



**MEDIA RELEASE
19 October 2006**

Violent attack on Melbourne Jew an attack on all Australians

Grahame Leonard, President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Malcolm Thomas, President of the Islamic Council of Victoria, and Archdeacon Philip Newman, President of the Victorian Council of Churches, stated today:

“On the Jewish Sabbath last Saturday, Menachem Vorchheimer, an Orthodox Jew, was peacefully walking to his synagogue in East St Kilda with his two children, aged 3 and 6.

A mini-bus containing some twenty footballers pulled up. These men yelled "F--- off Jews" and "Go the Nazis" before miming shooting a machine gun at the Vorchheimer family. They then tore off Mr Vorchheimer's religious headgear, and carried out a brutal attack on him. That a group of young sportsmen were responsible for this cowardly attack is a particularly distressing and disappointing aspect of this incident. There is nothing remotely 'sporting' about twenty people terrorising a man quietly walking along the street with young children.

There was simply no question of provocation or extenuating circumstances. This incident was unquestionably a clear example of racial or religious hatred. And, while personally extremely distressing for Mr Vorchheimer and his young children, it is also of great concern for the Jewish community, as well as for all faith groups in Australian society and for all Australian citizens.

Over the past thirty years Australia has gained an enviable international reputation as a tolerant society that is accepting of diversity, and perhaps even more that, respectful of difference. However an attack like this is an assault on every Australian and besmirches that hard-won reputation.

We recognise the work undertaken by organisations such as the AFL in dealing with racism at an elite level. However this incident suggests that acceptance of difference has not percolated down, and that a need exists for further education. We request the AFL to let the club concerned know in the strongest possible terms that Australians see racism as offensive and intolerable. We advise that we would be happy to work with their competition to educate officials and players.

The Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities are deeply concerned that such ugly incidents occur in our community; we hope that they not be allowed to proliferate and are responded to in such ways that demonstrate that they are totally unacceptable in this country. We appreciate the fact that Premier Bracks and other political leaders have condemned this violence, and urge that they continue to condemn racial and religious vilification in our Victorian communities.

While we expect the police to take appropriate action according to the law, we would hope that all community leaders would do all that they can to support legislation like the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act, legislation that works to protect people of all races and religious communities from vilification and its ultimate expression, violence against the person. Harassment of anyone in our community is just not on.”

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