



Executive Council of Australian Jewry

MEDIA STATEMENT

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New head of Yad Vashem

Yad Vashem is a shining light of memory, scholarship and commemoration, honouring the victims of the Shoah. Its purpose, through the uniqueness of the Shoah, is to affirm the innate dignity, humanity and equal rights of all people, and to serve as a universal warning of the calamities that may follow when there is any departure from this principle.

Preserving the impeccable reputation and renown of Yad Vashem is of vital interest to the entire Jewish people, and to the whole of humanity. Those who have led Yad Vashem in the past have been torch-bearers of the institution's values. Their distinguished lives and careers have enhanced the admiration and respect that Yad Vashem has earned from people of all backgrounds.

In our view, Mr Effi Eitam does not fulfil these exacting requirements. He has stated publicly that Israel must "expel most of the Arabs of Judea and Samaria," that Arab lawmakers "will have to be evicted from the political system," and that "Israel's Arabs" are "a fifth column" and "an association of first-degree traitors." He has never retracted these comments.

The rhetoric of demonisation and exclusion of entire communities defined by their ethnicity, and of ethnic cleansing, was precisely where the Shoah began. A practitioner of such rhetoric cannot lead an institution that is dedicated to warning of its dangers, without discrediting that institution's core message and bringing it into disrepute.

We urge the government of Israel not to proceed with the appointment of Mr Eitam as Chairman of Yad Vashem. Maintaining the integrity and credibility of the institution is of far more lasting importance than Israel's internal politics. Israel is blessed with many distinguished citizens who have dedicated their lives and careers to upholding the sanctity and dignity of all human life, regardless of race or religion. In our view, this is the calibre of person who should be chosen to lead Yad Vashem.

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