

# Executive Council of Australian Jewry Inc.

הוועד הפועל של  
יהודי אוסטרליה

The Representative  
Organisation of  
Australian Jewry

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26 May 2008

The Honourable Julia Gillard  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Minister for Education  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

**Re: Proposal for Australia to Become a Signatory to the Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (Task Force)**

I enclose herewith a Position Paper of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry relating to the above Task Force together with enclosures which include a Position Paper dealing with the inclusion in the National History Curriculum of a cogent and effective teaching unit on racism, racial hatred and genocide.

As the briefing notes make clear, this matter has been the subject of discussion with Ministers of the former government as well as with the then Leader of the Opposition and Minister for Foreign Affairs as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Rudd government.

Although the Task Force signatory process has been handled in the main by other countries Ministries for Foreign Affairs, it undoubtedly involves to a significant degree the Department of Education.

My purpose in writing to you at this stage is to raise the issue of the Task Force and the accompanying National History Curriculum proposal with you, it having earlier been raised with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, with a view to progressing the process.

I would be happy to meet with you or officers of your department to discuss this matter further and look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Kind regards.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Goot', written in a cursive style.

**Robert M Goot AM SC**  
**President**

**BRIEFING NOTES ON PROPOSAL FOR AUSTRALIA TO BECOME A  
SIGNATORY TO THE TASK FORCE FOR INTERNATIONAL CO-  
OPERATION ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATION, REMEMBRANCE AND  
RESEARCH (“TASK FORCE”)**

1. The purpose of the Task Force is to place political and social leaders’ support behind Holocaust education, remembrance and research both nationally and internationally.
2. Membership is open to all countries and the Task Force presently has 25 member countries (**Attachment A**), all of which are European apart from Argentina, Israel and the United States of America.
3. Members of the Task Force must be committed to the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust and for the implementation of national policies and programs in support of Holocaust education, remembrance and research. Professor Yehuda Bauer, former chair of the Yad Vashem Research Institute in Jerusalem, is the academic advisor to the Task Force. The Task Force website is at <http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/>.
4. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) first wrote to the then Minister for Foreign the Hon. Alexander Downer on 7 August 2006 (**Attachment B**), seeking Australia’s participation in the Task Force. The ECAJ approached the then Minister for the reason that most countries are represented on the Task Force through their Foreign Affairs Ministries.
5. The position set out in the third paragraph of the letter to the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, has, in the intervening period if anything become more pronounced. In a culturally diverse immigrant society such as Australia, in the ECAJ’s opinion, it is essential that all Australians learn the lesson of the Holocaust.

In subsequent discussions with the then Minister for Foreign Affairs that proposition was agreed in principal.

6. Mr Downer's subsequent correspondence with the ECAJ (**Attachments C and D**), indicated a willingness to investigate the ECAJ's request including seeking the involvement of the then Department of Education, Science and Training.
7. Ongoing discussions took place at regular intervals during 2007 between Graham Leonard the then ECAJ President and Michael Potts and Colin Millner of DFAT, with a view to achieving a positive outcome.
8. Further discussions were conducted between the ECAJ and the then Leader of the Opposition (Kevin Rudd) and Shadow Foreign Minister (Robert McClelland) and with Greg Cox then Chief of Staff of the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). All participants in those discussions indicated enthusiastic support for the proposal.
9. In a meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Stephen Smith) and representatives of the ECAJ in Canberra in February 2008, where the Minister gave a positive reaction although clearly he was not able to give any commitment on behalf of the Department of Education.
10. At the annual meeting of the Task Force held in Prague in June 2007 Australia sent a consular observer. Each year the Task Force Chair rotates amongst participating nations and this year Austria will chair and it is understood that the next meeting will be mid year in Vienna. Canada has signalled its intention to become a signatory, a process which the ECAJ is advised takes some years and includes a baseline study and a specific project. In this respect much of the workload would fall on the Department of Education.
11. In respect of the baseline study and specific project requirements of the approval of a new signatory to the Task Force, the ECAJ commends the accompanying Position Paper (**Attachment E**), which postulates the inclusion into the national history curriculum of a cogent and effective teaching unit on racism, racial hatred and genocide. It will be noted that the Position Paper is designed, inter alia, to develop an education program as part of a specific national project to facilitate Australia's participation in the Task Force.

12. The ECAJ requests the government's commitment to the Task Force including commencement of the process for becoming a signatory to the Task Force as soon as possible and offer the ECAJ's assistance and co-operation in achieving that objective.

**Robert M Goot AM SC**  
**President ECAJ**  
**26 May 2008**

April 2008

**ATTACHMENT A**

**Task Force Countries:**

Argentina  
Austria (current Chair of the Task Force)  
Belgium  
Croatia  
Czech Republic  
Denmark  
Estonia  
France  
Germany  
Greece  
Hungary  
Israel  
Italy  
Latvia  
Lithuania  
Luxembourg  
The Netherlands  
Norway  
Poland  
Romania  
Slovakia  
Sweden  
Switzerland  
United Kingdom  
United States of America

Attachment B

**Executive  
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**The Representative  
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Judaism - Australia

Federation of Australian

JewishCare

Maccabi Australia Inc

National Council of Jewish

Women of Australia



The Hon Alexander Downer MP  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

7 August 2006

Dear Mr Downer

On behalf of the Australian Jewish community, I write to suggest Australia's participation in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. This body includes representatives of government, and I have written to you as most countries are represented through their Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Task Force's purpose is to place political and social leaders' support behind Holocaust education, remembrance, and research both nationally and internationally. Membership is open to all countries and the Task Force presently has twenty-four member countries, all European apart from the United States and Israel. Members must be committed to the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, and to the implementation of national policies and programs in support of Holocaust education, remembrance, and research. Professor Yehuda Bauer, former chair of the Yad Vashem Research Institute in Jerusalem, is the Task Force's academic advisor. For further information I draw your attention to its website at <http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/>.

Mr Downer, you are undoubtedly aware that earlier this year, in a chilling echo of his puppet master Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said, "if they [Jews] all gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them worldwide". When plans for genocide of the Jews - and of others - can again be unashamedly publicly declared like this, the need for Holocaust education and remembrance is clearly more crucial than ever. The Australian Jewish community, indeed every decent Australian, urges our country's involvement and we pledge whatever assistance we can provide.

I look forward to your positive response.

Grahame J Leonard  
President



THE HON ALEXANDER DOWNER MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Mr Grahame J Leonard  
President  
Executive Council of Australian Jewry  
2nd Floor, 306 Hawthorn Road  
CAULFIELD SOUTH VIC 3162

23 AUG 2006

Dear Mr Leonard

Thank you for your letter dated 7 August 2006 seeking Australia's participation in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research.

Australia considers the genocide perpetrated against the Jewish people during the Holocaust as the most abhorrent of crimes. The Australian Government has been dismayed by recent signs of increased anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial, racism and religious intolerance, none of which is acceptable in any form in any place. The Holocaust showed the depths to which mankind can descend and made clear to the world the devastating consequences of anti-Semitism, racial hatred and persecution.

We already support efforts to ensure the Holocaust is not forgotten. Most recently, this was evidenced in our strong support of Israel's UN resolution to adopt an annual International Day of Commemoration to honour the victims of the Holocaust on 27 January. The resolution also called for national education programs and an outreach program on the "Holocaust and the United Nations". Australia considered the adoption of the resolution as an important step for the United Nations to ensure Holocaust remembrance and as a reminder to all states of the need to remain vigilant and take steps to prevent such horror from happening again.

In order to further assess whether the proposal should be considered in conjunction with the Minister for Education, I would greatly appreciate additional information on the Task Force's activities, in particular, on how membership of the Task Force may differ from calls of the UN resolution for remembrance of the Holocaust, and national education programs.

I would also like to nominate Deahne Turnbull (Executive officer) with my department as the relevant contact if you require any further information. She may be contacted on Ph:(02) 6261 3653 or by email, [deahne.turnbull@dfat.gov.au](mailto:deahne.turnbull@dfat.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

Alexander Downer



THE HON ALEXANDER DOWNER MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

- 8 DEC 2006

Mr Grahame J Leonard  
President  
Executive Council of Australian Jewry  
2nd Floor, 306 Hawthorn Road  
CAULFIELD SOUTH VIC 3162

Dear Mr Leonard

Thank you for your further letter dated 12 September 2006, concerning the work of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. I note the response of my Chief of Staff, Mr Chris Kenny, dated 16 November 2006.

I agree that the Task Force is to be commended for its work in ensuring the lessons of the Holocaust are not forgotten.

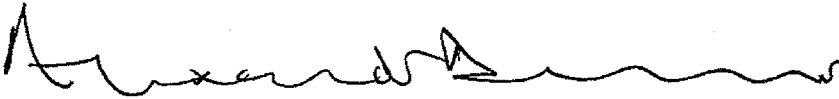
Regarding the proposal that Australia seek observer status at future Task Force meetings, I note that, given the Task Force's focus on developing educational programs and curricula, Australian participation in its work would not be practicable without the close involvement of the Department of Education, Science and Training in particular. Accordingly, I have written to the Hon Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Education, Science and Training, to seek her views on a possible application by Australia for observer status with the Task Force.

As you know, the plenary of the Task Force has met in Budapest from 3 to 6 December 2006. Although Australia was not in a position to attend this meeting as an observer, my department is seeking to learn more about the Task Force and its activities, in order to assist with ongoing consultation in Canberra.

Thank you for raising this matter. I look forward to discussing the Government's progress on this matter with you in the future. I also wish to nominate Mr Colin Milner, Director of Human Rights and Indigenous Issues, as the appropriate contact in future in my department, should you require any further information. He may be contacted by telephone on 2 6261 2068 or by email at [colin.milner@dfat.gov.au](mailto:colin.milner@dfat.gov.au).

As a final note, I wish to express my appreciation for the opportunity to speak to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry on Monday 27 November last week. I greatly value and appreciate the Council's continuing support of initiatives to defend our shared values of religious tolerance and moderation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexander Downer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Alexander Downer

**Attachment E**

**NATIONAL CURRICULUM POSITION PAPER**

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN JEWRY**

<p><b>(i) Inclusion into the National History Curriculum of a cogent and effective teaching unit on racism, racial hatred and genocide.</b></p>	<p>In all states across Australia students are at risk of completing their education without a basic knowledge of the genocides of the twentieth and twenty first century including the Holocaust. Ongoing syllabus changes have reduced the opportunities for history teachers to explore the implications of these events with their students, and to transmit an understanding of the essential fragility of human civilisation and the need to maintain vigilance.</p> <p>The inclusion of a teaching unit on racism, racial hatred and genocide supports the principles underpinning the Australian Values Framework.</p> <p>The topic provides a vehicle for the teaching of political literacy: civics and citizenship education.</p>
<p><b>(ii) Insertion of signposts to encourage teachers to take up the teaching of the history and lessons of the Holocaust within the unit on racism, racial hatred and genocide.</b></p>	<p>After the Nuremberg trials the crime of genocide was recognised by the United Nations as the deliberate destruction of racial, religious or ethnic group. As the ultimate genocide, the study of the Holocaust provides a springboard from which to grapple with the question, “What are the conditions that allow genocide to erupt again and again?”</p> <p>The topic allows for a study of Australia’s migration policies pre and post WWII and the migrant experience. It has resonance with current refugee policies.</p> <p>The inclusion of the topic within the National Curriculum provides the educational infrastructure to enable Australia to become a member of The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education and Remembrance.</p>

<p><b>(iii) Inclusion into the National English Curriculum a choice of relevant texts that explore the issues of racism, racial hatred and genocide including the ultimate genocide, the Holocaust.</b></p>	<p>The study of the Holocaust encompasses many interconnected issues: historical ethical, socio-political, civil, legal, philosophical, religious and psychological.</p> <p>Arguably, the Holocaust has facilitated the development of a particular language genre reminiscent of George Orwell's <u>1984</u>. A study of the Holocaust is also a study of language and the uses of language by the perpetrators, the bystanders and the victims.<sup>1</sup></p>
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**Rationale for including a study of the Holocaust as an option within a unit on the teaching of racism, racial hatred and genocide.**

*“Arguably in no other area of the curriculum are students able to confront the past to speak out more effectively against...unreason and inhumanity than when engaged in an in depth study of the Holocaust. Holocaust education not only brings us to a remembrance of the Holocaust as an event in history; it teaches us to go beyond mere historical description, so as to construct activism in which we attempt to repair the past so as to heal the future.”*

(Mary J Gallant and Harriet Hartman, “Holocaust Education for the New Millennium: Assessing our Progress” in the Journal of Holocaust Education, Volume 10, Autumn 2001, Number 2, pgs.1-2)

1. Lewis M Simons argues that the twentieth century is the bloodiest period in history. *“From 1915 –1923 Ottoman Turks slaughtered up to 1.5 million Armenians. In mid century, the Nazis murdered six million Jews, three million Soviet POWs, two million Poles and 400,000 other “undesirables”. Mao Zedong killed 30 million Chinese, and the Soviet government murdered 20 million of its own people. In the 1970’s the Khmer Rouge killed 1.7 million of their fellow Cambodians. In the 1980’s and early 90’s Saddam Hussein’s Baath Party killed 100,000 Kurds. Rwanda’s Hutu led military wiped out 800,000 members of the Tutsi minority in the 1990’s. Now there is genocide in Sudan’s Darfur region.”*<sup>2 3</sup>. After the Nuremberg trials the crime of genocide was recognised by the United Nations as the deliberate destruction of racial, religious or ethnic group. As the ultimate genocide, the study of the Holocaust provides a springboard from which

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Ruth Wajnryb, (2001) *How Tragedy Shapes Talk*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney and Sophie Gelski,(2003) *Teaching the Holocaust*, Sydney Jewish Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis M Simons, ‘Genocide the Science of Proof’ in *National Geographic*, January 2006,pp28-35.

<sup>3</sup> The word genocide was coined by a Polish Jewish scholar who lost almost all of his family in the Holocaust Raphael Lemkin, 1944.( from *genos* for tribe or family and *-cide* from the Latin for kill).

- to grapple with the question, “What are the conditions that allow genocide to erupt again and again?”
2. The Holocaust represents a watershed event in world history, as do the Industrial and the French Revolutions. Samuel Totten Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville asserts that the omission of the Holocaust from a historical curriculum, “*distorts the history of humanity and...the history of the twentieth century*”.<sup>4</sup>
  3. The Holocaust is not exclusively a Jewish tragedy. Gelski and Wajsenberg argue that the ‘ implications as well as the universal lessons of this man made catastrophe should be of major importance to teachers across a range of subject disciplines’<sup>5</sup> They cite Zygmunt Bauman, *‘The Holocaust was not simply a Jewish problem, and not an event in Jewish history alone...the Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilisation and at the peak of human cultural achievement, and for that reason it is a problem of that society, civilization and culture’*<sup>6</sup>
  4. Arguably, the Holocaust has facilitated the development of a particular language genre reminiscent of George Orwell’s 1984. A study of the Holocaust is also a study of language and the uses of language by the perpetrators, the bystanders and the victims.<sup>7</sup>

### **The study of the Holocaust supports the principles of the Australian National Values Framework**

5. The study of the Holocaust encompasses many interconnected issues: historical ethical, socio-political, civil, legal, philosophical, religious and psychological. Gelski and Wajsenberg argue that “*it is precisely this complexity that provides the rationale to include the Holocaust and its implications in the mainstream curriculum*”<sup>8</sup>
6. One of the most compelling lessons of the Holocaust is Hannah Arendt’s recognition of the “banality of evil”. If ordinary men and women can perpetrate such evil deeds, significant questions are raised about ethics, morality, the fabric of society and law and order. The study of the Holocaust provides an exemplar in civics and citizenship education. Arendt’s insight has shifted the focus of the study of the Holocaust from the suffering of the victims and the pathology of antisemitism to investigating the behaviours of perpetrators, such as railroad bureaucrats, architects, industrialists, doctors and accountants.

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<sup>4</sup> Holocaust Education: Issues and Approaches, Samuel Totten (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002) cited in Sidney Bolkosky , Holocaust and Genocide Studies; Fall 2004:18,2; ProQuest Religion p 307.

<sup>5</sup> Ed K Kwiet and J Matthaus, (2004) Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust, Praeger Series on Jewish and Israeli Studies Westport p223

<sup>6</sup> Zygmunt Bauman (1989) Z Modernity and the Holocaust Cambridge Polity Press, x in Ibid p223

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Ruth Wajnryb, (2001) How Tragedy Shapes Talk, Allen and Unwin, Sydney and Sophie Gelski,(2003) Teaching the Holocaust, Sydney Jewish Museum.

<sup>8</sup>Gelski and Wajsenberg (2004) in “Teaching the Holocaust Today” in Kwiet and Matthaus Eds, Contemporary Responses to the Holocaust p219

7. Education about the Holocaust facilitates the development of students' moral values. These values include racial and ethnic tolerance; opposing prejudice; fostering the rights of the individual; opposing unjust laws; safeguarding the rights of minorities; and considering the consequences of totalitarian regimes. This perspective is strongly argued by Deborah Lipstadt (1995)<sup>9</sup> *"I teach the particulars,"* Lipstadt has written about her own College –level courses, *"I let the students apply them to their own universe, (and) they never fail to do so."* (p26).
8. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences has expanded the traditional definition of what constitutes intelligence.<sup>10</sup> Goleman following Gardner identifies the concept of emotional intelligence as crucial to the development of the whole person.<sup>11</sup> Using these insights, Ruth Anne Lenga, has argued, *"A teaching of the Holocaust which aims to provide not just knowledge and understanding, but looks to promote personal growth, self respect and responsibility, promoting in pupils a commitment to the value of life and dignity, needs to promote learning that will penetrate deep within the personal world of the pupil"*.<sup>12</sup> In other words, effective Holocaust education can promote in students a deep understanding of hope, of courage and of what it means to be human.

### **Civics and Citizenship education**

All Education Boards in Australia implement a program of Civics and Citizenship education in the compulsory years of schooling. The value of the Holocaust in relation to citizenship education is being increasingly recognised. Short and Reed refer to the value of Holocaust study to foster the development of political literacy.

*"A study of the Holocaust and the socio-political developments that gave rise to it may prompt students to consider the measures liberal democracies need to take in order to safeguard their fundamental freedoms."*<sup>13</sup>

### **The Holocaust and Australian History**

From 1933 to 1939, Australia absorbed between 7,000-8,000 Jewish refugees from Nazism, many from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Over 5,000 arrived in 1939. In June 1938 the Evian Conference held in France dealt with the refugee problem as the Nazi Holocaust approached. At the conference the Australian government announced that it would not liberalise its alien immigration policy from an annual quota of 5,000, or 15,000 over three years. Australia's delegate, Thomas W. White, declared that, "as we have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one by encouraging any scheme of large-scale foreign migration".

<sup>9</sup> Lipstadt D (1995, March 6) 'Not facing history'. The New Republic, 212,26 cited in Simone Schweber, (2004) Making Sense of the Holocaust, Lessons from Classroom Practice, teachers College, Columbia University, p7

<sup>10</sup> Howard Gardner, Frames of Mind, Basic Books, New York, 1983

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, Bloomsbury, London 1996

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Anne Lenga, Holocaust Education: The Search for a Suitable Pedagogy, in The Journal of Holocaust Education, Vol 7, No 3, Winter 1998, pp51-60

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Short and Carole Ann Reed, Issues in Holocaust Education, Ashgate Publishing 2004 p3

Australian historian, Paul Bartrop, has explained, "Australia typified the world's approach as it stood in mid-1938".<sup>14</sup> In 1945, Australia established for the first time a Department of Immigration. Fear of a Japanese invasion impacted on Australia's immigration policies.

By far the largest number of Jewish immigrants arrived after World War II. The vast majority were survivors of the Holocaust.<sup>15</sup> In the immediate post war years Australia was second only to Israel in the proportion of migrants accepted.

Many Holocaust survivors sought to re-establish a life in Australia. *"I was so tired of war, I said I will go as far away from Europe as I can ... to Australia. They said go to the end of the world and turn right until you find it."* Bill Marr, b. 1927, Sevlus, Czechoslovakia; immigrated to Australia 1948.<sup>16</sup>

Australia's pre and post war immigration policies, government attitudes to migration, changing patterns of migration, the migrant experience and Australia's commitment to cultural diversity can be studied within the frame of WWII and the Holocaust. Current policies relating to refugees can be set in this context.

### **The Holocaust Task Force**

The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, aims to place political and social leaders' support behind the need for Holocaust education, remembrance, and research.<sup>17</sup> Initiated by Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson in 1998, the Task Force currently has twenty-five member countries. Australia is not yet a member. Inclusion of a topic on racism, racial hatred and genocide with the Holocaust as a case study provides the important educational infrastructure to enable Australia to participate in this initiative.

### **The way forward**

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry confirms its commitment to support the development of the National Curriculum. In particular, together with its constituent bodies in NSW and Victoria, to offer the expertise of specialist educators to participate in a Consultative Group or Committee to be established by the Department of Education and Training and/or the National Curriculum Board to contribute to the following,

- development of education programs on the history and lessons of the Holocaust within the National Curriculum

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<sup>14</sup> Suzanne Rutland, "Jewish Immigration after WWII, 2006 [www.ijs.org.au](http://www.ijs.org.au) accessed 26/02/08

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Australian Memories of the Holocaust [http://www.holocaust.com.au/lb/r\\_australia.htm](http://www.holocaust.com.au/lb/r_australia.htm) Accessed 26/2/08

- development of the education program as part of a specific national project to facilitate Australia's participation in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research.

**Susi Brieger**

**Education Advisor Executive Council of Australian Jewry.**

26 May 2008.