

19 August 2009

Mr John Searle
President
Jewish Community Council of Victoria

Dear John

There is an all too uncomfortable, somewhat sinister, undercurrent of intolerance of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people within certain sections of the Australian Jewish community. This has been evidenced by individuals and organisations publishing hateful and vilifying material against GLBT people on local web sites and in letters to the Australian Jewish News in recent weeks and at various stages over the last decade.

Events in Israel over recent years (Jerusalem World Pride attack 2006 and Tel Aviv GLBT Community Centre attack 2009) have brought home just how vulnerable GLBT people are and the easy targets they make. Whilst such events may not necessarily be hate crimes targeted at GLBT people, it is not a far stretch to see how such an outcome could eventuate.

It is incumbent on the leaders of the Jewish community at all levels to counter this intolerance, both real and perceived, distance itself from it and supplant it with a coordinated, on-going nation-wide anti-homophobia/transphobia strategy. This strategy will have three aims initially: 1) educate the Australian Jewish community about GLBT people and culture in a positive light; 2) identify and remove the language of hate and intolerance targeting GLBT people; 3) promote positive Jewish GLBT role models into the core fabric of the community. The Jewish community will have the full support of all Jewish GLBT organisations in Australia, along with organisations from and supporting the wider GLBT community, in setting up and implementing the strategy.

The ramifications of neglecting to achieve any one part of this in a timely and effective fashion are such that there will be further alienation and suffering (including depression, rejection by family and suicide) of GLBT individuals within the community and that GLBT individuals and organisations will continue to be the targets of hatred and intolerance from within the community.

For millenia the Jewish people have been the targets of hate and know all too painfully what the outcome of such hatred is. On August 14 2009 Laurance Splitter wrote the following:

"There is a particular poignancy to attacks from so-called religious Jews on gays. That whacko who referred to the "dreck" now living in Israel - specifically Israeli gays, lesbians, and anyone else who does not live according to his interpretation of God's will - might be reminded that it was just such a categorization (labelling fellow human beings as non persons) which allowed the Nazis and their many sympathisers to murder both Jews and homosexuals. I hold no hope for him or his peers, but we must continue to push for an education system which discourages young people from resorting to this kind of deadly categorization."

This needs no explanation. I am more optimistic than Laurance however, and I seek your assistance to prove him wrong.

I look forward to a positive response and cooperative outcome from the Jewish community. I hope that together we can bring this to life.

Sincerely,

Michael Barnett
Aleph Melbourne