

Jewish Board of Deputies accuses Fairfax of racism over Gaza cartoon

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📍 Vic Alhadeff: 'We believe this [cartoon] constitutes racial vilification, as well as inciting third parties to hatred of Jews.' Photograph: Supplied Photograph: Supplied

Jewish leaders say cartoon which accompanied Mike Carlton column played on 'grotesque stereotypes', but editor-in-chief says drawing was based on news photograph

The New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies has accused the Sydney Morning Herald of racial vilification and demanded an apology for publishing what they say is an offensive cartoon of an old man observing the conflict in Gaza.

The cartoon by Glen Le Lievre has been described by Jewish leaders as "a grotesque stereotype of a Jew using a remote-control device to blow up houses and people in Gaza".

Vic Alhadeff, the chief executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, told Guardian Australia he had written to the paper because he objected to the cartoon which was used to illustrate a column by Mike Carlton last Saturday.

“The effect is to portray the Jewish people as being collectively guilty of the tragedy in Gaza and wilfully and intentionally causing civilian deaths there,” Alhadeff said on Friday. “We believe this constitutes racial vilification, as well as inciting third parties to hatred of Jews.”

The Australian Jewish News reported that the board of deputies had threatened legal action, but Alhadeff said that was premature and he was waiting for a response from the newspaper before considering what action to take.

The editor-in-chief of the Herald, Darren Goodsir, is understood to have written to all the Jewish groups and individuals who had complained, saying the paper is committed to calling out examples of racial prejudice and bigotry.

“I very much regret the distress the cartoon has caused, but I want to assure you that there was no intention to invoke any disturbing stereotypes - nor to incite any racial hatred,” Goodsir wrote to one complainant.

“While we vigorously defend free speech, and a robust exchange of ideas and opinions - be they in words or images - I would never condone any submission that purposely impugned any individual, or community.”

Goodsir says the cartoon was directly modelled on a number of photographs published on major news sites during the past week of men, seated in armchairs and lounges, observing the shelling of Gaza from the hills of Sderot.

“One of these photographs depicted an old man, sitting alone, observing the conflict – and this is what particularly influenced the drawing.

“Not only did Mr Le Lievre use an actual image as the source for his cartoon, he adopted the same distinctive style he has developed over the years in which most old people have very pronounced features, including eyes, faces and noses. He has not diverted from his overall drawing style in this instance. He usually draws old people this way.”

In an editorial titled Media Disgrace published on Friday, the Australian Jewish News criticised sections of the Australian media for their coverage of the conflict and called on readers to boycott the Herald.

“Shame on 60 Minutes. Even greater shame on Fairfax. If you haven’t done so already, consider cancelling your Fairfax subscriptions today.”