

RACISM & ISLAMOPHOBIA AT THE OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF NEW ZEALAND

2 APRIL 2025

AT THE TIME OF THE SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CHRISTCHURCH TERROR ATTACK, THE CHIEF HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONER CLAIMS THAT THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IS THE BIGGEST THREAT TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN NZ

FIANZ, the national umbrella Muslim organisation is profoundly disappointed that Stephen Rainbow, the Chief Human Rights Commissioner, has resorted to racist and Islamophobic statements in his official capacity as the head of the Human Rights Commission of NZ. Whilst everyone has a right to express their personal views in a democracy, it is a totally different matter when he uses his office to express such unfounded, vile and prejudiced statements to senior leaders of the Jewish community. Dr Stephen Rainbow has seriously devalued and denigrated the Office of the Chief Human Rights Commission and this should be an alarming warning bell for human rights in this country.

What is even worse, is that he tried to justify his statements by claiming that his views were based on the recent NZSIS Threat Assessment Report. In response, Andrew Hampton, Director General of NZSIS in an email to FIANZ stated “it is concerning the Service’s threat assessment is being misrepresented in such a way.” In fact, the Report clearly stated “this report does not single out any ethnic community as a threat to our country, and to do so would be a misinterpretation of the analysis.” FIANZ notes that it is most unprofessional for the head of the NZ Human Rights organisation to trample on the integrity and basic human rights of a whole faith community without even bothering to check with the NZSIS before making such unsupported statements.

Since then Abdur Razzaq, Chair of the FIANZ Royal Commission and Advocacy Team, in a meeting with Dr Stephen Rainbow initiated by Andrew Kibblewhite, Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, sought an explanation. At the meeting Dr Rainbow apologised and this was followed up with a brief email apology. Dr Rainbow's only explanation was that his statements were in the context of a "robust conversation" with a senior leader of the Jewish community. For us this is not an explanation, but an admission that Dr Rainbow has deep held Islamophobic views and he expressed them with no thought of how such views impact on a community which is already suffering from the massacre of 51 Muslims in Christchurch. Dr Rainbow, in one statement showed he was heartless and deliberately ignored the trauma of the terror tragedy of 15 March being endured by the shuhada families, the bullet wounded and the wider community. In such a context, an email with a one word "apology" is actually an insult.

Dr Rainbow's further prejudiced and racist views included statements that the Afghan refugees in West Auckland are 'antisemitic'. It is ironic that the New Zealand Government has granted 200 visas to human rights defenders - four of them female Afghan judges and others who were supporting NZ forces in Afghanistan and risking their lives in the process. Dr Rainbow should be held accountable for bringing the Office of the Human Rights Commission to such a shameful and low level of credibility.

What is most reprehensible is that at a time when the Prime Minister is taking a prominent lead to ensure peace and cohesion between the various faith and ethnic communities in NZ against the backdrop of global conflicts, Dr Stephen Rainbow is misusing his position as the Chief Human Rights Commissioner to sabotage the pathway to social cohesion with his racist statements.

We expect David Seymour, who had nominated Stephen Rainbow, and Paul Goldsmith who appointed him unilaterally, and in the process rejected the advice of the independent and merit-based selection committee which included Sir Terence Arnold (chair), Hon Chris Finlayson KC, Paul Rishworth KC and Lorraine Toki - to learn a hard lesson. Stephen Rainbow was rejected twice by the independent panel, and both times the Minister ignored the independent panel. They talk about selection on merit but when it came to the appointment of Stephen Rainbow they ignored the merit-based assessment of the independent panel twice. The dividend for such hypocrisy has been the appointment of a prejudiced Islamophobe and the denigration of the Office of the Human Rights Commission.

We await to see what steps the Justice Minister and Prime Minister will take on this urgent matter regarding the integrity and reputation of the Human Rights Commission.

Abdur Razzaq
Chairperson,
FIANZ Royal Commission and Advocacy
Fianz.advocacy@gmail.com
2 April, 2025

Relevant Emails 1

Email from Philippa Yasbek to FIANZ :
Making us aware of the conversation with Stephen Rainbow.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Philippa Yasbek** [REDACTED]

Date: Monday, February 24, 2025

Subject: Fwd: Follow up on our meeting

To: FIANZ Advocacy [REDACTED]

Kia ora korua

I had a meeting with Stephen Rainbow, Melissa Derby and the Human Rights Commission staff today. Stephen said that the SIS threat assessment suggests that the Jewish community in NZ is more at risk from Islamists than white supremacists. He repeatedly talked about the risks that Jews face from the Muslim community.

I sent him the email below. I'm still furious that I had to hear his bullsh*t, much less feel compelled to respond to it. How does one complain about a racist Human Rights Commissioner?

In solidarity,
Philippa

Relevant Emails 2

Email from Philippa Yasbeck to Stephen Rainbow, HRC

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Philippa Yasbek [REDACTED] >
Date: Mon, 24 Feb 2025, 17:10
Subject: Follow up on our meeting
To: Stephen Rainbow <StephenR@tikatangata.org.nz>, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Kia ora koutou

Thank you for the meeting today and the sharing of perspectives. We are very committed to dialogue between communities and the shared fight against racism.

There is one point that I wanted to follow up on. Dr Rainbow stated that the SIS threat assessment rates the risk of violence from Islamic extremism more highly than that of white supremacy. I have just checked the [DG's statement](#) last week to the Select Committee, the Five Eyes' assessment of [Young People and Violent Extremism](#) as well as the 2024 assessment of [NZ's Threat Environment](#). All of these documents acknowledge the risk of violent extremism in Aotearoa. Key points from these documents include:

- The most likely terrorist attack scenario in New Zealand is a self-radicalised lone actor, acting with little to no intelligence forewarning
- There are a small number of people who subscribe to a range of known violent extremist ideologies. Increasingly, we also see individuals whom we assess to support violence from a mixed, unstable, or unclear ideological outlook.

The threat assessment also states that "this report does not single out any ethnic community as a threat to our country, and to do so would be a misinterpretation of the analysis."

The threat assessment states: "Identity-motivated violent extremism (IMVE) **continues to be a prominent ideology within New Zealand's violent extremist environment**. It is attracting a concerning number of young people who are becoming motivated by violent extremism through what they see in IMVE spaces online.... White identity-motivated violent extremism (W-IMVE) **remains the dominant IMVE ideology in New Zealand**. Terrorist attack-related material and propaganda, including the Christchurch terrorist's manifesto and livestream footage, continue to be shared among IMVE adherents in New Zealand and abroad.

Other IMVE adherents in New Zealand express a range of views, which include anti-Semitism, anti-Rainbow communities, and various anti-Māori, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigration outlooks."

By contrast, the report states: "A **small number** of Faith-Motivated Violent Extremism (FMVE) cases are beginning to re-emerge in New Zealand, in line with trends we see globally."

Assuming that the SIS uses language around numbers in an accurate and comparable way (see my highlighting above), this suggests that the SIS see more White Identity-Motivated Violent Extremism than Faith-Motivated Violent Extremism in NZ. I am not sure how anyone could use the language in the report to suggest that there is a greater threat from Islamist terrorists in NZ than white supremacists.

Dr Rainbow's comments came across as Islamophobic to me. I suggest that he should reflect on how these types of comments may come across to groups that have suffered a history of discrimination.

Cheers,
Philippa

Relevant Emails 3

Follow-up Emails Between Philippa and Stephen Rainbow



Philippa Yasbek Mon, Feb 24, 8:33 PM

to me,

Sounds a bit like "I only share my racist views with other people who I think might share them".

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Stephen Rainbow** <StephenR@tikatangata.org.nz>

Date: Mon, 24 Feb 2025, 17:39

Subject: Re: Follow up on our meeting

To: Philippa Yasbek <[REDACTED]>

Thanks for the feedback Philippa; I'll certainly consider your information (and relook at the material I based my suggestion on, which is back in Auckland) and revise my position accordingly, if appropriate.

In the meantime I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with us, and to assure you I have only expressed the view I did in the meeting with you, given the subject we were discussing.

Nga mihi,
Stephen

From: Philippa Yasbek <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Monday, February 24, 2025 5:10:39 PM

To: Stephen Rainbow <StephenR@tikatangata.org.nz>; [REDACTED]

Subject: Follow up on our meeting



Philippa Yasbek Wed, Feb 26, 5:28 PM

to me,


And the final response from Stephen.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Stephen Rainbow** <StephenR@tikatangata.org.nz>

Date: Wed, 26 Feb 2025, 14:47

Subject: RE: Follow up on our meeting

To: Philippa Yasbek <



Shalom Philippa

I undertook to get back to you once back in Auckland and I now have in front of me the 2024 NZ SIS Security Threat Report you cite from below. In addition to the comments you report, the Report states (Exec Summary p6) that “The conflict in Gaza is being used by terrorist organisations to drive online radicalisation and recruitment. These are global trends but similar signs are beginning to appear in our environment”.

It was this commentary that formed the basis of my questioning when we met, and I would be disappointed if this were interpreted as “Islamophobic” for that was certainly not my intention.

I hope you have not succumbed to the illness you were fearing, and I look forward to our ongoing engagement.

Nga mihi

Stephen



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