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Sent: Thursday, 26 June 2025 11:02 AM
To: PRL Independent Review Secretariat
Subject: Submission to the Independent Review of Criminal Law Protections Against the Incitement of Hatred in NSW

Categories: Protections Submissions

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Submitted by: Carmen Lazar OAM, JP

Position: Program Director & Consortium Leader - Assyrian Resource Centre – Assyrian Australian Association

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this important review. As the Director of the Assyrian Resource Centre and a long-standing advocate for multicultural and refugee communities, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating impact that hate speech, incitement of hatred, and racial or religious vilification can have on individuals and community harmony.

The Assyrian community in NSW, many of whom have arrived as refugees fleeing ethnic and religious persecution, continue to face discrimination, targeted abuse, and hate-fuelled rhetoric in their everyday lives. This submission is informed by my experience working with these communities over the past two decades.

1. Adequacy of Current Criminal Laws

The current criminal laws in NSW provide limited recourse for communities that are repeatedly subjected to public acts of incitement. Many forms of hate speech remain unaddressed due to the high legal thresholds, lack of proactive enforcement, and underreporting due to fear, language barriers, or mistrust of authorities. Recommendation: The legislation must be strengthened to clearly define and criminalise incitement to hatred, serious contempt, or severe ridicule on the basis of race, religion, language, ethnicity, or refugee status.

2. Community Vulnerability and Impact

Communities like ours particularly Assyrian, Chaldean, Yazidi, and other Middle Eastern Christian minorities continue to be targeted through misinformation, dehumanising language, and social media abuse. These attacks are not only traumatic but retraumatise individuals who have fled persecution abroad.

Case Example: We have assisted clients who were victims of hate-motivated vandalism, threats, and social media campaigns that went unpunished under existing laws.

3. Online and Social Media Hate Speech

The law must evolve to address modern forms of communication. Incitement is no longer confined to public rallies or print publications it is often propagated quickly and widely via online platforms. Many of our community members report encountering hate speech online, yet existing mechanisms provide little accountability.

Recommendation: Strengthen legal mechanisms to include online incitement and hold individuals and platforms accountable, with a clear pathway for reporting and redress.

4. Need for Clear Definitions and Consistent Enforcement

There is a need for consistency in defining what constitutes incitement, hate speech, and vilification under the law. Additionally, front-line police and legal staff should receive cultural competency training to recognise and appropriately respond to hate crimes and speech.

5. Supporting Victims and Communities

Victims of hate speech and incitement often suffer in silence. They require more than legal remedies they need culturally appropriate support services, community education, and reassurance that they will be protected.

Conclusion

NSW must lead the way in strengthening protections against the incitement of hatred. This is not about limiting freedom of speech it is about protecting freedom to live in safety and dignity. I urge the review to recommend stronger legal protections, better enforcement, and support for those affected by hate speech.

Thank you for considering this submission. I am available for further consultation if required.

Carmen Lazar OAM, JP

Program Director & Consortium Leader

Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS)

Approved Proposing Organisation (Community Support Program)

Multicultural Mens Project

Civic and Citizen Education

Work Development Order (WDO)

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I pay my respect and acknowledge the Cabrogal people as the traditional owners of the land which I work & live on