

Jeremy Leibler  
President  
Zionist Federation of Australia  
By email: JLeibler@abl.com.au

11 August 2023

Dear Jeremy,

We are concerned about the joint statement issued by the Zionist Federation of Australia and Executive Council of Australian Jewry.<sup>1</sup>

The organisations below – Ameinu Australia, Meretz Australia, Habonim Dror Australia and Hashomer Hatzair Australia – are all constituent members of the ZFA and yet we were not consulted, or even advised, of the statement before it was released.

Presented as being on behalf of the “Jewish community”, without discussion with the ZFA’s progressive constituent base, severely undermines the organisation’s claim to be representative of the full spectrum of views in the Jewish-Zionist community.

Had we been asked for input, we would have made the following points:

- International law is clear on the status of the territories captured by Israel in the Six-Day War.<sup>2</sup> The territories are occupied and civilian Israeli settlements on the land are considered illegal. Israel’s own foreign ministry acknowledged as such in 1967.<sup>3</sup> Criticising the Australian government for upholding its obligations under international law is politically naive and morally wrong.
- The Albanese government has done an admirable job of separating legal claims of sovereignty by Israel from the religious, historical, national and cultural claims of the Jewish people. As the foreign minister clearly stated, the government remains a clear friend of Israel and supports its right to defend itself.<sup>4</sup> We stand with them.

As progressive Jews who treasure and celebrate the connection we have to ancient Jewish sites (including those not within Israel’s recognised, sovereign borders), we categorically reject any notion that those connections automatically create legal claims which override international law or the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination.

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<sup>1</sup> [“Jewish community strongly criticises new position of Australian Government”](#) – Zionist Federation of Australia, 8 August 2023

<sup>2</sup> [“Israel’s Settlements Have No Legal Validity. Constitute Flagrant Violation of International Law. Security Council Reaffirms”](#) – United Nations, 23 December 2016

<sup>3</sup> [“Kfar Etzion, the Meron Opinion and the Illegality of Settlement”](#) – Gershon Gorenberg, South Jerusalem, 22 September 2008

<sup>4</sup> [Senator Penny Wong](#) – Hansard, 8 August 2023

- The statement should have mentioned the dramatic rise in Jewish terrorism against Palestinian targets<sup>5</sup> actively encouraged by Benjamin Netanyahu's hand-picked national security minister<sup>6</sup>. It also should have mentioned the detrimental effect this has on Israel's own security.<sup>7</sup> Failing to do so does a disservice to the organisation's claims to be an honest interlocutor in the foreign policy debate.
- A key part of the Israeli government's anti-democratic reforms agenda is to reduce judicial oversight<sup>8</sup> over Israeli control in the occupied territories and cement a reality of *de facto* annexation<sup>9</sup>. Given the previous concerns raised by the ZFA and ECAJ of those reforms<sup>10</sup> the omission of any reference in the statement raises questions about the seriousness with which the organisations take the legislation. It also underscores a broader inability to acknowledge the serious threat posed to Israeli democracy by the settler movement.
- Criticising the Australian government for re-joining the global consensus and turning the issue into one of factional politics highlights a broader, worrying trend towards anti-Labor partisanship from inside the Zionist Federation and the Jewish community's leadership more broadly.

We ask that this issue be raised at the upcoming Zionist Federation of Australia conference and our representatives be given the space to discuss this issue from both process and policy perspectives.

We are available to discuss this at your convenience.

Kind regards,

Daniel Samowitz  
Jade Karp  
Liam Getreu

Ben Wyatt  
Leon Orbach  
Jarrah Kron

Josh New  
Ella Upiter  
Barr Donde

Raphael Blay  
Mercury Muchnik

On behalf of  
**Ameinu Australia**

On behalf of  
**Meretz Australia**

On behalf of  
**Habonim Dror  
Australia**

On behalf of  
**Hashomer Hatzair  
Australia**

<sup>5</sup> ["Israeli security establishment alarmed by rise in Jewish terrorism"](#) – i24 News, 8 August 2023

<sup>6</sup> ["Ben Gvir praises settler who killed Palestinian in clash: 'Should get medal of honor'"](#) – Times of Israel, 6 August 2023

<sup>7</sup> ["Israeli Army Spokesman Says Jewish 'Terrorism' Is Spurring Palestinian Attacks"](#) – Haaretz, 7 August 2023

<sup>8</sup> ["Israeli Government Presses Ahead With Judicial Overhaul"](#) – New York Times, 10 July 2023

<sup>9</sup> ["The Attack on Democracy"](#) – Association for Civil Rights in Israel, April 2023

<sup>10</sup> ["ECAJ, ZFA speak out on Israel's judicial reforms"](#) – Australian Jewish News, 7 March 2023