

## **Christians and Jews warn democracy and its values under threat**

Australian Council of Christians and Jews

*Tuesday 23 September 2014*

The Australian Council of Christians and Jews (ACCJ), the oldest established interfaith organisation in Australia, says that despite the real possibility of a return to the state of fear that led to the Cronulla riots, legislators should not consider even the possibility of torture in response.

ACCJ President William Szekely said lessons learned in religious dialogue were now important in guiding the whole community.

“The climate of fear and anger prior to the Cronulla riots has returned,” Mr Szekely said.

“There is a growing fear of attack in the Jewish community. Muslim communities are also now concerned they will be targets of discrimination and victimisation and we have already seen the vandalism of Muslim property. Christians too are concerned at being targets of abuse by alleged supporters of ISIL.

“We reject the tactics of those who seem to be prepared to use violence to reflect overseas terror or to exact retribution on innocent members of different communities,” he said.

But Mr Szekely also warned that even the possibility of torture being sanctioned in forthcoming federal anti-terror legislation must be opposed.

“The ACCJ rejects even possibility of torture in proposed anti-terror legislation as alien to the Australian way of life,” Mr Szekely said.

“We believe that the lessons we have learned in dialogue between Jews and Christians and the teachings of all religions, can be of assistance to the community at large.

“We encourage all people of faith in Australia to work together to ensure that the peace and enjoyment of our Australian freedoms is collectively preserved.

“As we approach Jewish New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*, Sept 24), The Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*, Oct 4), and the Muslim New Year (*Al Hijira* 15 October), the ACCJ calls on all believers ‘of the Book’ to recall our collective mores and precepts of love, harmony, peace and brotherhood and continue to act according to these precepts towards one another and to all around us.”

“We call on every individual in every church, synagogue and mosque to reflect honestly, and act courageously and assert that Australia remains an open society and not one shackled by anger, fear or oppressive legislation.”

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