

# Foreword



**By Sir Peter Gluckman ONZ KNZM**

For 2000 years, Jews have suffered from stereotyping, stigmatisation, ghettoisation and persecution. The origins of classical antisemitism lie in religious doctrine highlighted by examples such as the 12th Century York massacre and the Spanish and Portuguese inquisitions of the 15-17th Centuries. Then in the 19th Century, antisemitism took a nationalistic and racial turn highlighted by the Dreyfus affair, then by Nazi ideology and the ultimate tragedy of the Holocaust. This antisemitism has re-emerged as these incompletely eradicated memes and Holocaust denial become conflated with conspiracy theories and alternative-right politics. And an even more recent trend has been the global emergence of left-wing associated antisemitism with its own internal paradoxes – for this group, for whom most forms of discrimination are unacceptable, antisemitism does not appear to count.

Recent history tells us that whenever societal cohesion breaks down or is at risk, or whenever an autocracy emerges, or a society wishes to assign blame, antisemitic attitudes, memes and actions soon surface.

Jews first arrived in New Zealand in the 1830s. The first Jewish rituals and celebrations and funerals were held within a year of Te Tiriti being signed. Jewish immigration grew first with the arrival of traders to serve the goldfields in the 19th century, then as pogroms occurred in central Europe at the beginning of the 20th Century when three of my grandparents arrived, and then again in the period before and after the Second World War.

Overt acts of antisemitism have been largely absent in New Zealand, but not entirely. Particularly around the Second World War, Jews suffered many difficulties, migration from Europe was inhibited, those who arrived here suffered from professional exclusion, Jews already here with European names were not trusted, my father in Dunedin had all his letters from his parents in Hamilton opened by censors. These are stories not well told or acknowledged. For decades Jews have had to worship and their children learn under tight security.

Jews have always been a minute component of New Zealand society – there are well less than 10,000 in Aotearoa with most living in Auckland and Wellington. With exceptions, they are not overtly different in dress or habits (other than dietary) from most other New Zealanders. So, do antisemitic attitudes still linger in a significant number of New Zealanders or not? Is the reported increase in antisemitic incidents an artifact of more reporting, is it a result of continuing ignorance, or of increasing fear and anger, or does it bear some relationship to broader and deeper attitudes within a minority of New Zealanders?

In this context, this survey is a valuable contribution. Supported by a grant from the Ministry of Ethnic Communities, it applies globally accepted survey questions to explore what New Zealanders think of Jews living in New Zealand. It explores the different types of antisemitism by applying methodologies used in comparable studies overseas. It explores the rapidly emergent phenomenon of left-wing antisemitism and the conflation of such attitudes with Zionophobia and an unwillingness to look at Jews independent of Israel. No-one would deny the need for the issues between Israel and

Palestine to be resolved in a humane and sustainable manner. But as international scholars have shown, anti-Israel rhetoric has become a convenient cover for deeper antisemitic views. All three monotheistic religions have an attachment to Jerusalem. The oldest of these, by several thousand years, is Judaism. Currently there is a trend towards denying this ancient attachment. Such denial reinforces Jews' sense that wherever they live they carry a stigma and blame that cannot be erased.

New Zealand should be proud of how it has struggled to address many forms of discrimination but this survey suggests that our society cannot be complacent. We face difficult years ahead: the long-term consequences of the pandemic, the growing realisation of the broad impacts of climate change, the unresolved issues of how New Zealand will construct itself as a multicultural society while being respectful of and embedding its bicultural origins, and the challenges of new technology, of growing inequality and geostrategic instability.

In such contexts the risks to social cohesion could grow. Fear, anger and affective polarisation are all possibilities that lie ahead and history suggests that antisemitic attitudes and events will increase. That has been the case in Europe and North America. And conspiracy theories are spilling all over the internet.

In this context, despite the limitations of any attitudinal surveys, there are sobering lessons in this report. Some of the responses may be put down to simple ignorance – given the small number of Jews within New Zealand society – but a study of individual survey questions suggest deeper and concerning attitudes may still exist.

Even if we exclude questions with any link to Israel, only 59% of respondents expressed a positive view of Jews and 13% reported a broadly negative view of Jews. Given the question “Jews don't care what happens to anyone but their own kind” only 52% disagreed with that proposition, 13% directly agreed with it and the remainder (some 35%) claimed they don't know. Is that genuine ignorance or is it a convenient way to avoid an answer that they might otherwise have given?

Jewish people have integrated into every domain of New Zealand life – from sport to politics. They are proud to contribute to the ongoing development of a healthy and cohesive society. But at the same time, they are proud of their identity. It is their intergenerational memory that has allowed them to survive much ugliness, but that leaves them aware that when times get tough, the antisemitic virus soon spreads. This report reminds us that we must all work hard to avoid that.

Community leaders need to be encouraged to call out antisemitism, wherever it occurs. When our leaders are silent, the silence can be interpreted as consent. The damage done from silence cannot be overestimated. Speaking out is part of what it means to be a leader in a civil society. We should not forget Edmund Burke who said “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good [people] to do nothing.”

The outcomes of this survey also demonstrates a powerful need for education about the Holocaust. Understanding what happened in the lead up to the Holocaust, and then what followed, has a vital role to play in protecting democracy in Aotearoa. As a subject, it is part of world history.