

Sydney, 14 January 2026

Arab Council Australia Responds to the Law and Safety Committee of the NSW Legislative Assembly Enquiry into Slogans and Protest Laws

Arab Council Australia (ACA) has made a submission to the NSW Government inquiry into protest slogans and public safety. As a secular and independent peak body representing Australians of Arabic-speaking background, ACA approaches this process with a commitment to social cohesion, democratic rights and the protection of all communities.

ACA rejects racism and bigotry in all forms, including antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian hatred. Violence and intimidation have no place in a multicultural society.

ACA echoes concerns that the manner in which the inquiry has been established risks undermining both democratic rights and social cohesion. The rushed timeline, particularly over the holiday period, does not accommodate genuine community engagement and consultation, nor time for a meaningful assessment of submissions before handing down a report. The impact to principles of democracy the proposed measures may have should demand a robust, measured and considered approach. With no valid reason for such a rushed process provided, ACA believes public confidence in the process will be impacted.

We are also concerned that the Terms of Reference appear to already assume certain slogans are inherently hateful, overlooking the importance of meaning, intent and context. Political expressions should not be treated as criminal if they do not objectively cross the threshold into threat, intimidation or incitement to violence.

While protections against racism and violence are essential, vague or phrase-based bans risk selective enforcement. The Terms of Reference of this Inquiry risk a disproportionate impact on the pro-Palestinian community in generally, and more specifically on Arab, Palestinian and Muslim communities at a time of heightened violence and hostility.

International human rights standards require that restrictions on expression be precise, necessary and proportionate. Banning words or slogans in isolation risks suppressing lawful political speech rather than preventing harm. Banning words or slogans that do not meet the standards of "hate speech" even further so.

ACA supports firm action against genuine hate and violence. Conduct that explicitly threatens, harms or intimidates must be prohibited, but political slogans should be assessed in context, not criminalised simply because they are deliberately misinterpreted or deemed controversial.

We call for a principled, evidence-based approach that focuses on harmful conduct and supported by clear legal definitions, strong evidence, and consistent enforcement.

We also urge investment in anti-racism education, community-led initiatives and stronger human rights protections, which are more effective for long-term safety and cohesion rather than an expansion of police powers.

This approach will strengthen community safety while upholding democratic freedoms and principles and will support social cohesion. Arab Council Australia is ready to work constructively with the NSW Government and the Committee to support a fair and balanced outcome.

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