

Media Release

Hon Jacinta Allan MP
Premier



Tuesday, 17 December 2024

STRONG ACTION TO FIGHT HATE AND HELP VICTORIA HEAL

Following a rise in antisemitic incidents across Australia and Victoria and the horrific terrorist bombing of Adass Israel Synagogue in Ripponlea, the Allan Labor Government is taking strong action to confront antisemitism, deal with dangerous and extreme demonstrations, protect religious worship, and restore social cohesion.

Premier Jacinta Allan joined Minister for Police Anthony Carbines and Minister for Multicultural Affairs Ingrid Stitt in the CBD today to announce a series of measures designed to:

- stamp out extreme and radical influences in public protests
- protect the safety of religious worship for Victorians of any faith
- help multicultural organisations reject division and promote peace
- cut through bureaucracy and get things done with the local community

The action comes following the introduction of the Labor Government's landmark Anti-Vilification and Social Cohesion Bill 2024, to make it easier for police to charge people for whipping up hate against their fellow Victorians because of who they pray to – and who they are.

Stamping out extreme, dangerous and radical public demonstrations

Peaceful protest is protected in this state under the Charter of Human Rights, but the right to protest is balanced against the right of people to live safely – free of danger, discrimination and harassment.

Victorians have witnessed extreme, dangerous and radical conduct in numerous public demonstrations over the last year. Hate and antisemitism thrive in these environments.

The Government will stamp out the influence of extreme and radical participants in public protests by:

- banning the flags and symbols of listed terrorist organisations in public, to give Victoria Police more powers and fill in any gaps in Commonwealth anti-Terror legislation
- banning the use of face masks at protests, which are being used to conceal identities and shield agitators from crowd-control measures like capsicum spray
- banning the use of glue, rope, chains, locks and other dangerous attachment devices that protestors use to cause maximum disruption and endanger others (even themselves)

Listed terrorist organisations include Hamas, Hezbollah and several other groups, including white nationalist and racist violent extremist (NRVE) right-wing groups.

Commonwealth law prohibits the display of their symbols for certain purposes, such as incitement. Banning the display of symbols of these listed terrorist organisations full stop – in Victorian law – will give stronger powers to Victoria Police to stop, search and seize, and signal that the views of these groups are not tolerated in our society.

The Government will consult with the Commonwealth on implementing this prohibition, which follow on from its landmark laws to ban the public display of Nazi symbology.

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Police have observed that face masks are being increasingly used to hamper legal crowd-control actions and conceal the identity of those committing violence and vilification, including Nazis. Masks aren't a free pass to break the law. There should be no place to hide in this state if you're a racist stirring up hate on the streets.

A mask ban in public demonstrations will focus on prohibiting the wearing of face coverings at protests and providing police with the power to require their removal. Exemptions would apply for legitimate health, religious or cultural reasons.

So-called attachment devices are also causing harm to the public and the protestors themselves. Glue, rope, chains, locks don't belong at peaceful protests in Victoria. They put people in harms' way, make it harder for police to do their job – and make heroes out of morons.

Police currently lack specific powers to deal with these devices. Currently, officers are even required to give the device back to the protestor. New laws for dangerous attachment devices will make it clear. They will prohibit their possession and use and give police powers to search, seize, remove, disassemble – and destroy.

These laws to act on extreme, dangerous and radical participants in public demonstrations build on existing police powers to move people on from protests if they violent or unlawful.

Protecting the safety of religious worship for all

The recent protests outside Caulfield Shule and the Great Synagogue of Sydney – and last year's rally outside Central Shule resulting in a mass evacuation of the congregation – were menacing. They affected the right of Victorians to gather and practice their faith in peace.

Regardless of your views on the conflict in the Middle East, places of worship should simply be off-limits in Victoria's multicultural society. It is a fundamental right. Whether it's a synagogue, a temple, a gurdwara, a church or a mosque – to target one congregation is to target us all.

The Government can confirm it will introduce new laws to protect the right of people to gather and pray, free from fear, harassment and intimidation.

This reform could include the establishment of safe access areas around places of religious worship to prohibit protest or amendments to existing offences to protect against disturbance of religious gatherings.

Due to the number of places of worship in Victoria, the question of the size and scope of these zones are complex, as is what behaviour is prohibited within them.

To get the balance right on these complex questions, the Government will consult with religious leaders and communities, police, unions and others including the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Helping organisations become champions of cohesion

Multiculturalism isn't the problem, it's the solution – and when community harmony is at risk, Victoria's multicultural policies, institutions and personnel must be equipped to reject division, build bridges and resolve conflict to bring people together.

Victoria's beloved multicultural and multifaith organisations can drive long-term change and be our champions of cohesion. The Government has a role in guiding and funding multicultural and multifaith community organisations, and will set and enforce a new standard by:

- introducing a simple, Victorian-focused 'social cohesion pledge' that multicultural organisations must observe to apply for government grants – with consequences if the pledge is broken
- setting a goal to restart multi-faith dialogue once again in Victoria following the conflict, to help people and communities come together
- undertaking further work to ensure Victoria's multicultural policies, institutions and personnel are equipped to reject division, build bridges and resolve conflicts.

With the delivery of Victoria's first Anti-Racism Strategy, and the Anti-Vilification and Social Cohesion Bill before the Parliament, now is the right time to make sure Victoria's multicultural organisations can bring this vision to life

and help deliver for all communities, including new and emerging ones. This includes work within the Victorian Multicultural Commission to ensure it can deliver this agenda.

Government will have more to say soon on this work, which will be guided through the formation of a targeted advisory group headed by an eminently qualified and respected Victorian – Mr George Lekakis AO, the longest-ever serving Chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

Listening and acting at a local community level

Dealing with antisemitism not only requires bold action at a state and national level. It also requires liaising and acting at a local level. This means more regular communication, more updates back into the community, and clear points of escalation to address and deal with concerns as they arise.

The Government will form and chair a new, agile body to help cut through systems and bureaucracy, understand the situation week-by-week, and get things done.

The *Local Escalation And Help* group ('Leah' for short) could include representatives of Government Departments, council, Jewish community groups, security groups – but not politicians. The Government will work with community leaders on the make-up of this small body and get Leah up and running as soon as possible.

If successful, it's a model that can be deployed to support any community dealing with increasing incidents of hate.

Additionally, the Government is continuing to work with the leaders of the Adass Israel Synagogue on next steps for the continuity of their services and their rebuild, with multiple visits and ongoing lines of communication. Adass Israel must face as few hurdles as possible in its recovery, and Government is prepared to act if needed.

What's next for social cohesion

The Government's action builds on key work to date, including more funding to increase safety, banning Nazi symbols, and the Anti-Vilification and Social Cohesion Bill – the genesis of which was an attack on Muslims. Victoria Police is continuing to work with the community, including with Operation Park to deal with all hate crimes.

Further announcements will come on the progress of the justice reforms for protest and places of worship, and work to update Victoria's multicultural policies, institutions and personnel – and as always, the Government will keep listening to the community on the need for other actions that can make a difference.

Quotes attributable to Premier Jacinta Allan

"Antisemitism thrives in extreme and radical environments, and we are giving police more powers to control protest and making it harder for agents of violence and hate to hide."

"This isn't about the Middle East. This is about Victoria. This is about our values and the right of anyone in this state to live, work and pray freely without fear of intimidation, fear and violence."

"Doesn't matter if you're Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu – we all deserve the right to simply be who we are."

Quote attributable to Minister for Police Anthony Carbines

"These reforms will ensure police have the powers they need to do their job to maintain public order and keep all Victorians safe."

"Some of these reforms are complex because they involve a balance of fundamental rights, but we are committed to consulting with the community and delivering them as soon as possible."

Quote attributable to Minister for Multicultural Affairs Ingrid Stitt

"We have a role in guiding and funding multicultural and multifaith community organisations. That means we have the obligation to set the standard: everyone can be champions of cohesion and must be equipped to do so."

"Long-term healing following this division requires communities to come back together again. Victoria has pioneered multi-faith dialogue, and we have a responsibility to lead this work for all Victorians."