

O P E N L E T T E R

To Australia's Prime Minister & Political Leaders

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The signatories of this open letter are academics and scholars from across Australia who wish to lend their support to the chorus of Australians **speaking out against recent statements by several media personalities and politicians which have instigated and accentuated a worrying trend of hate speech** in Australia, especially towards those of the Muslim faith.

We fear that such speech, if left unchallenged and allowed to fester, **will deepen divisions in this country, increase racial intolerance and discrimination, and, at worst, culminate in serious social tension and conflict.** History is replete with cases of how the expression of extreme views against vulnerable minorities have escalated into hate crimes and violence, ripping apart the very fabric of society.

We maintain that **freedom of expression is a vital** and core value for a vibrant democratic country such as ours. However, we hold the view that an expression that incites hatred, or fear, against a section of our citizenry, or advocates and promotes discriminatory action, or implicit violence, against such a group, must be summarily challenged and rejected.

As educators we believe it is of the utmost importance for our leaders to be alert to the damaging implications for social cohesion and harmony. **We call on you to act decisively to expose the fallacious and misconceived nature of some of the views being expressed** and to make a decisive and definitive condemnation of hate speech. While we appreciate that there have been some efforts made in this direction, **a far stronger stance is needed.** History teaches us that the appeasement of bigotry is a dangerous and self-destructive strategy.

What we need to foster and nurture in Australia is **respectful and genuine dialogue, intercultural understanding and empathy.** We believe that spurning hate speech and bigotry is the first step.

We urge you as the leaders of our nation **to unequivocally condemn hate speech and oppose campaigns of vilification** by adding your voices to the overwhelming majority of Australians who reject such a culture of scapegoating, bigotry and hatred.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Philip Ablett
University of the Sunshine Coast

Dr Gregory Acciaioli
Anthropology & Sociology, University of Western Australia

Associate Professor Panizza Allmark
School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University

Professor Dennis Altman
Professorial Fellow in Human Security, La Trobe University

Dr Julie Andrews
Convenor of Aboriginal Studies, La Trobe University

Dr Kristine Aquino
Department of Sociology, Macquarie University

Dr Paul Bauert, OAM FAMA BSc MBBS FRACP
Head of Paediatrics, Royal Darwin Hospital & Senior Lecturer, Flinders University

Professor Louise Baur, AM
University of Sydney

Dr Bijou Blick, MBBS, MPH, Dip Paeds
NSW Institute of Psychiatry

Professor Gary D. Bouma, AM
UNESCO Chair in Intercultural and Interreligious Relations – Asia Pacific, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, Monash University

Professor Linda Briskman
Professor of Human Rights, Swinburne Institute for Social Research

Emeritus Professor Joseph A. Camilleri, OAM
La Trobe University, Managing Director, Alexandria Agenda

Dr Dean Chan
Faculty of Humanities, Curtin University

Professor James Chin
Director, Asia Institute, University of Tasmania

Dr Sky Croeser
Department of Internet Studies, Curtin University

Professor Caroline de Costa, AM
College of Medicine, James Cook University

Professor Bassam Dally
School of Mechanical Engineering, University of Adelaide

Dr Helen Driscoll
Consultant Psychiatrist, Victoria

Dr Caroline Fleay
Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University

Emeritus Professor Alberto Gomes
La Trobe University, & Director of Dialogue, Empathic Engagement & Peacebuilding (DEEP) Network

Emeritus Professor Kerry Goulston

University of Sydney

Associate Professor Patrick Guinness

The Australian National University

Professor Ghassan J. Hage

Future Generation Professor of Anthropology and Social Theory, University of Melbourne

Associate Professor Ken Harvey

Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Monash University

Professor David Isaacs, MBBChir MD FRACP FRCPC

Department of Infectious Diseases & Microbiology, University of Sydney

Professor Paul James

Professor of Globalization and Cultural Diversity, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney

Dr Bert Jenkins

Convenor of Peace Studies, University of New England

Professor Jon Jureidini

Research Leader, Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide

Dr Elizabeth Kath

Lecturer, School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University, Honorary Research Fellow with the UN Global Compact Cities Programme and Co-Director of Global Reconciliation

Dr Thor Kerr

School of Media, Culture & Creative Arts, Curtin University

Professor Ian Kerridge

Professor of Bioethics and Medicine, University of Sydney

Professor Damien Kingsbury

Director of the Centre for Citizenship, Development and Human Rights, Deakin University

Professor Paul Komesaroff

Professor of Medicine, Monash University, & Executive Director of Global Reconciliation

Professor Marilyn Lake, FAHA, FASSA

Professor of History, University of Melbourne

Emeritus Professor Stephen Leeder

Public Health and Community Medicine, Sydney University

Professor Helen Lee

Professor of Anthropology, La Trobe University

Dr Julian CH Lee

Senior Lecturer, Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University

Associate Professor James Leibold

Department of Politics and Philosophy, La Trobe University

Dr Debbi Long

Department of General Practice, School of Primary Health Care, Monash University

Professor Christopher Mackie

Professor of Public Scholarship, La Trobe University

Honorary Associate Professor David McKnight

School of the Arts and Media, University of New South Wales

Dr Michális Stavros Michael

Honorary & Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, La Trobe University & Faculty of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences, Monash University, Director, Centre for Dialogue

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Associate Professor Jane Mills

School of the Arts & Media, University of New South Wales

Associate Professor Christine Morley

Queensland University of Technology

Professor Ross Mouer

Emeritus Professor, Monash University

Dr Yamini Narayanan

Senior Lecturer, International and Community Development, Deakin University

Emeritus Professor Kim Oates, AM

Sydney Medical School, University of Sydney

Professor Baden Offord

Dr Haruhisa Handa Chair of Human Rights Education, Curtin University Professor, Curtin University

Professor Kaori H. Okano

Professor in Asian Studies, La Trobe University

Associate Professor Brigitta Olubas

School of the Arts & Media, University of NSW

Professor Suvendrini Perera

John Curtin Distinguished Professor, Curtin University

Dr Robbie Peters

Director of Development Studies, Sydney University

Dr Jennifer Philip

Honorary Associate Professor, University of Melbourne & Deputy Director of Palliative Medicine, St Vincent's Hospital

Professor Leon Piterman

Pro-Vice Chancellor, Monash University

Professor Joseph Pugliese

Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies, Macquarie University

Professor Graham Seal, AM

Director Australia-Asia-Pacific Institute, Curtin University

Professor Yoshio Sugimoto

Emeritus Professor, La Trobe University

Dr Gwenda Tavan

Head of Department of Politics and Philosophy, La Trobe University

Associate Professor Savitri Taylor

Law School, La Trobe University

Dr Antonio Traverso

School of Media, Culture & Creative Arts, Curtin University

Emeritus Professor David de Vaus

Former Executive Dean, University of Queensland

Dr Selvaraj Velayutham

Department of Sociology, Macquarie University

Professor Adrian Vickers, FAHA

Professor of Southeast Asian Studies, University of Sydney

Associate Professor Deborah Yates

Senior Staff Specialist in Thoracic Medicine & Conjoint Associate Professor, University NSW

Associate Professor Amanda Wise

Department of Sociology, Macquarie University

Dr Alex Wodak, AM

Emeritus Consultant, St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney

Dr Shannon Woodcock

Sextures Institute, Melbourne

Professor Spencer Zifcak

Allan Myers Professor of Law, Australian Catholic University