



PRESS RELEASE

Sydney, 12 February 2026

Media Framing and Institutional Silence Compound Harm to Muslims Assaulted During Prayer

This week's interview on national television saw Karl Stefanovic question whether Muslims who paused to pray after a lawful Sydney protest were engaging in behaviour intended to provoke or "bait" police. Both the remarks themselves and the fact that this suggestion went unchallenged by Premier Chris Minns are deeply concerning. It reflects a broader pattern in which some communities' religious practices are recognised as ordinary expressions of faith, while others are cast as suspect or strategic.

A brief, peaceful prayer is simply an act of worship. It carries no hidden agenda. When public figures cast routine religious practice as something potentially manipulative, they reinforce long-standing prejudices and help create an atmosphere where unequal treatment of Muslim communities is more easily justified.

The Islamophobia Register Australia (Register) has lodged a formal complaint regarding Mr Stefanovic's remarks with the Nine Network and Free TV Australia. Pending the outcome of those processes, a further complaint will be lodged with the Australian Communications and Media Authority.

No acknowledgment. No apology.

Neither Premier Minns nor the New South Wales Police Force has offered a meaningful acknowledgment of harm, let alone a formal apology, to those allegedly assaulted while engaged in prayer at THE CONCLUSION OF a lawful protest in Sydney's CBD.

For communities already facing disproportionate levels of hostility and fear, the absence of accountability deepens the harm and reinforces a pattern the Register has documented for years: that Islamophobic harm is minimised, ignored, and without consequence.

Muslim women were the first targeted

Information obtained by the Register in the days since the incident - including directly from those affected - reveals that Muslim women were among the first to be targeted as police approached the group.

Approximately 20 male and female worshippers paused to perform *Maghrib*, the evening prayer, near Town Hall following the protest, when officers allegedly pushed and dragged worshippers, interrupted the prayer, and physically removed individuals from prostration. Several men and women are reported to have sustained physical injuries.

Lyeba Khan, who was at the protest provided this statement to the Register:

"I never expected NSW police to act like this, in broad daylight, in the middle of Sydney. I expected at worst some pushing and shoving, arresting the odd person as exemplary punishment, perhaps pepper spray. But until that evening, I could not imagine them trying to hurt us this badly. Afterall, they were here to protect the public, not attack them.

But after what happened on Monday, and hearing Minns and journalists justify the violence, implying the group were faking praying to bait police, that the protestors instigated things and were violent when we had been nothing but peaceful, I no longer feel safe in my own home under this government. The police and whoever was giving them orders had clearly demonised us and saw us as subhuman, to be able to treat us like this."

This scene was distressing and traumatising for many Muslims, but particularly for Muslim women who already bear the brunt of Islamophobic abuse in Australia. The Register's latest [Islamophobia in Australia Report V](#) found that Muslim women are disproportionately targeted in incidents of Islamophobia, making up 75% of all reports submitted. When law enforcement officers engage Muslim women during prayer in ways that appear aggressive or dismissive, it compounds an already fragile sense of safety.

Executive Director Dr Nora Amath said:

"The public backlash we are seeing reflects a deeper discomfort in the Australian community. People understand instinctively that interfering with peaceful worship, particularly when it involves women who already face disproportionate hate, crosses a serious line."

A crisis years in the making

Since 7 October 2023, the Register has documented a 619% increase in reported incidents of Islamophobia. Despite this staggering rise, there has been minimal sustained political focus, limited public urgency, and inadequate national coordination to address anti-Muslim hatred.



The Register has documented a rise in public harassment and intimidation of Muslims, particularly women, alongside targeted abuse of Muslim community leaders, including the attempted vehicular attack on Shaykh Wesam Charkawi, who was also present and targeted during this week's incident.

The cumulative effect is a growing sense among Australian Muslims that they are being treated as second-class citizens in their own country.

The Register calls for:

- An immediate public acknowledgment and formal apology from Premier Chris Minns and the New South Wales Police Force for the physical and emotional harm caused to Muslim worshippers injured while engaged in prayer.
- A transparent, independent review of the incident, alongside concrete, time-bound measures to address bias, improve cultural competency, and ensure the protection of religious freedom.
- Clear, unequivocal, and sustained political leadership that condemns Islamophobic hatred without qualification, contextualisation, or delay, and affirms that Australian Muslims are entitled to equal protection under the law.

Religious freedom cannot exist selectively. Public safety cannot be unevenly applied.

About the Islamophobia Register Australia

[Islamophobia Register Australia](https://www.islamophobia.com.au) is a not-for-profit organisation that has been leading the tracking and tackling of Islamophobia across Australia since its launch in 2014. It provides a secure and reliable online reporting platform that captures nation-wide data and offers first-hand support to victims of Islamophobia.

Its operating model has been commended and replicated by multiple other marginalised groups who have approached the Register to support them in the establishment of their own reporting models. This includes the First Nations Racism Register, 'Call it Out' founded by the National Justice Project and the Jumbunna Institute. The Register was also recently invited to provide evidence at the Disability Royal Commission who are looking to make formal recommendations to create a similar organisation to track and tackle disability hate.

Media Enquiries

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