Te Kāhui Tika Tangata
Human Rights Commission

International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2026 speech
Dr Melissa Derby, Race Relations Commissioner

Tēnā koutou, heartfelt greetings, Shalom,

I am sorry I cannot be there with you in person to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day, this year marking the 81st anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Thank you, though, for the opportunity to share a few words.

I'd like to acknowledge the Holocaust survivors and their descendants here today, along with members of our Jewish community, representatives of synagogues and community centres, particularly the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand, members of parliament, members of the diplomatic corps, central and local government representatives, community leaders and sponsors, and distinguished guests.

Over the years, I have visited numerous Holocaust sites and museums, including Auschwitz-Birkenau, all of which serve as a devastating reminder of the consequences of what can unfold when human rights are not upheld, and antisemitism, racism, hatred, and indifference are left unchecked.

Last month, while in Berlin, I visited sites that reminded me again of the horrors of the Holocaust. A week after my return to New Zealand, the terror attack occurred in Bondi. Antisemitism is *not* something that is confined to our past, which we remember with sympathy and sorrow once a year. Rather, it is, unfortunately, alive and well, and on the rise.

I have been in the role of Race Relations Commissioner a little over a year, and during that time, I have been informed of increasingly hostile instances of antisemitism. I have seen international conflict used by some as a front for antisemitism. I have heard terminology weaponised against Jewish people who simply want to exercise their right to self-determination, with their own state.

Holocaust Remembrance Day brings us together to remember the Holocaust, its victims and its survivors, and what led to it in the first place. However, we must also remember that commemoration should not be confined to dates on a calendar. Instead, each day, we must ensure that nobody, ever again, experiences what the Jewish people, and other communities, went through in the Holocaust.

We must follow our words with actions. In response to increasing tensions and hostility towards some communities in New Zealand because of various international conflicts, including our Jewish community, next month I will be releasing social cohesion guidelines for schools and workplaces, which address the impacts of international conflicts domestically. The guidelines encourage us to treat one another with respect, remind us that we are entitled to hold different opinions without prejudice, and reinforce that no community in New Zealand is responsible for the actions of overseas states or actors. It

is my hope that these guidelines will go some way to reducing antisemitism and other forms of prejudice in New Zealand and instead encourage harmonious relations.

I have been heartened by other initiatives that promote peace and understanding, like the Harmony Accord, and of course the work of the Holocaust Centre in Holocaust education. Congratulations on your new resources and initiatives that seek to bridge the generations by educating tomorrow's generation about the Holocaust, its legacy, and remind us how fragile humanity is and how we must do our very best to look after each other.

Education, civic leadership, and principled clarity are our strongest tools to counter antisemitism – the world's oldest hatred, which is growing again here and across the world. This is a warning to us all, and I encourage everyone in our country to stand for the same rights, protections, and freedom from hatred and persecution for others that they would like for themselves.

"Never again" must mean exactly that and it must apply *now*. As I have said consistently since I took on this role, we are fortunate to live in a country like New Zealand, where we enjoy freedoms and rights that are unprecedented throughout history *and* that few countries experience today. In the face of antisemitism and hatred, we must not only remember the lessons of yesterday, but we must also act today, recognising prejudice, resisting hate, and upholding the values inherent in the Golden Rule of treating others as we ourselves would like to be treated.

Zekher tzadik livrakha: May their memory be a blessing.