



# **Australian Education Union - Federal Office**

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **AEU STATEMENT ON GAZA AND PEACE EDUCATION**

**Friday June 13, 2025**

As a matter of urgency, the AEU Federal Executive has unanimously adopted the below statement on peace education.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said, “The ongoing genocide has brought unspeakable trauma to the children, families and teachers of Gaza. The AEU stands in solidarity with the teachers, students and education unions of Palestine.”

“We join global calls for an immediate ceasefire and full humanitarian access to rebuild lives, communities and in particular, to rebuild schools.”

Ms Haythorpe said this conflict is also being felt in Australia’s classrooms, staff rooms, and communities, which brings a layer of complexity for the profession in how to manage issues which may arise.

“Teachers are reporting increased tension and distress among students. Our members are supporting students from Palestinian, Jewish, and other backgrounds, including refugees, who are grieving, angry, confused or afraid,” Ms Haythorpe said.

The AEU urgently calls upon all Ministers of Education and Departments of Education across the country to provide clear, consistent guidance for teachers about how to discuss global conflicts, particularly the situation in Gaza to support students, and ensure that schools remain safe, inclusive and respectful places for all.

“Right now, teachers are having to help students make sense of complex, confronting global events, often without the resources or professional guidance needed. They are trying to teach empathy, critical thinking, and civic understanding in a deeply polarised climate, where even raising these issues can attract scrutiny or backlash, from the public, from parents and from education departments,” Ms Haythorpe said.

“It is the right of teachers to educate for peace through the curriculum without fear of reprisal or employer disciplinary action. They need reassurance that they will be backed when they engage students thoughtfully in discussions about war, justice and peace.”

Today, the AEU calls on all governments to ensure that:

- Teachers have the resources, guidance and support they need to educate for peace and to engage in respectful discussions with students and colleagues, without fear of hate and discrimination.
- Teachers have a right to engage appropriately and respectfully with their colleagues about community issues, including all global conflicts and in particular, the current conflict in Gaza, and
- Teachers and other educators and all those who are enrolled in public education who are impacted by the conflict are provided with the support they need.

“Australian teachers must be given the professional trust, support, and protection they need to teach with courage, care and conscience,” Ms Haythorpe said.

Further, the AEU Federal Executive has determined that:

*The AEU condemns the Israeli Government’s acts of genocide towards Palestinians in Gaza.*

*The AEU supports the ACTU 23rd May 2025 statement on Gaza*

*A permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of the Israeli Government’s military operations in Gaza remains paramount. In such an outcome, the AEU calls on all governments and international aid agencies to urgently work together with Palestinians to restore and rebuild the necessary public infrastructure, schooling, health, housing and sustenance provisions*

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## AEU STATEMENT ON PEACE EDUCATION

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### Peace

Children and young people have the right to be educated, healthy, housed and free from cultural or economic oppression. An inclusive, equitable and comprehensive public education system is an investment in peace.

The AEU supports all children and young people in their right to be educated, including those for whom the horror of war, has denied them this right.

Further, the AEU supports the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 13(1), ratified by Australia in December 1975;

*...Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.<sup>1</sup>*

Governments must take responsibility to deliver for children and young people their right to be well educated and live a life free of violence and fear.

### Education

Peace education is both about and for peace. It is a field that requires pedagogy and curriculum that is intended to<sup>2</sup>:

- eliminate all forms of violence
- secure a culture of peace building
- develop community and individual empowerment

To be effective, peace education must acknowledge the intersections and interdependencies between global and local manifestations of violence and injustice.<sup>3</sup>

Through its longstanding commitment to both the peace movement and the rights of children and young people, the AEU has an obligation to ensure teachers have

access to resources and tools to educate about and for peace, without fear of censure or reprimand.

Effective peace education relies on teachers having the professional agency to develop and provide teaching and learning experiences which call out the violence and injustice which is at the heart of war and conflict. The agency of teachers and their professional judgement, based on their knowledge, skills, and experience, must be exercised in a way which enables teachers to make decisions and act in the context in which they work. It must be done without AEU members being confined by kneejerk political reactions or limitations on their professional rights.

The genocide in Gaza shows the critical importance of peace education and the role of educators to help students develop critical thinking skills and media literacy to counter the spread of disinformation, and to achieve communities free from conflict, with peaceful relations at the centre.

## Action

Education departments and employers must take responsibility to deliver for children and young people on their right to be educated through enacting the agreements in ICESCR, Article 13(1).

The AEU expects employers to support children and students and their teachers and educators to ensure: *the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms*<sup>1</sup>. ~ (International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, Article 13(1))

The AEU calls on the governments and Departments of Education to ensure that:

- AEU members have the resources, guidance and support they need to educate for peace and to engage in respectful discussions with students and colleagues, without fear of hate and discrimination.
- AEU members have a right to engage appropriately and respectfully with their colleagues about community issues, including all global conflicts and in particular, the current conflict in Gaza, and
- teachers and other educators and all those who are enrolled in public education who are impacted by the conflict are provided with the support they need.

The AEU supports the state and territory branches to call on employers to assert the right of union members to educate for peace through the curriculum without fear of reprisal or employer disciplinary action.

1 *Right to education*. (n.d.). Australian Human Rights Commission. Retrieved November 22, 2023, from <https://declaration.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/right-education#article%2013/>

2 Jenkins, T. (2019). Comprehensive peace education. In M. A. Peters (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of teacher education*. Springer. <https://link.springer.com/referencework/10.1007/978-981-13-1179-6>

3 *What is peace education?* (n.d.). Global Campaign for Peace Education. Retrieved November 22, 2023, from <https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/what-is-peace-education/>