

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections**

Melbourne—Tuesday, 25 February 2020

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Natalie Suleyman—Chair

Mr James Newbury—Deputy Chair

Ms Christine Couzens

Ms Emma Kealy

Ms Michaela Settle

Mr David Southwick

Mr Meng Heang Tak

#### **WITNESS**

Mr Adel Salman, Vice President, Islamic Council of Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their elders past and present and to Aboriginal elders from other communities who may be here today. All mobile phones should be turned to silent at this point. I welcome Adel Salman, the Vice-President of the Islamic Council of Victoria, and I believe Mohamed Mohideen.

**Mr SALMAN:** Mohamed is running a little bit late. He just cannot find parking.

**The CHAIR:** That is fine. He will be making his way here soon. All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today. But if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, these comments may not be protected by this privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and is also being broadcast live on Parliament's website. Please note that footage can only be rebroadcast in accordance with conditions set out by standing order 234. You will also be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check as soon as it is available. Any verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as they are available. I now invite you to proceed with a brief 5-to-10 minute opening statement to the Committee, which will be followed up by questions by Committee members. Welcome, Adel.

**Mr SALMAN:** Thank you, Chairperson, and thank you, Committee, for the opportunity. My name is Adel Salman, as mentioned. I am the Vice President of the Islamic Council of Victoria. The Islamic Council of Victoria, for those that are not familiar with what we do: we are the peak representative body for Victoria's Muslim community. We are a member-based organisation, so we have a broad constituency, and we are confident that we do speak on behalf of the Muslim—the diverse; very important—the diverse Muslim community.

We welcome the opportunity to make this submission and to talk to you here today. I will start by talking about the context for anti-vilification. The Muslim community has suffered enormously due to Islamophobia over many years, and unfortunately the situation is not becoming any better, even since Christchurch, the very horrible events of Christchurch almost one year ago. Some of us were optimistic and felt that the situation would improve because that would shock us, it would shock us collectively as a society, into realising this is real, anti-Muslim hatred is real and it kills, and it would actually see a dramatic turnaround. We have seen the opposite; we have actually seen a spike. Now, unfortunately one of the issues that we have is that we do not have a lot of data to back up that. But we do have some, and that tells us that the incidents are increasing, that some of these groups that are targeting Muslims are becoming emboldened, and in fact Christchurch had an enabling, if you like, effect.

We are deeply concerned about Islamophobia. This is a lived experience for our community, and so any measures to deal with that, to try to reverse the tide, are welcomed and very much required. We believe that the current legislation, the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act*, is essential legislation, and we are fortunate in Victoria that we have an Act like this that does offer some level of protection. We just believe it needs to be strengthened. So fundamentally we are calling for it to be retained but strengthened.

Some of the issues that are impacting its effectiveness, including thresholds, for example, need to be dealt with to make it far more effective and to serve the purpose upon which it was actually legislated for in the first place. I think if you look at the crafters and the developers of the Bill, I am sure that they would welcome also opportunities to improve the Bill now that we have had I think 17 or 18 years of experience to be able to draw upon that. So in essence we are calling for the Bill to be retained, in the sense that the protected attributes covered by the Bill remain. We are not asking for additional protected attributes to be added. We believe that adding them will weaken the protections for the most vulnerable communities, in this case being the religious Muslim community or the Muslim community. That is not to say that we do not support anti-vilification provisions across the board. But what we are saying is that this Bill is for a particular purpose and we need to ensure and conserve that purpose, and adding attributes, we think, will weaken its effectiveness.

We also believe that the reporting of hate crime needs to be looked at in a serious way. We believe that the current processes for capturing data are deficient. We believe that Victoria Police need to be given some direction as well as training and awareness to improve their level of reporting. They do have a prejudice motivated crime unit, which we are part of as one of the multicultural, multifaith groups that are part of that grouping, but the police themselves would acknowledge that their capture and reporting is deficient, and we believe that needs to be strengthened. We believe it should be made mandatory for police to record a hate crime as a hate crime, and it should be dealt with appropriately. We also believe that the community network needs to be leveraged to supplement whatever processes we have in place for capturing and dealing with hate crime, and that is another one of our recommendations. I am not sure if you want me to talk about recommendations. I mean, I have given an introduction. Do you want me to go through the recommendations?

**The CHAIR:** If you would like to.

**Mr SALMAN:** In terms of strengthening the Act, we believe that the threshold at the moment in the Act is too high for serious incitement and the definition of that is open to interpretation. What does, actually, serious incitement mean? We believe the definition of conduct within the Act needs to be expanded to refer to a whole range of conduct that is on a spectrum. If you think about it, there is a continuum here, and I think what we are wanting to capture is the broadest range of the continuum that reflects the lived reality of Muslims today.

So if you speak to a Muslim woman who is a hijabi woman—who is covered with traditional Muslim cover—she would no doubt talk about a whole range of experiences that she experiences on a daily basis, and that could be abuse, it could be intimidation, it could be physical in some cases such that she would feel reluctant to actually engage in civil society as we all do and we all take for granted. Going to the supermarket, going to the shopping centre—she would have some concerns about doing that. Taking the kids to school—she would have some concerns about doing that. Walking down the street—she would have some concerns about doing that. Driving her car and not having the fear of having another driver try to run her off the road because they have obviously identified her as a Muslim—what makes it all worse is that these victims feel that there is not much that can be done to alleviate that.

We need to send a very clear message, obviously, and that is what this legislation actually does. We need to send a very clear message that any form of hate directed towards religious communities, and in this case particularly the Islamic community, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. When we talk about Islamophobia, we often draw a comparison with anti-Semitism, and there are some similarities there. I will not bore you with the historical context for that, but there is no doubt that there is a lot of similarity with anti-Semitism. One thing that we as a society have achieved really effectively—but this has taken many years and many, many, many tragedies—is that anti-Semitism is now seen as completely unacceptable. There is no excuse given for it. It is proscribed behaviour. Anti-Semitism is now proscribed behaviour just like racism is now proscribed behaviour. Islamophobia is not. In many ways Muslims are still fair game. It is still okay to attack and demonise Muslims. It is still okay to say very hateful things and things that incite hatred towards Muslims. Muslims are still seen as fair game.

What we would like is that we arrive at the point in the very near future where anti-Muslim sentiment, Islamophobia, is proscribed in exactly the same way as anti-Semitism. No politician in their right mind would ever vilify the Jewish community. No way, no way José, would they ever vilify the Jewish community, because they know that would be the end of their political career—because it is proscribed behaviour, it is shameful. But politicians, who are often the main culprits of spreading Islamophobic speech, feel very free to be able to vilify and spread hate towards Muslims and Islam because there is no consequence for doing so.

So that was a bit of a rant, but I think that, just from our perspective, is something that we need to, as a society, deal with. And the most effective way is through legislation. Obviously there are change programs and there are public awareness campaigns—all that is required. There is education in schools. All these things are very important, but the most effective way is through legislation. And that is why we believe that this Act, which we are very fortunate to have, needs to be strengthened.

So we would like the test to be reviewed. At the moment the way the Act is worded you need to demonstrate that a third party has been incited to hate you because of the conduct of somebody else. It is very hard to do, and it is not required. It should be: does the speech vilify you? And is this speech directed towards you as an individual and does it cause you harm? So it should be a harm-based test. I think incitement, we could keep

that. We are not necessarily saying we should remove the incitement provision, but we also believe there should be a harm-based test built into it under the civil provisions such that someone can come and say, 'I have been vilified, I have been the subject of hate, and I don't have evidence that somebody has been incited but I have experienced the hate, I have experienced the harm, and so under the Act I have recourse to seek redress'. We believe that is something that should be looked at.

We also believe that the Act should allow for both the protected attributes covered by the Act to be captured in an incident. Quite often, again, I talk about a Muslim woman who may be of African origin, of which there are thousands. They should be able to come and make a complaint on the basis of their race and on the basis of their religion, and the intersectionality of those should be an aggravating factor. Likewise the sex of the individual should also be seen as an aggravating factor. Now, we are not asking for gender to be included as one of the protected attributes, but what we are saying is that where there are a number of intersecting characteristics or attributes they should all be looked at as aggravating factors, so the incident or the crime becomes magnified and is seen as more serious.

We have talked about police. We certainly need the police to, I think, receive some training. I know that is happening now. We have quite a good relationship with the police force, and we know that they have got training programs in place. Some of those are delivered by Muslim organisations, which is great. We just believe there is more work to be done. We also believe police require specific training on how to apply the Act—how do they apply the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act*? We believe they need specific training on that—not just general awareness training, not cultural sensitivity training, not training on dealing with racism but actually training on how to apply the Act, because what we believe is that whilst the police are very familiar with the *Crimes Act* and how to apply the *Crimes Act*, they are not very familiar with how to apply the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act*. We are not calling for the criminal provisions to be removed from the Act; what we are saying is potentially they should be replicated in the *Crimes Act* and that specific training be given to police so they are able to apply those provisions.

In terms of dealing with complaints, the police will investigate complaints and sometimes the victim will not be satisfied. Where do they go? Who do they complain to? What redress can they seek if they feel that their complaint is being mishandled? So that is why we are calling for an impartial body to be established to investigate these matters.

We are also asking for the Government to consider the acceptance of data and reporting provided by third parties, not just from police. The police do report on prejudice-motivated crime. We would like the Government to consider other organisations, trusted organisations. They should also be allowed to provide information and data, which should be seen as valid and accepted. We think that is very important.

I think I have mentioned it before, but I will emphasise it: we would like the reporting of hate crime to be made a mandatory requirement for police. That is really important. At the moment it is optional and subject to the individual officer and sometimes the station that they are based at. So we would like that to be made mandatory, that police actually have to record a crime as a hate-motivated crime and report it as such.

In terms of the online space, we do think the Act needs to be updated. It was put in place in 2002, I think. A lot has happened since 2002. A lot of hate happens online; in fact that is where most of it happens, to be honest, in terms of the number of hate incidents. It happens online, and the incitement happens online. That is where most of the incitement actually happens. Some of these groups that actually are anti-Muslim have a very big web presence, social media presence, and they are very effective at using that, so we think that the Act needs to be updated to reflect the current reality of social media and that standards need to be established, and we believe there needs to be some power given to Government to police and demand that these social media companies are required to take down postings. I know Facebook, for example, has taken some steps towards that, but we have gone through this experience. We have actually tested it, and it is really difficult to have Facebook remove or take down posts. It is impossible to get Facebook to actually suspend an account and remove the Facebook page of somebody—it is almost impossible to do that. Why? When they are propagating hate speech, why is it so difficult? Now, Facebook is a global company—we understand that—and we are Victoria, but I think to the degree to which we can apply some leverage to these companies like Facebook we should seek to do that within legislation as well. So that is another recommendation that we are making.

And we call upon the Victorian Government to continue to partner with Muslim organisations. I mean, we already have a partnership with the Victorian Government, the ICV. We have been working on an Islamophobia project for coming up to two years now, and we are making some really good progress. We call upon the Government to continue that because that is very effective and it certainly I think builds a lot of trust in the community that the Government is taking that quite seriously.

I am just looking through. Is there anything else that I have missed? No, I think I have covered most of the recommendations.

**Mr TAK:** Comprehensive.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, very comprehensive. Thank you, Adel, for your presentation. I will probably just start off with some of the questions. I note in the submission—and you did speak about this, and it is very alarming—that has been an increase in incidents. In particular I note in your report you state in 2014 there were 243 incidents reported, and in 2017 to 2018 there were 349 incidents. So clearly as you stated, and particularly after the Christchurch attack, there continues to be just a horrific increase.

**Mr SALMAN:** We are extremely confident that that is seriously understated based upon our research. I mean, as I mentioned before, the ICV has been working on this Islamophobia project for nearly two years now. We have done a lot of international research. We have actually spoken to people in Europe, in the UK and in North America, and there is a general consensus that you would be lucky to be capturing 10 to 20 per cent of the total of the incidents. I would think at most we are capturing 20 per cent and probably less. So if you take that and you magnify the 349 and say that at best captures 20 per cent, then you can sort of imagine what the actual reality is like.

**The CHAIR:** And I think that has been well stated in the previous submissions from stakeholders—the lack of reporting for various reasons. I just wanted you, if I can just add—the reporting, is it because the people do not feel confident of the system or do not feel that they have enough support or cannot navigate the system?

**Mr SALMAN:** I think it is all of those things. I think the confidence—they do not have confidence that anything will be done. I was just mentioning to Yuki just before that unfortunately a lot of Muslims now feel that is just the way it is. It is just normalised; that is just the way it is. And they feel they do not have any recourse, nothing can be done, no-one will be there to support them. I think the procedures for reporting—that is one of the things they ICV is looking to do, actually make it simpler for Muslims to report these incidents. Support, you are talking about support. I do think we do need appropriate support mechanisms because some of these people, a lot of them, who have experienced this, especially repeatedly—remember a lot of these victims suffer this on almost a daily basis—there is a lot of trauma. They need specialist support, psychological support, for example. They certainly need legal support as well at the appropriate time. So I think it is all of those reasons.

**The CHAIR:** And just to add on to that, in particular with the increase in public visibility with young women or girls wearing the hijab, we are seeing an increase in targeted attacks.

**Mr SALMAN:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** What can we better do as part of this Inquiry to stamp this out?

**Mr SALMAN:** You can strengthen the Act. I think there needs to be more in the public awareness campaign and space. The Victorian Government—we are very fortunate in Victoria, I will declare that. I think we do multiculturalism better in Victoria than anywhere else in Australia, absolutely. We are very fortunate to be Victorians.

But there is still a lot of work to be done in that space. Paradoxically, a lot of the far-right groups actually have their base here in Victoria. It almost defies logic because Victoria does multiculturalism so much better yet we have these far-right groups here. What is going on? So I think the message is not getting through. As I mentioned before, we want hate directed towards racial and religious communities stamped out. We want it to be seen as completely unacceptable—people almost shamed for doing that.

As I mentioned before, there is a shame attached to being anti-Semitic, there is a shame attached to having racism directed toward people of colour—to some degree, there is still a lot more work to be done—but there is no shame attached to being anti-Muslim. That is our view. There is no shame in that. If you have got politicians who are indulging in some of the worst anti-Muslim speech, then how can there be any shame? They are supposed to be our public leaders. They have the platform. They are speaking to the public and yet they are repeating some of the most vile speech directed towards Muslims—in many cases spreading conspiracy theories about Muslims as well and Islam. Clearly we have a situation where to be anti-Muslim or to spread Islamophobic speech or to hate and vilify Muslims is not seen as shameful.

**The CHAIR:** I just have one more question. There continues to be an increase—and clearly you have suggested a number of reforms to assist, and I have spoken about this and asked you previously in relation to support—but as ICV, do you feel that you receive adequate support from all levels, from government and stakeholders?

**Mr SALMAN:** We receive some support, but we believe it needs to be more.

**The CHAIR:** Just elaborate on that.

**Mr SALMAN:** At the ICV one of the things that we are working on is to make it easier for people to report. We want to establish a hotline, because from our research—and we are extremely confident of this because we have done international research—the most effective way of increasing the level of hate crime reporting is by establishing a hotline. People like to speak to someone on the phone. Reporting online is somewhat effective, maybe using an app is somewhat effective, but most people like to or need to speak to someone on the phone so we actually are planning on establishing a hotline. We would like government support for that. We would like the Government to see that is an essential piece of infrastructure in our anti-vilification hate crime framework. We would like to think the ICV is credible enough for us to partner with the Government on that. Clearly we are because the Government is partnering with us already. We want to take it to the next level, so that is something we would like to do.

I think we would also like the Government to establish, if you like, appropriate support services specific for this issue. There are support services available—psychological support services, social workers, youth workers et cetera—but we believe this requires specialist services and we would like the Government to actually establish clear requirements that are then reflected in the establishment of services for this space. Because we believe that people who are traumatised by anti-Muslim sentiment, and it would be similar for other hate, require specific support and advice, and we do not believe that that currently exists now. There are some people who can provide services but that is almost ad hoc. We would like it to be systematised so we have a framework of support services just like dealing with, and I hate to use this comparison, domestic violence, for example. We would like there to be a similar level of approach, a systematic approach, to providing support to people suffering from hate speech, anti-Muslim sentiment in our case.

**Mr TAK:** Not a question, but a compliment rather. In terms of the mosque open day, I think that is very well received. I must admit that it was only after I started working as a councillor for the City of Greater Dandenong that I started to open up to understand a bit more. I would just like to compliment you on the mosque open day. That is very important.

**Mr SALMAN:** Thank you for that. We are quite proud of that mosque open day. In fact it is our third or fourth year and it is becoming bigger and bigger. It just so happens that this year's mosque open day coincides with the anniversary of Christchurch on 15 March, so we will be having very specific services in relation to that. Last year's mosque open day—I do not know if you attended any of your local mosques for mosque open day—that happened two days after Christchurch, it was 17 March, and the level of turnout was extraordinary. We had thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of Victorians turning up all across the state. We would like to think that we would have a similar turnout this year.

But you are right, mosque open day is a really important part of our community outreach. We want Victorians to see their mosque as a core part of their community, not something different, not something alien, but a core—just like a church, a core part of their community and it provides essential services to a segment of their community, and in some localities quite a significant segment as well. It provides essential services as well. I

mean, mosques should be seen as not just a place in which you pray but also the provision of services. So I think we have come a long way; we have still got a long way to go, I think.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Hi, Adel, how are you?

**Mr SALMAN:** Hi, David.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** I do not know where to start, I have got so many questions for you. But thank you and especially thank you for the advocacy that you are doing for your community. What you have said today is just so important, and I think you should be commended and the Islamic council should be commended for your work.

**Mr SALMAN:** Thank you.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Where to start? I might just start with education, right? So one of the things that we know is obviously if we can do things as early as possible in educating young people around diversity, people being able to express their own beliefs, their own religions and understanding about some of the backgrounds—and the mosque open day is an example—but some of those early as possible programs and support. I understand that the Christian community, the Islamic community and the Jewish community have been working on a number of initiatives in New South Wales particularly around curriculum to embed that within the broader education system to help young people understand all of that. How important do you think that is in terms of ensuring that we can educate people about respect and understanding of people's diverse backgrounds?

**Mr SALMAN:** Look, very important, David, extremely important. And you are right: we need to start early. Religious education in the sense of awareness of other faiths and the importance of faith for people—for me personally, my faith is a core part of who I am. It defines me in some ways, and many people will feel similar. But at the moment the level of religious literacy, if you like, is very low, very low. And that is because it is not seen as an important thing to teach our children. Now, parents might take it upon themselves to do that, but in our school system we are sadly lacking. Even where we had some level of religious education the Government actually chose to take it out of the standard curriculum, which is unfortunate, but that is another story.

But at the very least there should be a curriculum in there around religious education, so teaching about all faiths and the importance of faith, not just about the faith but the importance. Why is it important that we all become aware of people's faiths? It is because in some ways it shapes who they are, it shapes their views, and to the degree that people have that literacy around, 'You're a Christian', 'You're a Jew', 'You're a Buddhist', 'You're a Hindu', 'You're a Muslim', we have all our people of faith. We can do that at the senior level. At the senior level, in terms of interfaith, we all get together, we talk about, 'We are all people of faith', and we can communicate and share and we understand each other, but that is not translated. Certainly our children, they are not given an opportunity at all.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Thank you very much. Earlier on you mentioned that adding attributes may weaken the effectiveness. Can you just elaborate a bit further about what you mean by that?

**Mr SALMAN:** We believe one of the essential requirements is that there is a laser-sharp focus on racial and religious vilification, because we believe that the situation has not improved since the legislation was put in place 17 or 18 years ago—in fact in our case it is now worse—and to remove that focus by broadening the list of attributes may mean that you actually have to make some amendments to the legislation to accommodate the broader list of protected attributes. We believe that that could then remove, as I said, the focus from it. Again, to be very clear, the ICV stands against vilification of any kind, but we do believe that this Act serves a purpose, and it is more required than ever that that Act continues and in fact it is strengthened.

I will be honest with you: we have had this debate internally, because there are other groups, we know—for example, VEOHRC and others—who have actually said we want to scrap this legislation and have a catch-all like under the *Equal Opportunity Act*. We see some merit and logic behind that, but we believe that is also fraught and would defeat the purpose on which we are advocating, which is greater protection for the Muslim community.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** You mentioned about the Victoria Police reporting, and you mentioned about under-reporting. We currently have a Crime Statistics Agency that reports on a whole range of things quarterly. Would you suggest that hate crime be something that be reported within the Crime Statistics Agency, so we could understand exactly how big this problem is and what we are doing to deal with it?

**Mr SALMAN:** Absolutely. You have expressed it better than I did—100 per cent.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Okay, thank you. Then you also, in your submission, talk about the Government establishing an impartial complaints mechanism agency for investigating complaints mishandled by Victoria Police. At the moment we have a police conduct unit which looks at when there are issues with police conduct. We have IBAC. There was an IBAC review that said that there should be additional powers to look at specifically—a parliamentary committee, I think it was the IBAC committee—police powers when there were things not done right, that there could be an independent review of that. Is that the kind of thing you are looking at? So if things have not been handled appropriately, that there be an independent place like IBAC to properly investigate that, that this could be taken to?

**Mr SALMAN:** Exactly. We did not define exactly what it would look like, but we do believe there needs to be an impartial body to handle a situation where the complainant is complaining that the police have mishandled.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** So not taking something seriously, not fully having investigated the situation, have not got back to? Would you take it further to say that may be even part of the problem in so far as ridiculing or—

**Mr SALMAN:** That is the reality, David. When Muslims do go to report to police, they do not feel that they are taken seriously, and in fact sometimes—and again we do not have the data to prove this, but anecdotally we are told—

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** This is what people are telling you?

**Mr SALMAN:** People are telling us that they are demeaned, ridiculed and even worse. They might actually be subject to Islamophobic abuse then and there by police officers, so we believe there is a real need for a very impartial body to deal with these issues.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** You mentioned the hotline. We have the Anti Defamation Commission of the Jewish community that have similar requirements, also collection of data. They have similar requirements. Do you see the opportunity of various groups, like the Jewish community, working together with the Islamic community to be able to provide a collective response, if you like, for Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, general hate?

**Mr SALMAN:** I think there is some merit in that. I am not sure whether that is a stage 1 or a stage 2. Stage 1, I think we need to establish that, because one of the issues is around trust, and we mentioned that before.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** Work with your own community first and then see how you can get that.

**Mr SALMAN:** Exactly. We need to build that trust with the community.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** I want to touch on one other thing, if I may. There were reports today from ASIO head, Mike Burgess, that said small cells of right-wing extremists were regularly gathering to salute Nazi flags, inspect weapons and to disperse their hateful ideology. When we have these extreme groups, white supremacist groups, would you and certainly your community believe that these groups are effectively targeting all people that are effectively non-white, including Muslims?

**Mr SALMAN:** I would go further. If you look at these far-right groups, one thing that they all agree on is anti-Muslim hatred. They might have hatred towards Jews, they might have hatred towards people of colour, they might have hatred toward women, they might have hatred towards homosexuals and different levels, but one thing they all are unified on is anti-Muslim hatred, and this is globally. One thing that unifies all of these far-right groups is absolutely anti-Muslim hatred.

Further to that—and I think this was reported; I cannot recall exactly when it was reported but it would have been last year—some of these groups, whilst they have not lost their intense hatred for Jews, know that they



would be absolutely ripped to shreds if they started spreading anti-Semitic speech publicly but they actually said, 'Muslims are easy targets, so let's deal with the Muslims first. Then we'll come back to the Jews'. And that is the reality: that anti-Muslim sentiment is fair game. It is fair game. People feel safe—it is almost a contradiction there—actually demeaning and vilifying Muslims. They would not ever do that towards the Jewish community, which is great. That is wonderful. It is a milestone for us as a society that now anti-Semitism is seen as so off limits that no-one would even dare be doing it if they want to attain a political post, or they want to hold any post, or they do not want to be ostracised by the community.

**Mr SOUTHWICK:** I wish that was the case all the way around, but I can tell you unfortunately that is not what I experience. Politically, yes, but outside that—

So the last question that I would follow in terms of the right-wing supremacist groups is we have, certainly publicly, gone out in terms of suggesting that the swastika should be banned as a universal symbol of hate targeting all groups that are non-white, and obviously there are other things that should be looked at as well. But would you accept the proposition that the swastika has no place in our society?

**Mr SALMAN:** Yes, I do. No-one can claim that that is a neutral symbol. Everyone understands what that symbol represents. It represents mass murder on a scale that we have rarely seen in human history. How could anyone possibly defend that under the banner of free speech? No, that is not right.

**The CHAIR:** I will just conclude with one question—I asked it to the previous stakeholder—and it is in relationship to unemployment. I am certain that you have heard of cases where especially young youth of Muslim background find it extremely difficult and challenging to seek employment or opportunity, and that leads to other issues amongst the community. I have certainly had a lot of the Muslim community, youth in particular, whether it is your name, whether it is a hijab feel a sense of loss of hope. What are some of the things that, I suppose, we can do to better alleviate some of those issues? I know the Muslim community in particular are facing these issues.

**Mr SALMAN:** Yes, that is a very good question, and you are right: that is the reality for Muslims applying for jobs. I do not know if this can be legislated, but certainly I know some companies and even my company are actually talking about having the names and anything that identifies someone's background removed from resumes so it is a neutral recruitment process. That may be one measure. But how do you legislate that? I do not know think you can. Encourage corporate Australia and the NGO sector to actually adopt some of this best practice. I think it is something the Government can champion. That is something we should definitely be looking at doing.

I think there need to be programs to actually assist those who are most vulnerable, like Muslim youth, actually seek paid employment. That could be through further training. It should be through participating programs in partnership with corporate Australia or the business world or government or government agencies, whatever the case may be, because we believe there is a need for that. You know, people talk about affirmative action. They almost recoil when you talk about affirmative action, but honestly affirmative action is required. It can be a very effective tool sometimes. And what I am suggesting to you is that we actually need a specific program to facilitate the entry of the most vulnerable people into the workforce and provide them with the best chance possible, which they do not have at the moment.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your submission and sharing some of the stories. I have read them in your report. Thank you to ICV for all the work that they do not only in Victoria but throughout Australia. Your advocacy is an integral part of our community, so thank you.

The next steps will be once the public hearings conclude the Committee will deliberate on all the evidence, the submissions. Then we will prepare a report with some strong recommendations to Government, and we will provide you a copy of that. But hopefully we get a chance to see you before that. Thank you again.

**Mr SALMAN:** I hope so. Thank you very much. I really appreciate your time everybody. Thanks very much.

**Committee adjourned.**