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**Highlight:** In strong comments that highlight tensions in Labor, ministers Ed Husic and **Anne Aly** also said Palestinian-Australians were feeling ignored.

### **Body**

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Two Labor ministers say Palestinian-Australians are feeling forgotten in the unfolding political reaction to the Israel-Hamas war and that civilians in Gaza are being subjected to collective punishment.

Industry Minister Ed Husic and Early Childhood Education Minister **Anne Aly** urged for de-escalation of the conflict on Thursday morning, in strong comments that push the Albanese government to step up its support for Palestinians. Husic also suggested the government had only paid lip service to a two-state solution and Aly called for an investigation into potential Israeli war crimes.

[Link to Image](#)

Alex Ellinghausen

Their intervention highlights internal tensions in Labor over a domestic response to the war that has involved monuments lit up in Israeli flags and political condemnation of pro-Palestinian protests. Labor [has stood by Israel](#) since Hamas launched its assault on Israeli civilians on October 7 and Israel retaliated, leading to a conflict that has killed more than 1300 Israelis and 3000 Palestinians.

Husic, a senior cabinet minister and the first Muslim elected to parliament, made a passionate plea for **Australia** to step up support for Palestinians as they faced what he described as a "humanitarian catastrophe" with 1000 children dead, civilian infrastructure destroyed and a blockade on food, fuel, medicine and water.

"I feel very strongly that Palestinians are being collectively punished here for Hamas' barbarism," he said in an interview on ABC Radio National.

"I think it's really important ... that we contribute to international voices speaking up for Palestinians ... to say that there has got to be a more strategic and precise way to hold Hamas to account but not affect innocent Palestinian families."

He also sought to explain strong reactions from advocates in **Australia**, who have rallied on behalf of Palestinians. "Let me put it in a way that might be difficult for some to hear," Husic said.

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"Israel has described what happened on October 7 [as] Israel's equivalent of 9/11. The number of Palestinians that have been killed so far equates to the number of people who lost their lives in 9/11. We don't see any public landmarks in [Australia](#) that are being lit up in red, black, white and green.

"Now, there'll be people that are very uncomfortable with me making that remark. But it goes to the heart of what Palestinians and those who care for them in [Australia](#) [think], which is that Palestinian lives are considered lesser than."

Aly, a counter-terrorism expert who was born in Egypt, backed Husic's comments.

"I feel the pain of Australian Palestinians, Muslim and Christian. I feel the pain of Australian Muslims, and I know that Palestinians have for a long time felt that they have not been seen and have not been heard, that they have been forgotten by the international community, and I want to acknowledge that to them."

Parliament [has been divided this week](#) over its response to the unfolding war. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has urged the protection of civilian lives while asserting Israel's right to self-defence, while Opposition Leader Peter Dutton said Israel should show no restraint in retaliating to Hamas' attacks.

The Greens this week voted in parliament to condemn Israel of war crimes in [motions that were voted down in both houses](#).

[Youtube link](#)

Labor senator Fatima Payman, who was born in Afghanistan, [spoke out in the Senate on Tuesday](#) when she said Israel's right to defend itself could not equate to the annihilation of Palestinian civilians.

"Yet today, the world watches, the state of Israel deprives an entire population - men, women and children - of the basic necessities of life: food, water, electricity, gas and medicines. We must condemn it," she said.

Aly on Thursday said it was "hard to argue that this is not a form of collective punishment".

"The idea of war crimes is something that needs to be investigated," she said. "I would be loath to claim war crimes without a full investigation, that is how international law operates. But I would say and I would urge Israel to abide by international laws on the rules of engagement."

Husic said there had been strong and dehumanising language used about Palestinians - referring to them as animals or collateral damage - which affected wider communities and could shape government decisions.

Regarding Israel's actions, he said: "Governments are different to terrorist organisations. [With] governments, there is a higher expectation that there will be a protection of innocent lives."

He also said he strongly felt there had been no practical commitment to a two-state solution, which is Labor policy.

"Speaking completely frankly, I think there was an important point in time when we sort of started saying: 'It's important that there is a two-state solution that we fight for that'," he said.

"What I'm genuinely concerned about now, is that this is spoken more as a way in which we can just comfort ourselves at these points. And then when the situation and the tension subside, nothing practically happens."

Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil said she was proud to sit with Husic in cabinet, when asked about his comments. However, she did not say the government should rethink how it talks about the conflict.

"Israel does have a right to defend itself. It has just suffered a heinous and barbaric terrorist attack including young people massacred at a music event," she said.

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"We've got lots of people on different sides of this conflict who are feeling it really deeply, and I just want them to know that the Australian government grieves all loss of innocent life, whether it's a Jewish Israeli who has died or a Palestinian Muslim."

She also said there had been no progress on evacuating [46 Australians who are stuck in Gaza](#). Meanwhile, evacuations have continued for Australian citizens from Tel Aviv, where two flights were due to leave on Thursday.

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## Graphic

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Ed Husic and **Anne Aly** both spoke up in support of Palestinians.

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