



Australian Women's History Network <auswhn@gmail.com>

Teachers and School Staff for Palestine Victoria exhibit at HTAV conference

8 messages

Australian Women's History Network <auswhn@gmail.com>

18 February 2026 at 15:53



To the HTAV board, Executive Officer Deb Hull and President Elisa Litvin,

We write on behalf of the Australian Women's History Network to register our concern that the Teachers and School Staff for Palestine Victoria (TSS4P)'s application to exhibit at the HTAV conference this year has been refused.

The Australian Women's History Network promotes the study, teaching and writing of rigorous and critical history that lifts the voices of oppressed and marginalised people, and which questions dominant narratives. We are therefore deeply troubled by the HTAV's failure to recognise the important contribution that TSS4P's resources can and should make to the teaching of history in Victoria.

We note in particular the brave, accurate and important resources they have created around Palestine and ANZAC day, [Teaching for Palestine: Challenging ANZAC Day Booklet 1](#) and [Teaching for Palestine: Challenging ANZAC Day Booklet 2](#). These professional development resources have been written with and alongside academic historians, and have been publicly supported by leading military historian Peter Stanley. In a world of rising racism, misinformation and global conflict, resources that encourage students to think critically and thoughtfully about the history of Palestine are more relevant and important than ever. TSS4P should be celebrated for this thorough and challenging work, not excluded from exhibiting.

Feminists have long argued that how we interpret and tell stories of the past is inherently political, and that denying this obfuscates existing power relations. It is notable and concerning that the HTAV views TSS4P's ANZAC and Palestine material as 'too political' and yet allows the Robert Menzies Institute, funded by a Liberal-party affiliated think tank, to exhibit. This double standard is a troubling example of how the politics of power and privilege go unacknowledged and are then reproduced through the writing and teaching of history.

We hope, in the future, to have students in our university classrooms whose critical thinking capacities have benefited from the outstanding resources that TSS4P have created, and we urge you to reconsider your decision to refuse their exhibit.

Respectfully,

A/Prof Jane Carey, Dr Michelle Staff, Dr Lauren Samuelsson, Dr Geraldine Fela, Dr Cassandra Byrnes, Dr Prudence Flowers, Eli Branagh (Australian Women's History Network, National Co-Convenors).

Please note that the AWHN g-mail account is only monitored on a part-time basis.

The Australian Women's History Network is convened by Cassandra Byrnes, Jane Carey, Geraldine Fela, Lauren Samuelsson and Michelle Staff.

Email: auswhn@gmail.com | Web: www.auswhn.com.au/ | Twitter [@auswhn](https://twitter.com/auswhn)

The Network's journal is *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* www.auswhn.com.au/lilith/ | [Lilith on](#)

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The Australian Women's History Network is affiliated with the International Federation for Research in Women's History <http://www.ifrwh.com/index.html>

Australian Women's History Network <auswhn@gmail.com>

26 February 2026 at 08:21



To the HTAV Board, Executive Officer Deb Hull, and President Elisa Litvin,

We are disappointed that we have not heard from you regarding our correspondence last week. Please find attached an open letter signed by more than 100 academic historians, teachers and researchers, all of whom are deeply disturbed by the HTAV's decision to exclude Teachers and School Staff for Palestine from the upcoming HTAV VCE Conference.

Among the signatories are some of Australia's most noted historians. These include Sydney University Chair of History Professor Michael McDonnell; Humphrey McQueen; multi-award-winning Professor Clare Wright; Dr Geraldine Fela, 2025 winner of the Prime Minister's Award for Australian History; and former Principal Historian at the Australian War Memorial, Peter Stanley.

Signatories also include leading Jewish and Palestinian teachers and researchers. We are continuing to collect signatures.

Further to our letter last week, the AWHN would like to register our concern that, in the absence of the TSS4P exhibit, there will likely be no exhibits, workshops, speakers, or resources to support teachers in addressing the history of Palestine. The Australian Palestine Advocacy Network's recent report into anti-Palestinian racism in schools noted that "the capacity for teachers to engage with critical pedagogies that seek to understand power and transform relations of oppression and inequality was found to be severely limited by both a lack of knowledge about Palestine among teachers and notions of multiculturalism that exclude Palestinians." By refusing to allow the sharing of resources that centre Palestinian and Arab histories and perspectives, the HTAV's decision will further entrench this.

We, and the many historians, teachers and researchers who have signed this letter, urge you to reconsider your decision to exclude TSS4P.

Yours sincerely,
The Australian Women's History Network National Committee

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Elisa Litvin [redacted]
To: Australian Women's History Network <auswhn@gmail.com>

26 February 2026 at 08:24

Dear Australian Women's History Network National Committee,

I am currently overseas caring for my ailing father. Deb Hull has been on leave. She will reply to you as soon as possible.

Kind regards,
Elisa Litvin
[Quoted text hidden]

Australian Women's History Network <auswhn@gmail.com>
To: Elisa Litvin [redacted]

26 February 2026 at 08:41

Dear Elisa,
Thank you for your swift reply. We wish you all the best for your father and look forward to receiving the response from Deb Hull.
Best regards,
The Australian Women's History Network National Committee

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Deb Hull [redacted]
To: Australian Women's History Network <auswhn@gmail.com>

26 February 2026 at 12:58

Dear members of the Australian Women's History Network Committee,

I am sorry that there has been a delay in replying to your letter. Thank you for your kind reply to Elisa regarding the cause of this delay.

I would be happy to have an online discussion with the Committee about your concerns. You make some important points and, of course, we have given this matter a lot of thought. In this email I will try to address all the points as well as I can. Some of these can be addressed fairly briefly, but others will need to me to explain a little about how HTAV has approached similar requests and situations in the past.

- **Anzac myth.** The TSSFP resources reference an aspect of Australia's engagement in WW1 that is rarely discussed. HTAV is in favour of providing teachers with information and sources about these events. As you know, it is a central tenet of

history as a human discipline that there will always be multiple perspectives, both at the time and among historians afterwards. Any good history teacher is trying to help students grapple with this challenging truth. The Anzac myth and its purposes are explored in History classrooms and in the Victorian curriculum, and HTAV advocated strongly and successfully to ensure that the contestation of the Anzac narrative remained in the national curriculum. Over time, the Anzac myth has been challenged by feminists, some veterans, pacifists, First Nations activists, British historians, Marxist historians, post colonial historians and others. Through the lens of history as a discipline, we want students to reach a level of comfort with conflicting perspectives. It can be simultaneously true that Australians were part of an invading force in Turkey, part of an imperial force in Egypt, and also a group of young men thrown into unimaginable carnage and trauma on the Western Front. We continue to explore all of these things. Historical empathy, which is one of the 'Big 6' historical thinking skills, can and should extend in more than one direction.

- **The Spirit of Anzac Prize.** As a result of our long engagement with the Spirit of Anzac Prize, I can assure you that prize winning students in the past have critically unpacked the Anzac narrative and freely discussed their own perspective on it.
- **The Robert Menzies Institute.** You will be pleased and possibly a bit surprised to hear that the Robert Menzies Institute has so far behaved impeccably in its interactions with school history teachers. HTAV has, of course, been monitoring what kind of Institute it would turn out to be. The Institute has invited prominent progressive historians to contribute to its conferences, seminars and publications. The professional learning it has offered to history teachers has been focused on Menzies and on conservative political innovations and achievements, but has been limited to sharing research findings and primary sources. In a recent communication, the Director noted that the Institute was trying to increase the public understanding of the Menzies years and legacy, but was trying to do this through research and dialogue rather than slogans. This all seems a promising start. HTAV would be pleased to host representatives of the Whitlam Institute and, while they continue to engage with History teachers in a way that respectful of other views, is pleased to host representatives of the Menzies Institute. HTAV has also hosted representatives of the Islamic Museum, the Holocaust Museum and First Nations organisations, and they help to provide diverse perspectives and expert knowledge on aspects of the history curriculum.
- **All history is political.** You are right that there are many instances where teaching history, in a way that is respectful of the discipline and interested in multiple perspectives, might nonetheless be expected to influence a student's thinking. Once we learn something, we can't unknow it. The knowledge we collect over time is likely to shape the way we vote, the charities and causes we support, etc. The more we know about First Nations history, environmental history, the history of democracy, feminist history, the history of Russia and Ukraine, and the history of Israel and Palestine, the more likely it is to inform our views about contemporary issues. HTAV has been a strong advocate, at the national and state level, for curriculum design and teaching practice that amplifies the voices of marginalised and silenced people.

It is also true, and inevitable, that every school History teacher will have topics in which they are more interested, personally invested or knowledgeable, and this will undoubtedly influence the resources they draw on as they implement the Australian or Victorian curriculum.

However, HTAV has consistently advocated for history classrooms where all students (and teachers) can feel safe to form their own views and values in their own time. In a school classroom, there is a power imbalance between the teacher and the student, and a compulsory attendance requirement. A school student is not an adult, and is not free to leave the space if they feel their teacher is pressuring them to adopt political or social views that conflict with their own. For this reason, HTAV opposed the Morrison Government suggestion that history should be taught in a way that 'makes Australians feel more patriotic'. We don't believe history teachers should tell students how their parents should vote in a referendum. We don't believe the Institute of Public Affairs should distribute materials to primary schools that minimise the violence of European invasion. We don't believe that, at the end of a lesson on environmental history, a teacher should urge students to volunteer for the Australian Greens party. We don't think that, during a lesson on Menzies, a teacher should distribute membership forms for the Young Liberals. If you believe any of these things should not happen in a History classroom, then none of them should happen. It would be unsafe and unsound for HTAV to endorse some and not others on the basis of the personal views of the current Board and staff.

My thinking on this is influenced by John Rawls' concept of justice, and how you can know when a thing is fair or just. Rawls said you should design public policy or decide a principle as if you don't know who you would be in the scenario. If you didn't know your own race, religion, gender, age, nationality, socio-economic status, life experience, etc., what approach would you always consider fair?

In this instance, the question is what kinds of history teaching resources are appropriate for classroom use, and what principles should guide a history teacher's practice? Over time, in response to a wide range of requests, and in a polarised society in which History teachers need to defend their professional practice, HTAV has developed a consistent position.

- History teachers should teach history, particularly the history in the curriculum.
- History teachers should be well informed and up to date.
- History teachers should seek to expose students to a wide range of reliable evidence, perspectives and interpretations, including those that do not align with the teacher's own beliefs.
- History teachers should strive to help students understand the experiences and motivations of different groups and individuals.
- History teachers should train students to use critical thinking to identify bias, incomplete narratives and silenced or absent voices.
- History teachers should leave it to students to digest the evidence and interpretations, consider them in the light of their own experiences and perspectives, and form their own views. If you start telling a student what they should think and do, you are not teaching History any more.

It's not easy for a teacher to do this when they have strong personal views, but that is precisely why this approach is fair. (As a thought exercise, imagine that your child's history teacher has strong personal, social or political views that totally clash with yours. Would you have any objections if they followed the principles above?) It is also an approach that protects government school history teachers from having to change their history teaching every time there is a change of government.

That is why HTAV is happy to host exhibitors and presenters who are trying to increase the knowledge teachers hold about a particular topic in the history curriculum, or trying to add to the pool of quality resources that teachers might use. However, HTAV does not host exhibitors or resources that seek to encourage teachers to prioritise their own beliefs and activism within their classroom practice.

I would be happy to discuss this with you further. I have offered several times to meet with Lucy Honan of TSSFP. HTAV is trying to navigate a challenging ethical and professional question, and we can always benefit from mutual listening and conversation. Our aim is to be fair and consistent, and to promote and defend excellent school History teaching. The many historians who have engaged with HTAV over the past four decades will, I think, attest to HTAV's integrity and good will.

Warm regards,

Deb

Dr Deb Hull

Executive Officer

A History I enjoyed recently and recommend is 'The Rest is History' podcast's series on the early days of World War I, focused on Germany, Austria, Serbia and the Eastern Front. The first episode in the series aired on 25 August 2025 (episode 594).



HISTORY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION of VICTORIA (03) 9417 3422

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We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work. The HTAV Office is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. These lands were never ceded. We pay our respect to their ancestors and Elders, past and present.

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From: Australian Women's History Network <auswhn@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, 26 February 2026 8:52 AM

[Redacted content]

Subject: Re: Teachers and School Staff for Palestine Victoria exhibit at HTAV conference

You don't often get email from auswhn@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

[Quoted text hidden]

Deb Hull [Redacted]
To: Australian Women's History Network <auswhn@gmail.com>

26 February 2026 at 16:06

[Redacted content]

Dear members of the Australian Women's History Network Committee,

One further thought - can I ask that you please disseminate HTAV's reply below to the Network members who were invited to sign your letter?

Some members of the Network will not agree with HTAV's thinking on this matter, but I would be very grateful if they could have an opportunity to understand it. HTAV is a small not-for-profit organisation, established and governed by practicing school history teachers, for the purpose of improving history teaching in schools and increasing young people's interest in the subject. Our relationships with university colleagues are central to achieving these aims.

I am so sad to see that you published the letter on LinkedIn before making an attempt to reach out and understand us. I had understood us to be colleagues with a shared commitment to history education, and I am dismayed to find HTAV in this situation.

Warm regards,

Deb

Dr Deb Hull

Executive Officer

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Australian Women's History Network <auswhn@gmail.com>

26 February 2026 at 16:34

To: Deb Hull



Dear Deb,

We do understand the difficulties faced by small voluntary associations, as we are too. I am sorry you are distressed. The members of TSSFP are also distressed.

We did contact you two days prior to starting the open letter. While we understood that you were on leave, we did not realise that your president was also unable to respond. Given the shortness of time of prior to your conference, and in the absence of any response, we decided to proceed with the open letter.

We will certainly provide an update to our members. However, I strongly recommend that you do not ask us to circulate the reply you sent to us. I can absolutely guarantee it will not land the way you hope it will and will make the situation worse not better.

We will be in touch again next week with a more detailed response to your email. We are consulting with colleagues, including about the possibility of a meeting.

all the best,
Jane

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Deb Hull [REDACTED]
To: Australian Women's History Network <auswhn@gmail.com>

26 February 2026 at 17:17

[REDACTED]

Thank you, Jane. I really appreciate your response.

Elisa had to leave suddenly and may not have thought to add an 'out of office reply' to her private email.

I will be guided by you about the best way forward from here, with regard to communications with the Network.

I am about to drive to the conference venue, where tomorrow we hope to contribute to 300+ people staying in the profession and continuing to inspire young people with a love of history.

[Quoted text hidden]