

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Through the eyes of children, Jews fear the damage is irreversible

Jewish community leader and prominent lawyer Jeremy Leibler says Jewish Australians face antisemitism under a veneer of anti-Zionism, and he is unsure if the harm it has caused to social cohesion is reversible.

Leibler on Wednesday told the royal commission called in response to the Bondi terror attack that “obsessive demonisation and delegitimisation of Israel” has given social licence to attack Jewish people. He rejected the view it was difficult to draw a line between legitimate and antisemitic criticism of Israel.



Zionist Federation of Australia president Jeremy Leibler says attacks on Jewish Australians became normalised after the October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel. **Chris Hopkins**

Leibler is the president of the Zionist Federation of Australia and a partner of law firm Arnold Bloch Leibler, which he said had provided pro bono advice to around 100 individuals and organisations subjected to antisemitic discrimination.

Leibler, a father of four, said he had experienced the rise in antisemitism through the eyes of his children. In [a personal submission](#) to the commission, Leibler said his daughter, 17 at the time of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israel, had read death threats directed at him, and his son had “openly questioned why we haven’t packed up and left this country”.

Leibler said one of his 13-year-old twin sons had observed that a school did not need high fences because it was not Jewish. “It’s painful to me not just as a father, it’s painful as an Australian ... it’s not how I grew up, it’s not how I want anyone’s children to grow up, Jewish or not. And it feels like it happened very quickly. It doesn’t feel irreversible to me but I also don’t know. I don’t see any immediate pathway to addressing it.”

Leibler said since October 7, 2023, he had experienced a “very dramatic shift” representing a community traumatised by Hamas’ attacks, while antisemitism became “normalised” in Australian society, depriving Jewish people of psychological safety.

“As a partner at ABL, where my practice is in mergers and acquisitions, very quickly the phone was ringing off the hook from Jewish Australians subjected to antisemitism from all walks of life.”

Asked by royal commissioner Virginia Bell if it was difficult to draw the line between legitimate and excessive criticisms of Israel, Leibler replied that many Jewish people are also highly critical of the Israeli government. But Leibler argued it wasn’t difficult to draw that line, noting Australians had rejected the US war in Iraq without calling for death to American military forces, or boycotting their businesses, or criticising the US’s right to exist.

In August 2025, the Albanese government [recognised the state of Palestine](#), which prompted a war of words between Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#), who labelled the decision “weak”, and federal Labor.

Leibler said in the context of rising antisemitism and demonisation of Israel “it was reasonably foreseeable that government decisions touching on Israel, delivered without context or reassurance, would compound that demonisation”.

Leibler said political leaders had often failed to “make plain that disagreement with an Israeli government did not go to the legitimacy of the State of Israel or, by extension, to the legitimacy of the Jewish identity that is bound to it”.

“That failure of leadership also emboldened the forces that ultimately produced the violence at Bondi. On 14 December 2025, the connection between unchecked rhetoric and physical violence was made horrifyingly concrete. The persons who carried out the Bondi attack did not act in a vacuum. They acted in a climate in which ‘Zionists’ could be boycotted, harassed, intimidated, and ultimately, violently attacked.”

Earlier, outside the commission, NSW Police moved on a man wearing a T-shirt depicting the Israeli flag and a swastika with the slogan “antisemitism proud to be accused speak up”.



Police speak to a man wearing an antisemitic T-shirt who was outside the building holding the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion in the Sydney CBD. **Nine**

A commission spokesman said it was “appalled that such an item of clothing was worn in the vicinity of our hearing venue”, labelling it antisemitic.

“Safety of witnesses is paramount to the royal commission. We want to reassure witnesses and those wishing to engage with the royal commission that safety protocols are in place.”

The man was arrested later on Wednesday after attending Manly Police Station and was in custody while inquiries continued, police said.

Earlier, the commission heard an audio recording of a 13-year-old girl who had attended a Bar Mitzvah at Bondi on December 14, 2025. Although she couldn't hear or see the shooting, she saw “hundreds of people running away and screaming and was locked down in the venue”. “It was terrifying.”

“I don't think Jewish kids should be scared to live normally like other kids do ... I hope the royal commission can help us.”

Jewish man Dean Cherny said his daughter, 10, had asked him as he tucked her into bed, “if Israel is not safe and we’re not safe in Australia, where will we go?”

A witness identified as AAT, the son of a Holocaust survivor, said his son had faced racism and physical bullying at a public school in Darwin after he began wearing a Star of David. “He was squeezed until he couldn’t breathe ... dragged across the floor, causing him to receive carpet burn on his upper arm. He was thrown into a garbage bin.”

A former academic employee of a Perth-based university said that before visiting with her godson, she was “shocked and taken aback” by comments on the Facebook page of the cafe on campus, which made it very clear Jews and Zionists were not welcome.

A former Tasmanian public high school teacher reported witnessing antisemitic behaviour by students, including graffitiing swastikas on desks and shouting Heil Hitler.

A year 10 student of a public school said she had had “thrown coins at me and [I was] asked if I would pick it up”. She reported being called a Jew, taunted with fake sneezes and coded slurs such as “achoo” and “juice”.