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TEAL MPs FUEL DIVISION BY OPPOSING PRESIDENT HERZOG VISIT

MEDIA STATEMENT

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The call by Teal MPs Zali Steggall and Sophie Scamps for Prime Minister Albanese to reconsider Israeli President Isaac Herzog's visit is deeply concerning and must be unequivocally rejected. This attempt to block President Herzog's visit serves to further isolate the Jewish community at a particularly vulnerable time.

Astonishingly, some Labor figures and Greens are also opposing or expressing disquiet about the visit. In the wake of the Bondi Beach terrorist attack, this push to block a respected Jewish leader from visiting Australia to support the Jewish community is utterly appalling.

It is clear that some MPs have failed to learn the tragic lessons of Bondi. Instead of building bridges, they are contributing to further division and deepening the wounds of antisemitism, much of which today is rooted in anti-Israel hatred.

Ms Steggall has described President Herzog's visit as "deeply divisive and problematic", suggesting it will likely lead to protests and harm national unity. Yet protesters have already been on our streets regularly since October 7, 2023, stoking division and fuelling the rise in antisemitism. To suggest these protesters should have veto power over a state visit is deeply disturbing.

It is in fact remarks like Ms Steggall's that only embolden protesters, fuel disunity and escalate tensions, particularly during the already sensitive security situation surrounding Herzog's visit.

Additionally, at a time when we should be firmly standing with the Jewish community, Ms Steggall is instead echoing anti-Israel rhetoric that has fuelled hatred since October 7, 2023. This includes repeating the claim that Israel committed genocide in Gaza, while implicating President Herzog in this.

It is disgraceful that the term 'genocide', originally coined to describe the Holocaust, is now being weaponised against the Jewish people, the very victims of that atrocity.

Criticising a government's policies is one thing, but the perpetuation of false, highly divisive narratives at such a vulnerable time for the Jewish community in Australia, by Australian politicians, is something else entirely.



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It is also crucial to note that President Herzog holds a largely ceremonial role in Israel, with virtually no bearing on Israeli policies in Gaza. Herzog also previously led the Labor opposition in Israel. He has the reputation in Israel and worldwide of being a unifying figure. The opposition to his visit exposes that these anti-Israel activists are not about policy criticism but about overall opposition to the only Jewish state.

I also remind these MPs that Israel's actions in Gaza were a direct response to Hamas's horrific October 7 2023 attacks, the deadliest assault on Jews since the Holocaust. Hamas aimed to murder as many Jews as possible, a goal more fitting to the description of genocide and war crimes.

While tragic, as all wars are, the war in Gaza was defensive. As a democracy with Western values, Israel showed remarkable restraint in a complex urban warfare environment, despite facing a terrorist group that uses human shields and seeks to maximise casualties. When mistakes or tragedies have occurred, Israel has been transparent and conducted investigations, as any democracy would.

Prime Minister Albanese must reject these calls and stand firm in welcoming President Herzog. This is not the way to treat our democratic ally, especially at a time when the Jewish community is in dire need of support. Australia must stand unequivocally with both the Jewish community and the Jewish state at this critical time.

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