

NSW government to overhaul race hate laws after Parramatta shooting

ANTHONY KLAN THE AUSTRALIAN 2:46PM October 19, 2015

Words can be “dangerous weapons” used by hate preachers and violent extremists, and the recent attack in Sydney’s Parramatta is evidence of the need to overhaul racial vilification laws, the NSW government says.

State attorney-general Gabrielle Upton said planned changes to hate laws were necessary to “disarm” hate preachers and to “safeguard our inclusive, pluralist and harmonious community”.

The NSW government has announced it plans to toughen racial vilification laws, under section 20D of the Racial Discrimination Act, and implement most of the recommendations made by a 2013 parliamentary committee into the matter.

“Recent events have reinforced the necessity of being vigilant to and guarding against the spread of racial vilification,” Ms Upton said.

“We cannot allow violent race hate speech to fan flames of division and tear our community part.”

Ms Upton said after “extensive consultation” it would release an exposure bill in January next year, and introduce legislation in the 2016 budget session.

The government has long come under pressure to bolster its race hate laws.

Since the current laws were enacted in 1989 the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board has referred 30 cases to the DPP, but it has not prosecuted one of those cases.

The laws came under the spotlight most recently after a sermon emerged in March this year of the Australian spiritual head of Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir – Ismail al-Wahwah - calling on Muslims to “rid” the world of “Jewish hidden evil”, among other slurs.

The issue was reported by NSW Jewish umbrella group the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies. Subsequently NSW anti-discrimination board president Stephan Kerkyasharian determined a “serious breach” of race-hate laws had occurred, but police and the DPP took no action, citing weakness in the law.

Two weeks ago, six ethnic and cultural groups, including key representatives of the Indian, Greek and Chinese communities, joined the NSW board of deputies in calling for the laws to be strengthened.

NSW Jewish Board of Deputies president Jeremy Spinak said the group welcomed the government’s move to tighten the laws.

“There is an important need to legislate and educate effectively against incitement to racist violence, racial harassment and intentional promotion of racial hatred,” Mr Spinak said.

In response to the claims Mr al-Wahwah had acted inappropriately in his speech uploaded in March, Hizb ut-Tahrir said the comments had been made ‘in 2004 when the army of Israel was launching a brutal war against the people of Gaza’.

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