

Australia synagogue arson isn't free speech or political commentary, but a call to arms

written by Arsen Ostrovsky | 06.07.2025

This past Shabbat, a Synagogue in East Melbourne, Australia, was firebombed, while a mob of pro-Palestinian thugs shouting, "Death to IDF", attacked patrons eating at a popular Israeli restaurant in the city.

The reality is these are not isolated incidents. They are the latest manifestations of an unabated explosion of hate, violence and incitement targeting the Jewish community since the October 7th attacks.

Yes, we've heard the pro forma condemnations. The platitudes about antisemitism having no place in Australia. And the reassurances that this hatred "does not represent our values." But words, however welcome, must follow with action—urgent, decisive and tangible.

I had the great fortune and privilege of growing up in Australia, having fled the former Soviet Union with my family to escape persecution because we were Jews. But today, I barely recognize the country that once stood as a beacon of tolerance and an oasis of peace for Jews. Instead, we now see near-daily reports of Jewish schools attacked, Synagogues defaced or firebombed, and Jewish-owned businesses vandalized.

And it is happening in plain sight, while it too many of our elected leaders and allies remain silent.

What many fail - or refuse - to acknowledge is that attacks like those in Melbourne do not occur in a vacuum.

Words have consequences. The violent mob that stormed an Israeli restaurant on Friday, was chanting "death to the IDF", the same chant shouted just days earlier by British band Bob Vylan at Glastonbury. Others demand to "Globalize the Intifada."

This is not free speech. It is not political commentary. This is a call to arms and incitement to violence, pure and simple.

When such hate is unchecked, it directly leads to what we witnessed in Melbourne: places of worship firebombed and innocent people assaulted for nothing more than eating a meal at a Jewish or Israeli owned establishment.

And when Israel is repeatedly demonized, delegitimized and held to a standard no other nation is subjected to, when it is routinely thrown under the bus for political expediency, this only fuels the hatred and emboldens perpetrators of antisemitism with a warped sense of justification to carry out violent attacks against Jews and

Jewish institutions.

However, what we are witnessing in Australia today is not just a Jewish problem. It is a national crisis of moral character. Because a country that allows one minority to be relentlessly vilified, assaulted and excluded without consequence, is a country betraying its own democratic values.

The late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, once warned that “Antisemitism begins with Jews, but it never ends with them. A world without room for Jews is one that has no room for difference, and a world that lacks space for difference lacks space for humanity itself.”

What kind of Australia do we want?

The question therefore is: what kind of Australia do we want?

One where Synagogues burn and mobs roam free?

Where calls for violence against Jews are dismissed as legitimate political expression?

Where the Jewish right to safety and dignity is conditional on global events, media narratives, or the will of those in power?

We all know what the response would be if it were a Mosque set alight, or a halal restaurant stormed by a mob shouting “Death to Muslims.” There would be national outrage, and rightfully so. There can be absolutely zero tolerance for racial hatred of any kind.

But when it's Jews, the urgency seemingly disappears. The clarity evaporates. And the political will, with the exception of some cherished allies and leaders, dissolves.

This double standard is not only dangerous, it is corrosive to the very fabric of Australia's democracy, to its identity and the kind of society it aspires to be.

Antisemitism doesn't fade away on its own. It grows when tolerated, excused or acquiesced to. And like a virus, it ultimately devours societies that fail to confront it.

Melbourne has now seen not only the warning signs, but the fire itself.

So how much worse must it get before Australia says: enough?

What happened in Melbourne this Shabbat, and has been reoccurring on an almost daily basis since October 7th, was not just an attack against the Jewish community, but an assault on the very foundations and freedom that all Australians enjoy and have the right to expect.

The choice before us is clear: confront this hatred with the urgency it demands, or allow it to fester until the damage is beyond repair. Silence is not an option, it is complicity. Published in The Jerusalem Post, July 06, 2025.