

REPORT ON ANTI-SEMITISM IN NEW ZEALAND IN 2006

Background

A 2006 census recorded that 6,858 (0.16%) of the population stated their religious affiliation as Jewish/Judaism and 1,599 (0.04%) of the population considered their ethnic group to be Israeli/Jewish. This is less than the estimated 10,000 in 2004-5.

Historically, New Zealand has generally been perceived as a safe and anti-Semitic free country. However over the past few years, incidents, perhaps influenced by local and international events, have shown otherwise.

2006 Year in Summary

The general pattern of anti-Semitism in New Zealand comprises a 'background' level of emails, letters and the occasional vandalism. From time to time, this background level is punctuated by more severe events such as arson attacks or bomb scares. This year saw a physical attack on a person and an attempted physical attack on a person – such incidents have not been reported in New Zealand since 1991¹.

In 2006, there were 32 reported incidents of anti-Semitism². This is an increase of 88% on the previous year (2005) when there were 17 reported incidents. In 2004, there were 25 reported incidents of anti-Semitism.

Breakdown of 2006 Reported Incidents of Anti-Semitism

The breakdown of reported incidents is very similar to that of 2005.

46% of reported incidents in 2006 comprised of emails, letters and phone calls that originated from the following two groups of people:

1. Right-wing inspired groups
2. Mentally ill people (mainly phone calls)

The remaining 54% of reported incidents in 2005 consisted of:

1. Graffiti and vandalism (19%)
2. Verbal abuse and oral intimidation (6%)

¹ In 1991 a mentally ill person entered the grounds of Kadimah College (the Jewish school in central Auckland) and stabbed six students, none fatally.

² For the purposes of this report, a "reported incident" means an anti-Semitic incident or event that is reported to the Community Security Group (CSG). The CSG falls under the auspices of the New Zealand Jewish Council.

3. Suspicious people and vehicles (23%)
4. Assault on a person or attempted assault on a person (6%)

The emails and letters from right-wing groups included references to Adolf Hitler and also contained swastikas, as did the vandalism.

In contrast to previous years, there has been an increase in more serious assault as evidenced by the following two incidents.

On 27 August 2006 a community member was beaten in Hamilton when he identified himself as being Israeli and Jewish. The attacker was apprehended and is now being prosecuted by the crown via the court system.

On 31 October 2006 an Israeli, who is working in New Zealand, was walking in the city centre near the synagogue when two males in their mid 20s turned to face him. They intimidated him. He ran away dropping his kipa which was recovered by the two men who were then laughing.

A Note on Activism

As reported last year, the most public right wing group in New Zealand is the National Front.

This year they have been less active although they are still believed to be monitoring Jewish websites and email lists.

Taking their place in activism are the left wing groups pushing pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli rhetoric. On 28 November 2006 a protest organised by a pro-Palestinian group took place outside the Synagogue and community centre in Auckland during a visit by a retired Israeli general (a similar, smaller protest took place in Wellington at the same event earlier in the week). Information advertised on Jewish websites about the event was re-posted in numerous forums along with comments such as "*Is this a "bring your own Qassam and semtex" event?*"³. The police responded swiftly and in large numbers to keep the protest away from function attendees – a sign of our strong relationship and shared concerns.

General Trends

New Zealand is not generally thought of as synonymous with terrorism. However, the 2005 Security Intelligence Service (**SIS**) report⁴ continued to emphasise the need for "increased vigilance" against terrorism and "counter-terrorism continues to be the biggest single component of the Service's activities". The London bombings of 2005 have highlighted the potential for home-grown terrorists. The 2005 report again stated that "there are individuals in New Zealand who are sympathetic to Al Qaeda, have strongly anti-western views and have

³ Found on <http://tumeke.blogspot.com/2006/11/three-days-of-action-in-wellington-in.html>

⁴ See: <http://www.nzsis.govt.nz/publications/ar05/nzsis-ar05.pdf>

links to extremists living overseas. There are individuals who have participated in jihad in places like Bosnia. The SIS has found that here, as in other countries, "there is a complex symbiotic relationship between criminals and Islamic extremists".

As stated last year, the New Zealand Herald reported that a small group of Maori Muslims are being recruited in prison and claim to support Osama bin-Laden. The Federation of Islamic Associations is reportedly funding this group.

It is worthy of note again that an Islamic style written and oral threat was made towards the Rabbi of the Auckland Hebrew Congregation in 2003.

Government Liaison

The New Zealand Jewish Council (via the CSG) continues to work with the New Zealand police to facilitate the fast resolution of threats and to work towards better protecting Jewish life and Jewish way of life in New Zealand.

It is also the responsibility of the New Zealand Jewish Council to represent the community's political interests with the government.

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