



REPORT

AUSTRALIANS SAY: "NOT IN OUR NAME"

"Improper Motion" advertisement campaign

16 March 2008

This week saw the culmination of a collective campaign waged against the Prime Minister's motion in the Australian Parliament honouring Israel's independence. On the morning of 12 March, an advertisement appeared in the "The Australian" newspaper taking up more than half of the facing page 7. Its design was an arresting white on black with the al-Nakba logo, designed by Melbourne artist Dora McPhee, a central feature. But, it was the impressive list of signatories - almost illegible because the font had to be reduced to fit them into the space we had bought - that made every moment spent on the campaign worth the effort. Some 37 Palestinian advocacy and support organisations and other interest groups had backed it and some 400 names made it into print. There were many others, but they could not be included because of space constraints and others simply arrived too late. They have been added to our Australian al-Nakba website www.1948.com.au along with all the letters, articles and news items covering the campaign and we hope over the coming weeks and months, it will become a source of reference for everyone.

The most positive outcome of that intense week is knowing that the Australia-wide network of Palestinian supporters works, and the message is reaching people not normally involved with activism. Within hours of contacting the various groups in each state, emails began pouring in from people alerted to the campaign by their group's coordinators. People wanted to add their names and they wanted to contribute if they could. The generosity was overwhelming, so much so that the \$16,500 cost of the advertisement size we had decided on, was completely met by the donations.

Our intention behind this advertisement was simply to make a public statement about the motion and show that many Australians share our disapproval of the Government's and the opposition's actions. However, what transpired in the

last week or so was much more than that. This advertisement triggered a tangible media interest and occupied much of the public debate in the print media. It also showed the undisputed bias of The Australian newspaper towards Israel and the Jewish lobby. The Australian published a one-sided editorial on Wednesday and another in the Weekend Australian, an opinion piece by the president of the Zionist Federation of Australia, an opinion piece by the Israeli Ambassador and an on-line 5 minute video by Greg Sheridan (aka Jerusalem Greg). On the other side, the Fairfax newspapers published three excellent articles two of which are by Alan Ramsey. Also, SBS TV reported the motion, showed our advertisement and interviewed our friends in Canberra who went to the Parliament to protest. This media interest helped defeat the Government's initial intention of keeping this motion quiet. We are glad they failed and that the passing of this bi-partisan motion without objection in our parliament was exposed.

There was no doubt that Australians saw this as a way of taking affirmative action, where their names were confirmation of their protest, and their contributions, a way of making it happen. As the momentum gathered and people communicated with each other, the power of the ripple effect was very evident. This is just the kind of grassroots action that is needed when so many doors are closed to Palestine - and this year especially. A lot is being planned in every state, and despite the distances between us, we have no doubt that by supporting each other, Palestine will take on a new meaning in Australia.

We believe that the prime minister, members of parliament and the media now know that the voices for Palestine are increasing in number and from all levels of society. Soon, it will be difficult for them to ignore decent and honourable Australians who can see for themselves the injustices and the truth of what is happening in Palestine.

We wish to thank Paul Heywood Smith QC, Chairperson of the Australian Friends of Palestine, for drafting the text of the advertisement and initiating this campaign. We also thank you all for participating and hope that we have reached a new level of activism in Australia based on cooperation, trust, and a belief that together we can create an effective voice for the voiceless and an energy that can join with others around the world, to finally bring peace and justice to the long-suffering Palestinians.

Sonja Karkar
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WFP and AFP
AFOPA

