

Media Release

AUSTRALIAN HATE CRIME NETWORK

Working to improve understanding, reduce incidence and minimise the impact of hate crime and hate incidents in Australia.

Thursday 23 April 2020

COVID-19 and Hate Crime in Australia

The Australian Hate Crime Network (AHCN) has called for greater vigilance in countering racism and other forms of bigotry that is erupting amidst the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Co-Convenor, Professor Gail Mason, said that 'There are signs of a recent surge in racist incidents against Asian Australians and international students. These incidents appear to be triggered by racist assumptions that people from China or those who "look Asian" are to be blame for the COVID-19 pandemic.'

Both the Australian Asian Alliance and the Australian Human Rights Commission have received reports of physical and verbal abuse of this nature - in the streets, shops, public transport and elsewhere. In addition, there are incidents of racist graffiti and vandalism of the homes of Asian-Australians.

The AHCN commends Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese and the Queensland Police for condemning and identifying racist incidents against Asian Australians that are related to the virus.

Co-Convenor, Professor Gail Mason, said 'We need more of these public statements from police leaders condemning the abhorrent nature of these racist attacks'.

The AHCN has found that the problem of prejudice-motivated abuse related to COVID-19 extends beyond the Asian community to other targets of prejudice and bigotry, such as Jewish, Muslim, disabled and LGBTI communities.

Members of the AHCN have been documenting the many other forms of online virus-related abuse, including antisemitism. Australian racists online have been sharing various images of Jews as the coronavirus, as well as accusing 'the Jews' of creating and spreading COVID-19, and of wishing that all Jews die from the virus.

Our Muslim members have noted reports that since March 28, tweets with the hashtag #CoronaJihad have appeared nearly 300,000 times and potentially seen by 165 million people on Twitter, according to data shared with TIME by Equality Labs, a digital human rights group.

Associate Professor Nicole Asquith, Secretary of the AHCN said:

'it is concerning that some conservative religious leaders in the US and elsewhere are linking the virus to LGBTIQ people and attributing the virus to God's wrath for the concessions meted out by way of same-sex marriage.

While reports demonstrate horrendous incidents of anti-Asian racism in Australia since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AHCN notes that it is not possible to state with certainty whether there has been an increase in incidents due to the lack of comprehensive or consistent data collection systems in Australia.

While some state police forces do collect data on hate crime, most do not.

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Co-Convenor, Professor Gail Mason, stated that

‘This lack of consistent, official and centralised data on hate crime was identified more than a year ago after the Christchurch massacre. We would like to hear from law enforcement agencies around the country about what progress has been made to monitor and track hate crime since then. We need a national data base for hate-motivated crime.’

The Australian Hate Crime Network (AHCN) is a partnership comprised of academics, community representatives and government organisations. It is dedicated to developing priorities and outcomes that address and prevent hate crime and hate incidents in Australia. The AHCN advocates for improvement in data collection, law enforcement and criminal justice responses to hate crime.

Clarification: The AHCN notes that the contents of this media release represent the views of non-government and academic members of the AHCN. It does not represent the views of representatives of any government agency or department associated with the AHCN.

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