

Statement of Sheina Gutnick

Name: Sheina Gutnick

Address: Known to the Royal Commission

Occupation: Australian Public Affairs Officer, Combat Antisemitism Movement

Date: 1 May 2026

1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion. This statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. The views I express in this statement are based on my personal experience.
3. Where direct speech is referred to in this statement, it is provided in words or words to the effect of those words that, to the best of my recollection, were used at the time.

Personal and professional background

4. I am 31 years of age. I live in [REDACTED] Melbourne.
5. I am currently the Australian Public Affairs Officer for the Combat Antisemitism Movement, a global organisation that undertakes civic education, grassroots activism and policy advocacy to combat antisemitism. I have been in this role since March 2026. I hold a Bachelor of Social Science in Psychology and have professional experience as a behavioural therapist, as well as experience in the education sector, including working with students, families and school-based support systems.
6. I am Jewish and was raised in an Orthodox Chabad family and community. I attended Kesser Torah College in Sydney before moving to Melbourne, where I attended Beth Rivkah Ladies College, an Orthodox Jewish school. My Jewish identity, heritage and religious life have always been central to my upbringing, family life, education and community involvement. I observe Orthodox Jewish practice and am actively involved in Jewish communal and educational life through teaching, mentoring, volunteer work and community education.

CONTINUED STATEMENT OF: Sheina Gutnick

7. I grew up hearing stories of the cold and cruel USSR where my grandparents and great-grandparents clung to their Judaism under Soviet rule. Being Jewish was dangerous and Jewish customs were practised in secret, always with the fear of discovery and persecution. My father Reuven Morrison, fled to Australia from the Ukraine at fourteen years old. He was deeply proud to be Australian and grateful for a nation that welcomed Jews when so many others turned them away.
8. My parents met in Sydney, on Bondi Beach, as young Russian Jewish refugees in the early 1980's. They were married at Central Synagogue in Bondi Junction under a chuppah by a Rabbi, according to Jewish law. My parents eventually became deeply connected to the world of Chabad, a movement within Chassidic Judaism whose name stands for *Chochmah* (wisdom), *Binah* (understanding) and *Da'at* (knowledge). Chabad shares commonalities with other strands of Orthodox Judaism, primarily a commitment to abide strictly by Jewish law and customs, but it is also set apart by its emphasis on outreach and its engagement with non-Orthodox Jews.

Personal experiences of antisemitism

9. I wish to highlight my personal experiences of antisemitism and their impact on my daily life and sense of safety as a Jewish woman, mother, educator and public advocate. In the period since 7 October 2023 I have experienced several incidents of antisemitism that paint a clear picture of the environment in which we are currently living.
10. On several occasions in both Sydney and Melbourne in the last 2 and a half years I have witnessed cars driving past on main roads with passengers shouting "Free Palestine" followed immediately by "F*** the Jews". This is not political expression but is explicit, targeted hatred and is designed to intimidate.
11. My child was scheduled to undergo surgery shortly after the widely publicised incident involving nurses at Bankstown Hospital. During that time, I felt genuinely terrified about entering the hospital system. I was frightened about who would be responsible for her care, whether any staff involved might hold hostile views towards Jewish people, and whether that hostility could affect the standard of care she received or place her at risk of negligent harm.
12. In December 2024 I was walking through Westfield Bondi Junction holding my twelve-month-old baby. A man pointed at my Star of David necklace and called me a "f***ing

terrorist". I felt shocked, exposed and unsafe. There were many people around me, but no one intervened. Because I was holding my baby, my first instinct was to avoid any confrontation and get away safely. It left me feeling deeply vulnerable, as though even in a busy public place, I could be targeted for being visibly Jewish and still be completely alone.

13. These examples represent only a small sample of the many incidents I have experienced. They are not isolated or rare, and together they have fundamentally changed how I move through the world. I no longer feel safe using public transport with my children to travel into the city, meaning that we now avoid everyday activities such as visiting museums or attending public events and festivals that should be normal and free of fear for any family. For me this decision is not theoretical but is based on my own experiences and repeated reports and firsthand accounts from friends who have experienced harassment and intimidation on public transport, particularly in proximity to protests.
14. As a mother I am constantly weighing the risk of exposing my children to environments where they may witness or be subjected to antisemitic abuse.
15. I am also witnessing the impact of this climate on the next generation of Jewish women in my role as a Bat Mitzvah teacher. Students at public schools have told me openly that they have been bullied for being Jewish, and I have experienced hesitation from mothers who are afraid to send their daughters to Bat Mitzvah programs out of concern that visibly participating in Jewish life may make them targets. This is deeply concerning to me as it demonstrates that antisemitism is not only affecting individuals in isolated incidents but is shaping behaviour, limiting participation and instilling fear in the next generation.

Experiences of antisemitism as an advocate against antisemitism

16. In my professional capacity with the Combat Antisemitism Movement, I have been directly exposed to a large volume of antisemitic abuse, particularly online. I have received and seen hundreds of comments, including people stating in response to posts that both I and the organisation makes that I should have been killed in the Bondi attack, calls to "kill Israelis," comments celebrating violence against Jews, as well as claims that

attacks against the Jewish community are “false flags” staged by Jews themselves for attention or sympathy.

Chanukah attack on 14 December 2025

17. These experiences, confronting as they are, pale in comparison with the most significant act of antisemitism I have experienced and continue to live with – the loss of my father on December 14th 2025. He was a Jewish man, attending a Chanukah festival.
18. After the Bondi attack I saw a significant amount of rhetoric attempting to downplay or reframe what occurred, include widespread claims that the attack was not antisemitic. I saw people trying to excuse and justify the events as only ‘anti-Zionist’. Misinformation spreads quickly online, driven by influencers and commentators with agendas, presenting distortions as fact and embedding a growing acceptance of narratives that excuse, minimise and even promote violence against Jewish people.
19. What I have experienced together with my community, and what happened at Bondi, should not be possible or accepted in a country like Australia. The fabric of social cohesion depends on a community’s basic right to live openly and safely. Antisemitism has always existed, but I believe there was a clear shift after the Opera House protests on 9 October 2023. From that point, it felt as though antisemitism was being allowed to come into the open in a way that was completely unprecedented. The threshold for what is considered acceptable in public discourse and behaviour towards Jewish people has shifted in a way that is deeply alarming. Antisemitism is no longer abstract or historical. It is present, visible and increasingly bold in everyday Australian life. I know this viscerally.

Combatting antisemitism and the Commission’s work

20. Addressing antisemitism in Australia requires a serious, thoughtful and preventative approach. Reactive, piecemeal measures will not achieve the outcomes we need.
21. First, there must be a strong focus on education. Education around antisemitism, Jewish identity, and the real-world consequences of hatred should be embedded early before hateful attitudes are formed and normalised. This should include building critical thinking skills so that students are better equipped to assess information, question sources and recognise misinformation.

22. Secondly, there must also be a serious examination of how extremist views and narratives have been able to take hold, including analysing the role of social media, online influencers and informal information channels that are shaping public opinion. The speed and scale at which misinformation spreads requires a coordinated response that goes beyond surface-level interventions. I want to be clear that I am not calling for the silencing of legitimate views, opinions or alternative political positions. Open debate and discussion are critical in a free society. But language that glorifies hatred, excuses violence or encourages harm against any community is another matter entirely.
23. There must be a broader commitment to reinforcing shared national values. Views that promote hatred, division or violence against any group are fundamentally at odds with what Australia stands for. Allowing these attitudes to take hold, whether through inaction or insufficient response, has real and lasting consequences.
24. Thirdly, there also needs to be recognition of the impact on freedom of movement within Australia. Many Jewish Australians are actively avoiding certain venues, public spaces and suburbs out of fear for their physical safety. This is a lived, daily reality for those who are visibly identifiable as Jewish. No Australian should feel unable to safely access parts of their own country.
25. I believe that any reforms must be underpinned by data that assists in understanding how an environment of permissive antisemitism and extremism has developed, and the development of meaningful, long-term strategies to address it at its root.
26. I urge the Commission to recognise the cumulative impact of the experiences I have detailed in developing its recommendations. Taken together they illustrate a pervasive climate in which freedom of movement and participation in public life have become restricted, and Jews no longer experience the basic sense of safety that all Australians should expect.

Reflections on the Jewish spirit

27. I think about our history. The attack at Bondi happened on the first night of Chanukah, a festival which tells the story of Jews being told they could stay only if they abandoned who they were. A small group refused. They fought not only for land but for identity and faith. And when they won they didn't celebrate with power. They lit a flame – a small, unwavering light in a desecrated space. That is our story: we answer darkness with light.

CONTINUED STATEMENT OF: Sheina Gutnick

We light menorahs at home and put them in our windows and doorframes so that the light shines outwards into the world.

28. Our message now is the same: our identity does not bend to outside pressure. We are guided by the Torah, our moral and eternal guide for life.
29. I am deeply grateful to the many Australians of all backgrounds and faiths who have stood beside our community with compassion and decency, not only in the aftermath of Bondi but always. We are proud Australians. This is our home.

Signed:  _____

Date: 01/05/2026 _____