Discrimination

SPEECH

Monday, 25 November 2019
Mr TIM WILSON (Goldstein) (18:27): Deputy Speaker Wallace, I know you are one of the great champions of this country with a sense of unity and purpose. You know better than anybody that Australia is a place of welcoming, no matter who they are. We welcome a full breadth of society on the condition that people take responsibility and respect each other's freedom. That is the fundamental point of this motion today: to acknowledge our mutual obligation and responsibility to respect others by standing up against racism within the community, particularly for minorities. It's not the only type of 'ism' we should stand up against. We should stand up against anyone who seeks to draw a line of prejudice against others.

The success of our liberal democracy is, in part, due to our unqualified support for the rights of individuals to live their lives in a society that respects people's diversity, individuality and faith. For decades, Australia has always stood firm on these principles. We should be rightly proud of it.

Going back to the UDHR in 1948, we spoke of 'all men' without distinction to race, sex, language or religion, having certain inalienable rights. These rights are subject only to the rights of others, as individuals, to the just requirements of society to which they are enabled to develop wider freedom.

Today we are facing a concerted challenge to these values as demonstrated, sadly, by the 2019 Executive Council of Australian Jewry's report into anti-Semitism. The report lays bare a sobering reality of the anti-Jewish sentiments that exists, sadly, in some parts of our community. As the MP that represents the third-largest Jewish community in Australia, it's appalling. We should never let it go unremarked.

From October 2018 to September 2019 at least 225 attacks and 143 threats were made against Jewish Australians, despicably so. The character of anti-Semitism has only worsened, with more incidences of direct verbal abuse, harassment and intimidation. That sits against a global backdrop where, sadly, we're seeing the same sorts of behaviour, particularly in the UK. A new generation of Jewish people are facing the same anti-Semitic bile that flooded through Europe in the 1930s. In one instance a group of Jewish primary school children faced verbal abuse and harassment on Halloween. The perpetrators, boys in their mid-teens, performed Nazi salutes and taunted them with racial slurs. There is no place for that type of behaviour in our country.

In July this year a 12-year-old Jewish boy at a public school was physically assaulted in a corridor. He was punched in the face, had skin gouged out of his shoulder and was bruised on the left side of his back, requiring hospital treatment for the injuries. Nobody should find it acceptable that a generation of young Australians are growing up accustomed to walking past armed guards and bulletproof glass as they go to school. This is an indictment of the values of freedom and tolerance that built this country up to its position of strength, and that's why we must stand firm.

While we must condemn overt harassment, similar forms of vilification shouldn't be left unnoticed. In our suburban streets, graffiti supporting Hitler and Nazism have more than doubled. Holocaust and Nazi minimisation continues to demean the millions of Europeans who lived and suffered under the Nazis, and their descendants who live in our wonderful community. Additionally, we must recognise the demonisation and delegitimisation of Israel that is, sadly, finding a home in some nefarious quarters of Australia's political parties. Abroad, Israel has faced a prejudicial contempt and international sanction from the United Nations unendingly, while many other countries that have appalling human rights records go completely unremarked.

Jewish Australians are not alone in facing discrimination, hatred, violence and harassment. Many of the atrocities I've highlighted also befall Muslim Australians and other minority groups. Everyone in our society has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and their right to exercise those freedoms should be respected. A person's faith does not end at the church door. It informs part of their identity and their individuality, and they should be free to express it in the public square. When Australians of faith are harassed, the foundations of our
free society are also threatened. If the vilification of minority groups continues to worsen, every Australian loses, not just the individuals who are targeted.

That's why we must stand up as part of this motion and part of our country. When we set the tone in this place we set the standard for the nation, and Australians look to us to find the courage and confidence to stand up and speak out, sometimes when it's difficult. That includes confronting ourselves and holding a mirror up to the nation. So we say to racism across this country, and every other type of prejudice: it has no place in our great country.