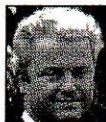


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Wilders visit stirs unease

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THE Australian visit of Netherlands MP Geert Wilders (pictured), who is campaigning for curbs on Muslim immigration, has triggered calls of support for multiculturalism by Jewish groups, although not everyone in the Jewish community supports the leadership's stance.



Wilders' message that Islam and democracy are incompatible, with his claim that the massive influx of Muslim immigrants to Europe has proven this, exposed rumblings of disunity in Australia.

The Jewish leadership's message was clear: Wilders' contentions are flawed and threaten social cohesion.

Wilders was in the crosshairs of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), which issued a statement endorsed by state Jewish councils and the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission (ADC).

The statement insisted "inciting hatred and animosity towards specific cultural or faith-based communities has no place in Australia. All Australians have a right to practise their faith and observe their cultural traditions and languages in accordance with the law and free from discrimination or vilification."

The Jewish Christian Muslim Association (JCMA) feared Wilders' views would "introduce overseas hatreds into the local community. These hatreds have no place in Australia. Australia is proud of its multicultural society, wherein people from over 150 countries and many faiths live together in harmony."

A JCMA spokesperson told *The AJN* that a proposal to issue a private invitation to Wilders to meet with its members was not carried out because the Islamic Council of Victoria, a JCMA constituent body, was unhappy about it, and the JCMA instead issued only a public invitation in a press release. Wilders' tour organisers did not respond to the invitation.

But there apparently is no homogeneous view of Wilders across the community, reflected in letters from *AJN* readers.

Citing next month's Islamic Peace Conference in Melbourne – to be addressed by Saudi cleric Sheikh Abdul Rahman al-Sudais, who has called Jews "the scum of the earth" and "monkeys and pigs" – Mark Stone panned Jewish leaders for "double standards, hypocrisy and lack of consideration of all community views".

Michael Burd of Toorak stated: "Wilders' message was nothing that those who follow world affairs didn't already know about issues facing Europe regarding Muslim integration ... It is bitterly disappointing that our Jewish community leadership has decided to snub our only friend in Europe, I believe a naive and misguided attitude."

Meanwhile, the ADC slammed comments by journalist Chip Le Grand in *The Australian*, claiming "a disproportionate number of Jews" was in the audience of a Wilders rally in Melbourne last week.

ADC chair Dr Dvir Abramovich reflected: "It's hard to understand how Le Grand possibly arrived at this conclusion. Did he count participants as they walked in, and then tick off the Jews among them?"

"If so, how exactly did he identify the Jewish members of the audience? Does he believe that there is a Jewish physical stereotype?"