



## Executive Council of Australian Jewry

### הועד הפועל של יהודי אוסטרליה

#### MEDIA RELEASE

#### ECAJ annual Report on Antisemitism in Australia

29 November 2020

During the twelve-month period, from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020, there were **331 antisemitic incidents** logged by the ECAJ, volunteer Community Security Groups (CSGs), and official Jewish state roof bodies. The total figure consists of **188 attacks** and **143 threats**. This represents a **decrease of 10% in the overall number of reported antisemitic incidents in Australia compared to the previous year**, although the number of reported incidents in 2020 remains substantially above the average recorded since 2013.

**“The decrease in the overall number of incidents should not disguise the marked increase in the number of the most serious categories of incidents”, said Julie Nathan, the ECAJ’s Research Director on Antisemitism, who authored the report. “There was a doubling in the number of reported incidents of physical assault; a 12% increase in direct verbal abuse, harassment and intimidation; a 229% increase in the number of reported direct threats by postal mail; and slight increases in the number of threats via telephone and posters and stickers.”**

“The increase in the number of more serious incidents is especially concerning in light of the fact that synagogues and other Jewish community facilities were closed for varying periods from March onwards due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and there were thus fewer opportunities for antisemites to abuse, harass and intimidate Jews in the vicinity of those facilities as they have done in the past”, Ms Nathan said.

“In previous years, these kinds of incidents have often occurred during the Jewish Sabbath and festivals when many Jews walk to and from synagogue. The fact that substantial increases occurred in the number of assaults and incidents of direct verbal abuse, harassment and intimidation at a time of significant reduction in the visibility of Jews on the streets may indicate a rise in the underlying level of anti-Jewish sentiment.

There was also a proliferation during the year of antisemitic discourse, mostly online, blaming “the Jews” for the pandemic, a new iteration of a classical form of antisemitism that is based on unfounded conspiracy theories.

“White supremacists continued to express support online for violence, armed action, revolution, terrorism and race war”, Ms Nathan said. “The reinvigorated Black Lives Matter movement in the US, after the death of George Floyd in May 2020, galvanised and excited many Australian right-wing extremists, as they focused on acts of violence by some segments of BLM which they viewed as “accelerating” a coming race war, that they so fervently hope for.”

The ECAJ report notes that although Australia overall remains a stable, vibrant and tolerant democracy, where Jews face no official discrimination, and are free to observe their faith and traditions, unofficial antisemitism is becoming more serious, and there have been worrying signs that it is creeping into mainstream institutions.

“Several incidents of antisemitic bullying of Jewish students in schools which had gone unreported in previous years were publicly exposed during the year in review”, Ms Nathan said. “In the wake of publicity concerning the bullying of two Jewish boys, aged 5 and 12, in Melbourne public schools during 2019, other Jewish students came forward with their own experiences of bullying and assault in yet another public school in Melbourne. These allegations became the focus of a further official inquiry in Victoria.”

“We need not only strong anti-incitement laws but also systematic education programs at schools and universities and responsible messaging from community and political leaders”, Ms Nathan concluded. “It’s not just a government responsibility. Everyone stands to lose if racism continues to worsen. The responsibility falls on all of us”.

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