/1966, p. 89).[81]

This warning underscores the importance of maintaining moral integrity and psychological resilience while confronting injustice. Combating hate should not entail reciprocating with hatred; rather, it involves a conscious effort to heal and transform hearts. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, emphasises virtue as the pursuit of what has come to be known as the "golden mean"[82] (Bartlett et al., 2011, pp 33–36)—striving for moderation and balance even amid challenging circumstances. Guided by this principle, I endeavour to foster inner change within those who revel and trade in hate, wherever possible.

A key part of my effort is engendering common sense—simple, foundational principles of fairness and respect. My aim is to actively combat Islamophobia and promote inclusivity and equity within our communities. These core values will guide my actions, policies and partnerships as I work towards a more caring,[83] just and compassionate society—one rooted in virtues such as empathy, justice, courage and wisdom.[84] Fostering these virtues through difficult yet respectful conversations is also essential to overcoming prejudice, as they help us develop the common sense needed to see beyond stereotypes and recognise the inherent dignity of every individual. Ultimately, the goal is to cultivate a society where understanding replaces fear and compassion triumphs over hatred.

Aftab Malik

Australia's Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia

"These recommendations capture the multidimensional impacts and consequences of Islamophobia. They take a whole-of-society approach, reflecting evidence that shows Islamophobia permeates all levels and corners of society".

AFTAB MALIK

Recommendations

Purpose of these recommendations

1.

Islamophobia engenders social exclusion, which leads to a degraded sense of personal safety, a deterioration in health, impaired performance in education and productivity in the workforce. It also corrodes a sense of belonging, citizenship and trust in government.

2.

Islamophobia has far-reaching implications for all Australians because it produces an "us" and "them" dynamic, which undermines Australia's core values such as mutual respect, inclusion, fairness and compassion.

3.

Fear, hatred and the mistrust of Muslim Australians and Islam encourage people to act on fear instead of fact, and legitimise prejudice and dehumanisation.

4.

Islamophobia is not a Muslim issue, but a social cohesion issue, and therefore a challenge for all Australians.

Combating Islamophobia requires a multifaceted, multisector, whole-of-society approach. To be effective and thorough, it involves:

» Political leadership

» Education and awareness-raising

» Increased social interactions

» Community engagement

» Policy changes

» Legal responses and mechanisms

» Establishing support systems

These recommendations should be acknowledged as having national significance. As such, any recommendations accepted should be formally included in the agenda of the National Cabinet to track and coordinate across federal, state and territory governments. Relevant issues should be referred to the appropriate ministerial councils and committees for targeted policy development and action as necessary.

Coordination

This document presents recommendations that the Australian Government will be responsible for and that the Special Envoy to Combat Islamophobia will support.

It is envisaged that the following federal agencies and other authorities will work together and play a key role in actioning the recommendations:

- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights
- Department of Home Affairs
- Attorney-General's Department
- Department of Education
- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Australian Sports Commission
- Department of Social Services
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
- Parliament of Australia — Parliamentary Joint Committee on Parliamentary Standards

For the recommendations to be effective, it will be essential to:

1. Create an oversight mechanism or a task force responsible for monitoring progress on all recommendations accepted by the government. This will minimise any interagency impediments, encourage cross-agency cooperation and monitor progress.

    a. Membership should comprise Senior Executive Service (SES) Band 3 officials from relevant Departments, and be chaired by the Secretary, Prime Minister and Cabinet.

2. Include provisions for the Special Envoy to be included in the oversight mechanism or task force, to:

    a. input advice where relevant

    b. facilitate specialist and community voices to attend (where appropriate)

    c. ensure that progress is being made.

3. Establish a baseline on the state of relations to the 4 purposes noted above and gather data over time to track and monitor the outcomes and effectiveness of these recommendations.

Recommendations for the Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

1. Confront Islamophobia with equivalent urgency to other discriminatory practices, and provide it with the same rights, protections, and legal recourse.

2. Formally recognise the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on 15 March, as established by the United Nations General Assembly.

3. Help build greater inclusivity into recruitment practices within the Australian Public Service by better understanding barriers that deter minority and diverse communities from applying, and use that insight to design more inclusive recruitment practices.

   a. This should also include efforts to improve retention and leadership pathways for minority and diverse communities.

4. Endorse Recommendation 16 of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *National Anti-Racism Framework*, to conduct an independent review of counter-terrorism laws, policies and practices to investigate potential discriminatory application and effect.

   a. This review should investigate the potential discriminatory application and effect on Muslim-Australian communities.

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights

5. Establish a commission of inquiry into Islamophobia, with Terms of Reference to examine:

   a. existing policies within key government agencies (as identified in these recommendations) to identify and address any discriminatory practices

   b. the current extent of Islamophobia in Australia, including identifying the main drivers and causes of:

      i. anti-Muslim hate

      ii. prejudice

      iii. dehumanisation

      iv. discrimination

      v. vilification

      vi. racism

   c. the role of media reporting, documentaries, film, social media and political discourse in contributing to rising hostility towards Muslims

   d. the intergenerational impact of Islamophobia

   e. the impact of Islamophobia on social cohesion and democracy

   f. the mental health impacts and economic costs of Islamophobia to Australia

   g. the impact of Islamophobia on the daily lives of Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim (e.g., at work, school, in sport and accessing healthcare, employment and housing), including Muslim refugees, those living with disabilities and those with intersectional identities

h. and evaluate the gendered nature and impacts of Islamophobia and the barriers that Muslim women and men face when reporting Islamophobia

i. the reasons for the under-reporting of Islamophobia to police specifically and authorities generally

j. the impact of officially adopting, or not adopting, a working definition of Islamophobia

k. implications for Australia's international image as an inclusive democracy

l. and determining baseline data for assessing progress.

m. how cultural and religious biases combine to produce employment barriers for Muslim applicants.

6. Establish a commission of inquiry into anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism, with Terms of Reference to examine:

a. the current extent of anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism in Australia, including identifying their main drivers, causes, impacts, and experiences

b. how to address and mitigate the negative consequences of anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism.

Department of Home Affairs

7. Strengthen funding to enable research teams to gather evidence on effective interventions that combat Islamophobia in Australia, and to develop, evaluate and disseminate anti-Islamophobia programs.

8. Establish a funding program aimed at enhancing the safety and security of Muslim not-for-profit institutions (such as Islamic centres, schools, community facilities), particularly mosques, large and small. The grant should encapsulate protection, planning and capability, incident management and wellbeing and resilience. The following measures should be covered by this grant:

a. all-hazards capital safety and security infrastructure, including security equipment and installation

b. maintenance of costs for one year from installation

c. minor construction related to the project

d. training to ensure the proper use of new security equipment

e. security risk assessments

f. development of risk mitigation plans

g. cybersecurity protection for Muslim organisations.

9. Support the capacity building of existing community monitoring and reporting efforts that document the extent of Islamophobic hate crimes and hate incidents, as well as community-based support services for those affected by such crimes and incidents.

10. Work with the Australian Federal Police and state and territory police agencies to improve data collection on hate crimes, including those motivated by Islamophobia, to inform policy and resource allocation.

11. Working in partnerships with states, territories and local government, provide grants that specifically aim to combat Islamophobia and strengthen social cohesion. These community grants must be evaluated, leveraging the research capacity mentioned above. These should include, but not be restricted to:

    a. community education programs

    b. youth engagement projects

    c. media monitoring, advocacy and literacy campaigns

    d. community safety initiatives

    e. arts, cultural festivals and activities

    f. conflict resolution programs

    g. interfaith initiatives

    h. documentary production grants to highlight the lived experiences, histories and contributions of Muslim Australians, as well as stories highlighting positive intergroup contact, journeys out of prejudice and Islamophobia, and of coming together to combat prejudice

    i. social media initiatives that counter Islamophobic narratives and promote inclusive online communities

    j. digital storytelling projects that empower Muslim voices and foster empathy across diverse audiences

    k. grants for online platforms that support peer education, reporting of online hate and community resilience

    l. partnerships with tech companies (large and small) to develop tools and campaigns addressing Islamophobia in digital spaces

    m. awareness programs for security agencies.

12. Address the role of foreign actors and domestic affiliations in spreading Islamophobic content as part of broader foreign influence operations.

13. Establish a position of Liaison to Muslim communities within the National Emergency Management Agency to embed tailored programs for Muslim communities within universal disaster risk reduction, response and recovery services to minimise barriers to access and also reduce Islamophobia linked to specific emergency events.

14. Expand existing bystander training to include capacity-building for frontline practitioners, workers and teachers to recognise and respond to Islamophobic incidents.

15. Mandate compulsory religious sensitivity training for all Australian Federal Police officers, similar to domestic violence and family violence–related training, to:

    a. better identify Islamophobic hate crimes

    b. improve handling of complaints of Islamophobic hate crime incidents

    c. create a national network of hate crime subject matter experts within the Australian Federal Police, which will also examine how to improve developing trust and encouraging Islamophobic reporting to police.

16. Review existing provisions in the Migration Act regarding character grounds to make clear the Minister's ability to refuse visas for visitors promoting hate speech, including those with a history of promoting Islamophobic hatred.

Attorney-General's Department

17. Endorse Recommendation 14 of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *National Anti-Racism Framework*, and implement religious discrimination protections at the federal level.

18. In line with the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (ICERD Committee), the Explanatory Memorandum to the *Racial Hatred Bill 1994* (Cth) and community solutions reflected in the 2021 Australian Human Rights Commission's report *Sharing the Stories of Australian Muslims*, close the gap of protection on racial hatred.

    a. This should be done by clarifying that the ethno-religious category within the definition of race in the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) includes Muslims, the same way it includes Jews and Sikhs.

19. In relation to both discrimination and racial hatred, improve public disaggregated data collection on hate incidents to ensure inclusion of a category for conduct which has a religious element to it. For example, based on the identity of a victim or statements made relating to a person's religious identity.

20. Work through the Standing Council of Attorneys-General (SCAG) to consider:

    a. a statutory hate aggravation on existing crimes such as property damage, arson, various types of assault and grievous bodily harm and threats of violence, without creating new offences, thereby enabling police to acknowledge a hate motive at the investigation and charging phase. Queensland introduced such an aggravation in recent years

    b. hate crime scrutiny panels, similar to the United Kingdom model, at district levels, to improve communication, operational policing of hate crime and community trust over time.

21. Establish an advisory panel consisting of representatives from diverse Muslim communities to provide insights into the potential impacts and unintended consequences of new counter-terrorism legislation on Muslim communities.

22. Implement religious discrimination training for all legal professionals within the Department.

23. Establish workshops to assist staff in all divisions to recognise and address unconscious biases that may affect their work and decision-making processes.

24. Develop guidelines and resources for legal practitioners on handling cases involving Islamophobia, ensuring that victims are treated with consideration and religious sensitivity and receive fair treatment and justice.

25. Regularly publish reports on statistics relating to Islamophobia and legal responses to them, promoting transparency and accountability.

26. Launch campaigns aimed at raising awareness about Islamophobia, its legal implications and the importance of reporting hate crimes and discrimination.

27. Establish collaboration with state and territory police agencies to achieve all the above.

Department of Education

28. The Department of Education, in collaboration with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), should lead the development of an overarching Anti-Racism and Inclusivity Framework for the education sector (to include First Nations racism, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Arab racism, anti-Asian racism, etc.). The aim is to create a more inclusive, respectful and safe educational environment for all students, staff and communities. This framework should include clear, actionable guidelines specifically aimed at combating Islamophobia, alongside broader anti-racism, diversity and social cohesion measures. It should ensure a whole-sector approach to fostering diversity and equity by:

   a. establishing a multi-stakeholder working group to:

      i. include representatives from the Department of Education, TEQSA, Universities Australia, other university sector bodies, student and staff associations, religious and community organisations, anti-discrimination agencies and experts in multicultural and anti-racism education

   b. utilising the findings from the Racism@Uni Report from the Australian Human Rights Commission (when delivered) to inform the framework and guidelines

   c. reviewing existing policies, research and legal frameworks that:

      i. analyse current anti-racism policies, legal protections and research on racial discrimination, including Islamophobia, to ensure the framework is evidence-based and aligned with national standards

   d. developing a comprehensive Anti-Racism and Inclusivity Framework

      i. consideration should be given to the role of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *National Anti-Racism Framework*

   e. creating specific guidelines to combat Islamophobia that:

      i. address incidents of Islamophobia explicitly, outlining prevention strategies, response protocols, educational initiatives and support services for affected individuals, including staff

   f. piloting and refinement that:

      i. implement pilot programs across diverse institutions to test and improve the guidelines and framework

   g. disseminating and supporting the implementation to:

      i. provide resources, training and ongoing support to facilitate sector-wide adoption and integration of the framework and guidelines

   h. establishing monitoring and review mechanisms that:

      i. develop systems for ongoing evaluation, reporting and updating the framework to ensure sustained progress and responsiveness.

29. The Department of Education, in collaboration with relevant bodies such as the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), state education departments, school networks, student and staff associations, community organisations, anti-discrimination agencies, and multicultural education experts, should lead the development of a Whole-School Anti-Racism and Inclusivity Framework (to include First Nations racism, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Arab, anti-Asian racism, etc.). The aim is to increase awareness and understanding of Islamophobia and racism, and their impacts, among students and staff. This framework should include specific guidelines to combat Islamophobia and promote broader diversity and equity principles by:

   a. establishing a multi-stakeholder working group that includes:

      i. representatives from the Department of Education, ACARA, state and territory education authorities, school principals, teachers, students, parent groups, religious and community organisations, anti-discrimination agencies and multicultural education experts

   b. reviewing existing policies, research and legal frameworks that:

      i. examine current anti-racism policies, anti-discrimination laws and research on Islamophobia and racial discrimination in schools to ensure the framework is evidence-based and aligned with national standards

   c. developing a whole-school Anti-Racism and Inclusivity Framework

      i. consideration should be given to the role of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *National Anti-Racism Framework*

   d. creating specific guidelines to combat Islamophobia that:

      i. address incidents of Islamophobia explicitly, outlining prevention approaches, response protocols, awareness campaigns, and support services for affected students and staff

   e. piloting and refinement that:

      i. implement pilot initiatives in diverse schools to test and improve the guidelines and framework

   f. supporting implementation and capacity building that:

      i. provide resources, professional development, and ongoing support to schools to embed the guidelines effectively

      ii. develop and provide teacher resilience training to support educators managing Islamophobic bullying incidents

      iii. develop school-based mental health interventions suited for Muslim students impacted by Islamophobia

      iv. support staff victims of Islamophobic-driven bullying

      v. provide student awareness of the harmful effects of bullying

      vi. provide training to school teachers, educators, and staff on:

         • Islamophobia

         • examining the commonalities between the 3 great Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam)

         • Islam–West history, exchanges and encounters

g. establishing monitoring, evaluation and review processes that:

    i. develop systems for tracking progress, addressing issues and updating strategies to ensure sustained improvement

h. consider the impact of the above recommendations on teacher workload by conducting a Teacher Workload Impact Assessment, consistent with the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.

30. Review results of the Australian Values Education Program (2003–2010) in addressing matters of serious religious/racial conflict as illustrative of the power of curricula and pedagogy to repair and strengthen social cohesion and explore the potential to implement programs that replicate its success.

31. Review the national curriculum pertaining to Islam, Muslims, and Muslim history, in both primary and secondary education, to ensure content is accurate and to make inclusions of and acknowledge Muslim contributions to Australia, Western civilisation and the development of universal values. More specifically:

a. integrate into school history subjects, Islamic history or Islam–West cross-cultural encounters and exchanges, including Muslim contributions to Australia

b. integrate into school ethics/civics subjects the contributions of Islam to ethics in general and universal human ethics in particular

c. encourage more comparative perspectives in teaching humanities and social science subjects (the arts, for example), especially highlighting some ways Islamic perspectives and practices converge or diverge with other perspectives and practices (including Western).

32. Develop a program to bridge the perceived divide between the 3 great Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). More specifically:

a. in parallel to faith-based programs that teach each religion as a separate and distinct tradition, develop material that looks at the Abrahamic family as a tree with 3 significant branches

b. integrate material from history that shows how these 3 great traditions interacted, influenced and exchanged with each other

c. explore in ethics subjects how these 3 traditions diverge, but also significantly converge, on the question of ethics

d. promote interfaith dialogue and school programs that bring together Islamic and non-Islamic schools.

33. Support Islamic Studies and Education in higher education by integrating it as an essential component in the national effort to combat Islamophobia by promoting its visibility and investing in its programs and research.

a. Islamic studies offers a rigorous, nuanced, and contextually grounded framework for:

    i. correcting widespread misinformation about Islamic beliefs and practices

    ii. humanising Muslims through engagement with their histories, cultures and lived experiences

    iii. equipping future leaders, educators, journalists and policymakers with the knowledge needed to dismantle harmful stereotypes and challenge structural bias

    iv. creating space for Muslim voices and scholarship to contribute meaningfully to national conversations on ethics, pluralism and social cohesion.

34. Establish collaboration and coordination with states and territories' education authorities, agencies and departments to achieve all the above.

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

35. Provide funding and support to improve and strengthen community capacity to deliver specific, targeted mental health support services for victims of Islamophobia.

36. Create an Islamophobia-related trauma protocol in mental health services.

37. Develop and mandate compulsory religious and cultural sensitivity training for all health and mental wellbeing practitioners.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

38. Effectively communicate Australia's combating Islamophobia initiatives and policies to Muslim majority countries (e.g., key partners like Indonesia) to improve diplomatic relations.

39. Institute an international day of solidarity and education on Islamophobia on 15 March through Australian embassies and missions overseas.

40. Facilitate exchange of global best practice on combating Islamophobia, working with other countries' combating Islamophobia envoys and anti-Muslim hate coordinators.

Australian Sports Commission

41. Invest more in funding community-level sporting initiatives and organisations. These community grants must be evaluated, leveraging the research capacity mentioned above. Funding could be provided to, but is not restricted to, the following examples:

    a. support the organisation of interfaith sports tournaments, with mixed-faith teams participating

    b. provide funding for training programs that educate coaches and volunteers about cultural sensitivity and religious practices, as well as how to respond to Islamophobic incidents

    c. propose mechanisms to actively encourage and facilitate the reporting of Islamophobic incidents within community sports settings, ensuring timely responses and appropriate action

    d. establish scholarships for youth of different faith backgrounds to participate in sports programs

    e. fund the development or renovation of community sports facilities, including spaces for prayer, reflection and meditation

    f. fund sports clinics that invite youth from different faith backgrounds to learn skills from professional athletes

    g. encourage partnerships between sporting organisations and local Muslim community groups to co-host events, workshops and discussions that focus on building relationships and understanding.

Department of Social Services

42. Review existing support services for victims of hate crimes and consult with Muslim communities to see how services can be strengthened to support victims of Islamophobia.

43. Raise awareness about support resources that are available to Muslims facing Islamophobia.

44. Conduct a review to address barriers to reporting Islamophobia and to seeking or accessing resources and services.

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

45. Endorse Recommendation 10 of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *National Anti-Racism Framework,* to amend the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* to include a positive duty to eliminate racial discrimination.

46. Institute reporting mechanisms, clear standards and practices that prevent employers from discriminating against Muslim applicants and employees.

47. Ensure clear mechanisms and provisions are in place to support individuals experiencing Islamophobia in the workplace.

48. Support Muslim entrepreneurs by creating funding programs and resources that promote positive representation and visibility.

49. Support Muslim women's economic empowerment programs, recognising the unique form of discrimination women face.

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

50. Establish an educational not-for-profit centre that affirms the presence, contributions and achievements of Muslim Australians and that promotes initiatives in arts, culture and media.

    a. incorporate a community co-design and governance model for the centre's establishment.

51. Fund initiatives that encourage diverse voices in media and arts, including Muslim filmmakers, writers, artists and content creators.

52. Strengthen Australia's online safety laws to more effectively challenge online hate by actioning the relevant recommendations made in the independent review of the Online Safety Act.

53. Implement an integrated strategy to combat Islamophobia through research, media and community education by:

    a. funding and supporting research initiatives, collaborating with not-for-profit organisations such as Media Diversity Australia and the Independent Multicultural Media Australia, academic institutions and mainstream media outlets. These efforts aim to thoroughly understand how media reporting (including digital platforms and social media algorithms) influences perceptions of, and impacts, Muslim communities, social cohesion and societal trust

    b. expanding and adapting the foundational work of the *Reporting Islam* project (2014–2018) to reflect the digital realities of 2025. This should focus on:

        i. developing educational programs that empower youth and their families with media literacy, narrative resilience, critical thinking skills and the confidence to participate in public discourse

        ii. equipping journalists with insights and best practices for reporting on a range of issues about Muslim identity, with an emphasis on respectful, accurate and socially cohesive storytelling

        iii. addressing the role of social media algorithms and platform dynamics in shaping and disseminating narratives about Muslim identities

        iv. grounding itself in research that highlights the complexity of identity formation and the risks of algorithmic amplification of hate speech

c. fostering active collaboration between media outlets, journalists, community organisations and educators to promote narratives that foster understanding, respect and social cohesion. This includes:

    i. supporting media campaigns that challenge stereotypes and misinformation about Muslim Australians and Islam

    ii. creating platforms for Muslim voices and stories to be heard authentically and positively

d. contributing to ongoing national conversations about youth, media regulation and social cohesion by emphasising the importance of media literacy, narrative agency and resilience in building an inclusive society.

Parliament of Australia

54. Endorse Recommendation 26 of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *National Anti-Racism Framework*, to develop behavioural codes of conduct for all Australian Parliamentarians and staff to take a zero-tolerance approach to racism, with appropriate sanctions.

a. Specifically, this should:

    i. develop codes of conduct for all Australian Parliamentarians and staff on what constitutes Islamophobia, and implement mandatory training programs on Islamophobia for all parliamentarians and their advisors

        • the training should cover how Islamophobia manifests in society, impacts its victims and undermines social cohesion

        • the training should be annual to ensure that parliamentarians and their advisors remain informed about evolving issues related to Islamophobia and best practices for addressing them.

    ii. introduce clear contingencies for responses to parliamentarians who engage in hate speech or behaviour. These contingencies may include:

        • setting up guidelines whereby leading political parties respond to such incidents by publicly affirming, at the next opportunity, their commitment to inclusive values, speech and behaviour, and rejection of Islamophobia. Such incidents where relevant, to:

            – deliver formal reprimands and

            – temporary suspension from the party room or various party-granted roles

    iii. create a transparent reporting mechanism for constituents and fellow parliamentarians to report Islamophobic speech, ensuring all claims are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly

    iv. establish an independent oversight for conduct complaints.

Appendix I

Comparison sweep: key documents and frameworks that complement the proposed recommendations

The following key and related reports were reviewed to make a comparison of existing recommendations for compatibility and add strength to combating Islamophobia in Australia. These reports all touched on and raised similar issues; however, with the exception of *Sharing the Stories of Australian Muslims*, they were not specific in addressing the increasing experience of Islamophobia in Australia for Muslims. The reports, however, highlighted that despite similar systemic and social cohesion issues with solutions being presented to the government, change and improvement are slow and never sustained. Change needs to be embedded deeply into policy and legislation for a safer and improved Australia for Muslims:

- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2024). *The national anti-racism framework: A roadmap to eliminating racism in Australia.* The national anti-racism framework full report 2024

- Dellal, B., Nyuon, N. & Castley, C. (2024). *Towards fairness: A multicultural Australia for all.* Towards fairness: A multicultural Australia for all

- Australian Public Service. (2024). *The APS culturally and linguistically diverse employment strategy and action plan.* The APS culturally and linguistically diverse employment strategy and action plan

- Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. (FECCA). (2024). *An anti-racism framework: Experiences and perspectives of multicultural Australia.* FECCA-NARF-report-v6-1.pdf

- White House (2024). *The US national strategy to counter Islamophobia and anti-Arab hate.* National-strategy-doc.pdf

- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Sharing the stories of Australian Muslims.* ahrc_sharing_stories_australian_muslims_2021.pdf

Appendix II

Academics, scholars and specialists consulted on the recommendations

During November and December 2024, I met with over 100 Muslim community members, representing academics, experts on Islamophobia, youth, women, religious leaders, Muslim community leaders, Islamic societies and peak bodies from across Australia. Their calls for action are reflected in the recommendations. In developing these, and during that process, I also benefited from the critical feedback, discussions and insights from the following academics and specialists, whom I would like to acknowledge. While their contributions have been invaluable, I bear sole responsibility for the final iteration of the recommendations.

Listed in alphabetical order.

1. **National multicultural and social cohesion expert**

   1. Dr Bulent Hass Dellal AO, Executive Director, Australian Multicultural Foundation, Victoria

2. **National academics and experts**

   1. Professor Abdullah Saeed, Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies, The University of Melbourne, Victoria

   2. Dr Faiza El-Higzi OAM, School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Queensland

   3. Mr Hamza Vavani, PhD candidate, Board Chair & Director, World Wellness Group, Queensland

   4. Professor Ihsan Yilmaz, Deputy Director (Research Development), Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Victoria

   5. Professor Jacqui Ewart, Communication Professor, Griffith University, Queensland

   6. Dr Jan A Ali, Senior Lecturer, Islam and Modernity, Western Sydney University, New South Wales

   7. Professor Kevin Dunn, Provost, Western Sydney University, New South Wales

   8. Dr Leda Barnett, Psychologist

   9. Professor Lisa Gibbs, Deputy Director, Centre for Mental Health and Community Wellbeing, University of Melbourne, Victoria

   10. Dr Mario Peucker, Associate Professor, Victoria University, Victoria

   11. Associate Professor Matteo Vergani, Deakin University, Director, Tackling Hate Lab, Victoria

12. Professor Mehmet Ozalp, Head of School, Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation, Charles Sturt University, New South Wales

13. Professor Michele Grossman AM, Research Chair in Diversity and Community Resilience, Alfred Deakin Institute, Melbourne, Victoria

14. Professor Mohamad Abdalla AM, Founding Director, Centre for Islamic Thought and Education, University of South Australia, South Australia

15. Dr Rachel Woodlock, Deputy Director, National Centre for Contemporary Islamic studies, The University of Melbourne, Victoria

16. Professor Emerita Samina Yasmeen AM, CitWA, FAIIA, Director, Centre for Muslim States and Societies, School of Social Sciences, University of Western Australia, Western Australia

17. Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, PhD, Deakin University, Director, Middle East Studies Forum, Victoria

18. Dr Susan Carland, Research Director, School of Social Sciences, Monash University, Victoria, and Deputy Chair of The Islamophobia Register Australia

19. Emeritus Professor Terence Lovat, The University of Newcastle, New South Wales

20. Professor Winnifred Louis, School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Queensland

3. **International specialists**

1. Professor Ahmed Shaheed, Professor of Human Rights Law, University of Essex, United Kingdom, and former United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (2016 to 2022)

2. Ms Amira Elghawaby, Canada's Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia, Canada

3. Professor Archana Kaushik, Department of Social Work, University of Delhi, India

4. Professor Imran Awan, Professor of Criminology, Birmingham City University, United Kingdom

5. Dr Irene Zempi, Associate Professor of Criminology, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom

6. Professor John L Esposito, Professor of Islamic Studies and Founding Director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, United States of America

7. Ms Marion Lalisse, European Commission Coordinator for Combatting Anti-Muslim Hatred, Belgium

8. Ms Mobashra Tazamal, Associate Director, The Bridge Initiative, United Kingdom

9. Professor Tahir Abbas, Professor of Radicalisation Studies, Leiden University, Netherlands

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81 Nietzsche, F. *Beyond good and evil: Prelude to a philosophy of the future* (W. Kaufmann, Trans. With commentary). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1886).

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83 I would like to thank Her Excellency the Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC, the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, for reminding me of the importance of this moral virtue.

84 Drawing on the Aristotelian-Platonic tradition of virtue ethics, the 14th century renowned Asharite theologian and Chief Judge, Adud al-Din al-Iji (d.1355), stated there are 4 moral virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance – and justice, which he argued was the combination of the first 3. He posited that wisdom has 7 subdivisions (including clarity of discernment, quickness of apprehension, retention and recall); courage has 11 (including greatness of soul, patience, humility, endurance, indignation and empathy); temperance also has 11 (including modesty, sedateness, good disposition, scrupulousness and liberality) while justice has 14 (including friendship, concord, fidelity, amiability, maintaining kinship bonds, contentment and worshipful devotion).

See: al-Iji. A. D. (n.d). *The compendium on the science of ethics* (O. Qureshi, Trans., pp. 2–7).

Below: Adelaide City Mosque was the first city mosque built in Australia (1886–88).

Top: Mareeba & District Mosque, Mareeba, Queensland, was established by Albanian migrants in the 1960s who worked in the sugar cane fields of Far North Queensland.

Centre: Replica of Marree Mosque, outback South Australia, the first mosque built in Australia (1861). Marree Mosque was established by Afghan cameleers.

Bottom: Sadadeen Road, Alice Springs, was named after Balochistan-born cameleer Saleh 'Charlie' Sadadeen.
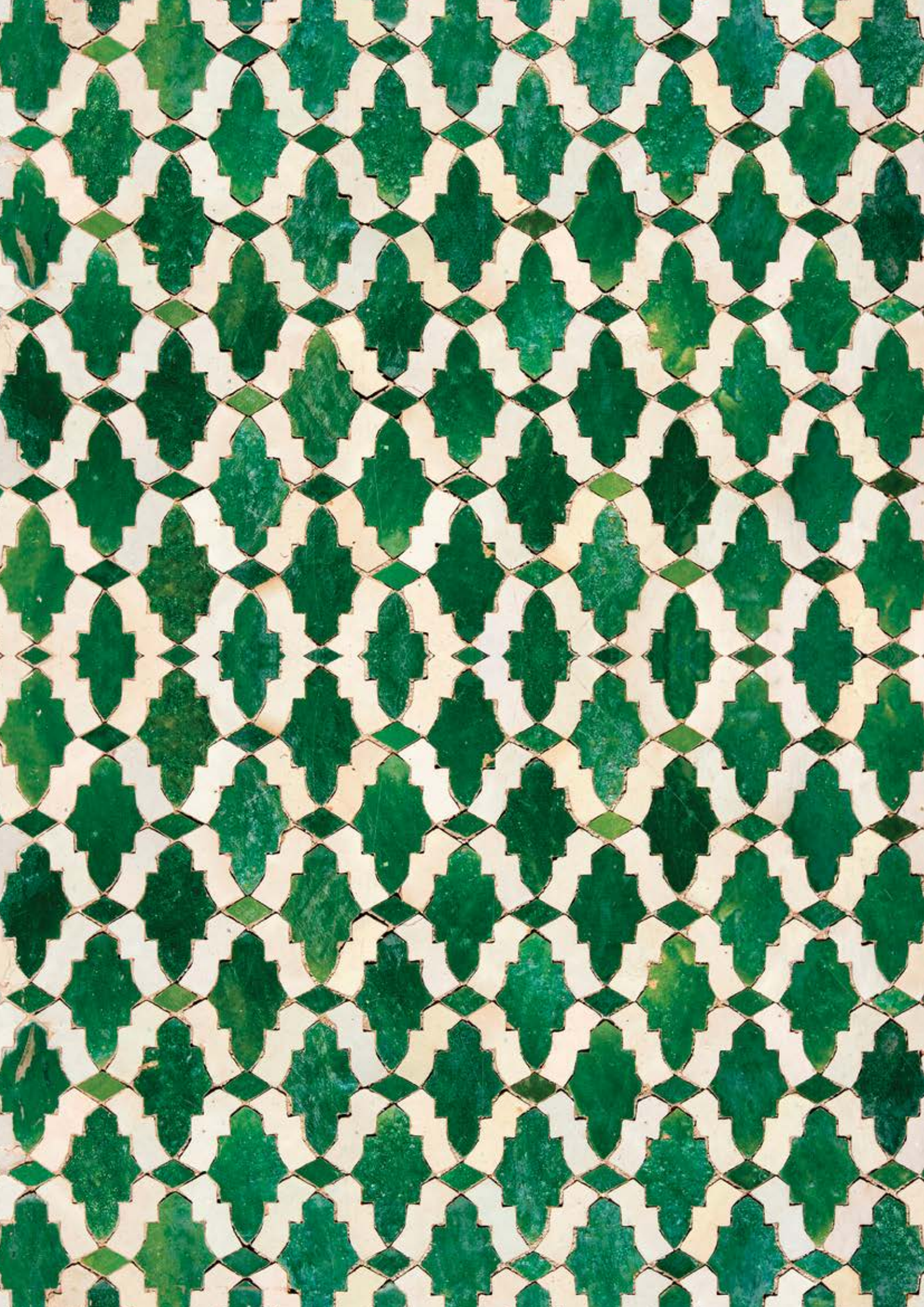
Inside the Broken Hill Mosque, built in 1887 by Afghan Cameleers. The heritage-listed building now serves as a museum.

Australian Muslim History Gallery at the Islamic Museum of Australia, Thornbury, Victoria, which highlights the long history of Muslims in Australia.

Images Pages 46–47 courtesy of the Islamic Museum of Australia

As I look towards tomorrow
and beyond, I believe that
meaningful change is possible.
The resilience, courage and
voices of Muslim Australians,
paired with the insights and
support of experts and allies,
serve as a powerful foundation
upon which to build a more
inclusive society.

AFTAB MALIK

"The recommendations in the report must be taken seriously, and confronting Islamophobia must be treated with the same urgency as other forms of racism and prejudice… ANIC therefore urges the government to act swiftly and decisively to implement the recommendations in full, without hesitation or delay."

Bilal Rauf, Australian National Imams Council

—

"… a landmark initiative that reflects a deep and inclusive consultation process with diverse Muslim communities across Australia, [offering] a comprehensive framework to address the structural, systemic, and interpersonal dimensions of Islamophobia."

Abdullah Khan OAM FACEL, Islamic Schools Association of Australia

—

"Benevolence Australia fully endorses this report and all its recommendations, which reflect the voices of diverse community stakeholders across Australia. It presents government with a clear, and crucial opportunity to address Islamophobia seriously in all its forms."

Ustadha Saara Sabbagh, Benevolence Australia

—

"This report addresses the main drivers of Islamophobia and presents a clear way forward. It reflects a wide consultation process. We hope for the urgent implementation of these recommendations."

Dr Ali Alsamail, Shia Muslim Council of Australia

—

"… a historic opportunity to signal to Muslim Australians that their concerns are being taken seriously at a systemic and structural level."

Ahmed Zreika, The Islamic Society of South Australia

"This report offers a clear and actionable roadmap for addressing Islamophobia at its roots. Grounded in evidence and inclusive consultations, it amplifies the lived experiences of Muslim Australians and highlights the systemic, structural, and interpersonal dimensions of Islamophobia with balance and compassion. The Alliance of Australian Muslims fully endorses the report and urges the government to act with urgency and commitment… This is a pivotal opportunity for the government to demonstrate leadership, transparency, and a genuine commitment to equity, justice, and systemic reform — sending a powerful message that the experiences of Muslim Australians are being heard and taken seriously."

Khalid Mousa, The Alliance of Australian Muslims

—

"The Board of Imams Victoria endorses the report and its recommendations, which align closely with the perspectives of many Victorians with whom we have directly engaged while implementing our Countering Islamophobia Project…We urge that clear timelines and accountable leadership be established to ensure the effective implementation of all recommendations."

Sheikh Muhammad Nawas, Board of Imams Victoria

"We believe this document presents a watershed moment for our nation, providing a clear, actionable, and necessary framework to address an issue that has deeply affected our community for far too long."

Zameer, Coalition of Muslim Student Associations Australia (CoMSAA)

—

"… a much-needed step towards addressing the pressing issue of Islamophobia in Australia. We commend its well-considered, practical, and actionable recommendations that, if implemented, will help protect the rights and dignity of Muslim Australians."

Dr Nora Amath, The Islamophobia Register Australia

—

"AFIC applauds the comprehensive nature of the Special Envoy's report on combating Islamophobia, which not only reflects the key concerns of Muslims from across Australia, but provides practical and robust steps to address them. We urge the government to endorse all his recommendations, demonstrating to Muslims that it is committed to protecting the safety and upholding the dignity of Muslim Australians."

Dr Rateb Jneid, Australian Federation of Islamic Councils

"The Lebanese Muslim Association welcomes this report … We acknowledge the wide-range of voices and experiences that have informed its findings, reflecting the concerns and aspirations of Muslim communities across Australia… These steps, alongside the report's other recommendations, will send a powerful signal that Australia is committed to protecting its Muslim citizens, strengthening social cohesion, and ensuring that discrimination has no place in our society."

Hafez Alameddine, The Lebanese Muslim Association

—

"The Islamic Council of Victoria … endorse[s] the proposal and the recommendations… We acknowledge the extensive consultation of the community that has been carried out and reflected in these recommendations and endorse steps to materialise these recommendations in full."

Dr Mohamed Mohideen OAM, JP, Islamic Council of Victoria

—

"This is not a document of blame or punishment, but a thoughtful, collaborative roadmap for building a better, more inclusive society … [it presents] a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach that is not only visionary but deeply rooted in compassion and wisdom."

Aimen Jafri, Tasmanian Islamic Foundation

—

"We urge the government to give these recommendations careful consideration and to prioritise their implementation as part of a broader commitment to equity, justice, and systemic reform."

Yusuf Mansuri, ACT Muslims Australia

AUSTRALIA'S SPECIAL ENVOY TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA