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AUSTRALIA'S SPECIAL ENVOY TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA

“Radical extremist Islamic hatred” obscures anti-Muslim hate

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ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTISEMITISM are real, harmful, and unacceptable. Each targets entire communities, fuels fear and has tragically led to violence and death. To fight these hatreds effectively, we must confront both with equal urgency.

When asked last week by a journalist about her position on my report, a *National Response to Islamophobia*, Sussan Ley responded that right now, what we are confronting as a country is “radical extremist Islamic hatred” and where “antisemitism has been allowed to fester and grow in this country.” Within her response, there was not even a tacit acknowledgement of the rising levels of hate Muslim Australians have been experiencing.

This framing of “radical extremist Islamic hatred” is not only demoralising for Muslim Australians, but it also actively shapes public perception towards them. It frames all Muslims as agents of danger rather than as diverse, law-abiding Australians who deserve safety and dignity like everybody else. It frames all Muslims as villains, only worthy of condemnation, and denies them their humanity.

This phenomenon isn’t isolated.

Evidence demonstrates that during periods of national anxiety, narratives of blame are frequently politically advantageous. Framing an entire community as a threat may be straightforward, but it also diminishes social cohesion and accuracy. Islamophobia is not merely a social prejudice; it has been employed too frequently as a political tactic, prioritising fear over truth.

And yet, the tsunami of “secular hatred” unleashed upon Muslim Australians post-Bondi, has been staggering.

In the fortnight following the Bondi terror attack, Islamophobia has risen in Australia to 740%, and Muslims have endured threats, abuse, discrimination, and, at times, violence. I have already spoken how difficult it has been for Muslim leaders to talk about this, fearing that doing so may be perceived to be grossly insensitive and an attempt to diminish the grief that Jewish Australians are currently experiencing.

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For many Muslim Australians, this surge in hate speech is not abstract. It's a lived experience. Parents have reported children being bullied at school, women being harassed in public spaces, and families are reconsidering when and where it's safe to visibly practise their faith. These are the everyday consequences of rhetoric that blurs the line between individuals who commit violence and entire communities who reject it.

These numbers and stories matter because they reveal the scale of the problem and demand a response from our leaders that is both principled and humane. When a cultural or religious community is targeted, the impact reverberates beyond individuals—it shapes neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, and the sense of who belongs in our country.

Islamophobia does not require spectacular violence to be harmful or hateful. The spread of hateful stereotypes, the use of pejorative labels, and the routine of online abuse, offline threats and physical violence, degrades Muslims daily. It erodes social connectivity and warmth and fuels a climate where prejudice and hate become the compass for social interaction. The result is not only personal harm but of social paranoia.

While this doesn't negate the existence of genuine security threats or the responsibility of governments to address them, effective counter-extremism relies on precision, evidence, and trust. When entire communities are treated as suspects, this trust erodes, and with it, the effectiveness of security policies designed to safeguard Australians.

The task before us is to address fear and hatred without giving more oxygen to intolerance and creating a moral panic. This means crafting and enforcing policies that address extremism without profiling entire communities or treating Muslims as emblems of danger. These individuals pose as much danger to Muslim communities as they do to others.

It also means clear, consistent condemnation of hate from leaders, media, and institutions, and an acknowledgement of the victims of hate. It means public discourse that distinguishes between the many Muslims who live peaceful lives, contribute to society, and reject violence, versus the small handful who engage in or advocate for violence.

This is not about competing between hate; it is a struggle for acknowledgement and an urgent appeal for responsible rhetoric from our leaders that does not further exacerbate the existing Islamophobia faced by Muslim communities both before, and after the Bondi attacks.

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We can start to do this by acknowledging that both Islamophobia and antisemitism are real threats of equal concern. No Muslim that I have spoken to, has denied the reality of antisemitism. However, the assertion that one form of hate is more real should not become a rhetorical weapon against a group of people. The correct response is to condemn all hate equally and with seriousness.

When our leaders or commentators make statements that minimise (or ignore) the harm of Islamophobia or antisemitism, they should be called to account. An apology, clarification, or correction should be expected when a claim undermines the experiences of victims or stokes prejudice.

This also requires greater accountability in public discourse. When charged language is repeated uncritically by media outlets, it amplifies fear and normalises suspicion.

Editorial judgement matters. Words chosen in headlines and interviews do not merely reflect public sentiment, they shape it.

If we are serious about confronting hate, then words must be matched by action: clearer standards for public language, swift correction when harm is done, and policies that protect communities rather than isolate them. The ongoing, stubborn refusal to acknowledge the harm faced by Muslims undermines the very social fabric we claim to defend. The question is not whether to talk about extremism, but how to discuss it without normalising the demonisation of an entire community, by providing social license through our words.

Individuals who choose violence and division go against the very foundations which create the safe and inclusive country we all desire.

The killing of Jewish Australians was not due to “Islamic hatred,” and nor is the abuse and prejudice that Muslims experience a consequence of “secular hatred.”

It is hatred, simple.

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