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Australia's leaders condemn 'abhorrent' scenes after anti-Jewish chants filmed at Sydney rally

Anthony Albanese says images from the rally were 'horrific' and featured 'slogans which are antisemitic and just appalling'

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Australia's prime minister, Anthony Albanese and the foreign affairs minister, Penny Wong, have condemned pro-Palestine protesters who were filmed chanting anti-Jewish sentiments in Sydney.

Wong said there was "no place for antisemitism in our society" as questions were raised over why the rally on Monday night was allowed to occur and if Jewish people were safe in the city.

Chants heard at the rally included '████ the Jews" and '████ Israel".

On Monday evening, pro-Palestine protesters marched from Sydney Town Hall to the Sydney Opera House, which was lit up in white and blue in solidarity with Israel. Parliament House in Canberra was also lit up in the colours of Israel's flag.

"I think we should all be concerned," Wong told ABC Radio National on Tuesday.

"There is no place in Australia for antisemitism or prejudice or hatred of any kind and we should all stand firm against the sort of antisemitic language that unfortunately some engaged [in] - just as we should stand firm against all prejudice.

"It goes to who we are as a country and it goes to one of our greatest strengths, which is our diversity but our unity around values."

Albanese told Sky News the images from the rally were "horrific", featuring "slogans which are antisemitic and just appalling, with no place".

"I did say that demonstration shouldn't have gone ahead and I stand by that."

NSW premier Chris Minns said the police's decision to allow the protest was "operational".

NSW police have launched an investigation and the premier warned anyone caught taking part in "racial vilification or incitement of hatred or incitement of violence" would be charged. He described the scenes at the Opera House as "abhorrent".

"To have some people celebrate atrocious indiscriminate killing and kidnapping in Israel is appalling," he said.

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"This is the opposite of the dynamic multicultural community we want in NSW and Australia. Racial epithets were thrown at the Jewish community by the mere fact that they were members of the Jewish community which is shocking and abusive and potentially a crime."

Minns said it was important that members of Sydney's Jewish community could safely meet and mourn.

The premier on Tuesday morning was yet to be briefed if any NSW residents had been caught in the violence in the Middle East.

Israel has promised a "complete siege" of Gaza, cutting off water, food and power supplies after Hamas militants abducted more than 100 people during a surprise multi-front attack. Israeli media said on Monday the death toll from the Hamas attacks had climbed to 900.

In response to the attacks, Israel has launched strikes from the air and sea, which medics said had killed more than 680 Palestinians in Gaza, an area home to 2.3 million people with nowhere to flee.

Hamas threatened to start killing Israeli civilian hostages if the bombing of civilian areas in the enclave occurred without prior warning.

When asked whether Palestinians had been suffering under Israel's occupation for decades, Wong said: "We know this is a region of the world where there has been longstanding dispute, longstanding suffering, violence on all sides. Nothing justifies what we have seen Hamas engage in."

After the rally in Sydney, the federal opposition's home affairs spokesperson, James Paterson, said it was "shocking to see these scenes in an Australian city".

"We have a serious problem if Australians think this is an appropriate way to behave," he wrote on X.

The independent MP for Wentworth, Allegra Spender, wrote on social media: "The scenes and chanting outside the Opera House last night are abhorrent. At a time when there should be solidarity with our Jewish community, they have been subject to appalling abuse."



Flares were lit during the pro-Palestine rally outside the Sydney Opera House on Monday night. Photograph: Dean Lewins/AAP

Zionist Federation of Australia president Jeremy Leibler asked about why the protest was allowed to go ahead and why "the only person arrested was someone carrying an Israeli flag".

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"It is appalling that at a time when Hamas is murdering Jews on the streets of Israel, the streets of Australia have been deemed unsafe for Jews," he said on Tuesday.

Police confirmed one man with an Israeli flag was arrested and moved on but said it was for "his safety". Minns said that was "regrettable, obviously".

"We will create a situation in NSW, as I've said repeatedly, where the Jewish community can come together in their own city," he said.

Rally co-organiser and speaker Fahad Ali claimed on Tuesday that NSW police failed to help shut down a "minority" of people shouting antisemitic chants.

"I intervened to shut down antisemitic chants from a group of idiots who were in the minority," he posted on Twitter. "Police told me to my face that they would not assist."

Ali said the behaviour of that minority was "not only vulgar but completely selfish".

"It has served as a distraction from the immense human suffering in Gaza and calls for genocide and collective punishment by Israeli officials."

Fellow organiser Amal Naser said the young men taking part in the antisemitic chants were not part of the main group and had joined at the Opera House.

She tried to get police to move them on but "they put the onus on us to disperse them".

"The police are there to help us create a peaceful rally and to help us coordinate [but] we were asked to disperse them ourselves, which is absolutely ridiculous," she said.

She added: "We absolutely condemn any form of antisemitism and it's not associated to our movement. Our movement is an anti-racist and anti-colonial movement."

Earlier, Albanese said the government had provided political support to Israel, but poured cold water on the Coalition's call to volunteer to join a coalition of like-minded nations in the event that Israel needs military support to deal with the fallout of attacks from and in Gaza.

"Well there's no suggestion that that is what's envisaged," Albanese told FiveAA radio.

Albanese recognised the Middle East was "complex" and acknowledged the "ongoing suffering of Palestinians" and "hardship because of the conflict, on Israeli citizens".

"This does not provide any solution - it just provides for the murder of innocent civilians," Albanese said. "That does nothing to advance a political cause."

Asked whether Australia should be more forthright in offering aid to Israel, Wong said: "Mr Dutton always wants to find a political difference, doesn't he? What I would say is I've spoken, unlike him, to the foreign minister of Israel - there has been no such request."

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