

CALL FOR BANNING SWASTIKA IN AUSTRALIA

The Jewish Holocaust Centre supports the call for a ban on swastikas in Australia. This symbol represents hate and mass murder. Displaying the swastika communicates hate - hatred of Jews, hatred of homosexuals, hatred of people with disabilities, hatred of Sinti-Roma, hatred of people who are different to the Nazi Aryan ideal.

But it also goes beyond hate to advocating for the elimination of such people, and we saw in World War 2 that this ended with the most heinous invention: killing factories where people, mostly Jews, were murdered at an industrial scale. Over 3 million individuals were murdered in death camps, mostly during an intensive 18-month period.

Sue Hampel, co-President of the Jewish Holocaust Centre states, “The fact is that the Swastika represents industrialised mass murder of people considered subhuman. It symbolised it 90 years ago, and it still symbolises it today. We must not forget that Australian soldiers fought and lost lives to defeat Nazism, and our soldiers were horrified when confronted with the extent of the brutality at camps like Bergen-Belsen in Germany.”

Museum Director, Jayne Josem, says, “At the Jewish Holocaust Centre we educate against hate, every day. We celebrate and promote an inclusive, multi-cultural Australia, and our museum shows the dangers of allowing intolerance and prejudice to proliferate. It shows how hateful words and propaganda against groups in society can end in discrimination, dehumanisation and ultimately mass murder. We teach that regardless of colour or creed, every human deserves respect.”

Inside the museum at the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Elsternwick there are very few swastikas on display. Why? Because the swastika is deeply offensive to our Holocaust survivors who come each day and speak to students about their experiences. This symbol reminds them of the power the Nazis had to take their family members away, to strip them of their dignity and to murder their parents, siblings and friends. It reminds them of a time when no laws could protect them from this massive crime. And it reminds them of a time when seemingly no-one stood up for them.

Banning the swastika will be an important gesture demonstrating that our government finds it abhorrent in 2020 in Australia to see such vile symbols. We know that both sides of politics finds the sight of swastikas and the rise of antisemitism deeply disturbing. Banning the swastika will not solve antisemitism, but it will curb its visibility and it is this visibility which has the potential to encourage antisemitism among people who would otherwise not consider it.

Education is the answer to the antisemitism problem today because hatred of others, whether Jews, Muslims, homosexuals or other groups being targeted in 2020, is mostly a result of ignorance. It has been said that ‘ignorance leads to fear, fear leads to hatred and hatred leads to violence’ (Ibn Rushd). We need to educate to overcome the ignorance and the fear of the other, we need to educate to make the public understand just what it is about the swastika that is so abhorrent in our multi-cultural and diverse Australian society in 2020.

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