

21 April 2008

The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP  
Leader of the Opposition  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Nelson,

On 12 March, you seconded a motion put by the Prime Minister honouring Israel's 60 years of independence and remarked on the "historical circumstances" that have seen Australia and Israel forge a continually developing relationship – indeed, one that you say seeks to "further the peace process between Israel and Palestine." Neither the motion nor your statement explained why the fate of the indigenous Palestinians has been inextricably bound with Israel for all of those years, namely, that the historical circumstances of Israel's development was predicated on the catastrophic uprooting of Palestinian society.

Cognisant of Australia's long-held claim to be even-handed on Israel/Palestine, we have approached the Prime Minister asking him to recognise the Palestinian al-Nakba of 15 May and to move a motion around that time that would acknowledge the enduring narrative of indigenous Palestinians and the suffering that has been visited on them over the past 60 years; that would acknowledge their courageous journey in their struggle for the right to exist in their own land; that would support the right of Palestinians to seek self-determination, national independence and sovereignty in a free Palestinian state within the 1967 borders; and that would commit Australia to working with international initiatives for a just peace for both peoples.

We are seeking your support for such a motion, as it would be a way of bringing balance back to Australia's stance on Israel/Palestine. It has been our hope that Australia would become more compassionate towards the much-maligned Palestinians who like any other people seek freedom from oppression and a world willing to intervene on their behalf. Under your leadership, we would like to think that the Coalition will adopt policies on Israel/Palestine that are much more even-handed from those adopted by the Howard Government.

This year, the Palestinians are remembering and feeling the pain of their society's uprooting in 1948 when three-quarters of Palestine's population was dispossessed, displaced, exiled and occupied to clear the way for a Jewish state. These refugees have never been allowed to return to their homes and property and instead have had to eke out a miserable existence as stateless people in camps or as unrecognised Palestinians in the Diaspora for three generations. What is more, some 1.5 million Palestinians are living as third-class citizens inside Israel and almost 4 million Palestinians have been reduced to a wretched existence under Israel's military occupation. That critical mass of humanity is now facing an existential threat.

Israel has made it clear that it will not stop its activities – the land expropriations, the illegal building of Jewish settlements and the Separation Wall, the humiliating checkpoints, the house demolitions, the bombardments and assassinations, the transfers, arrests, imprisonment and isolation of people from their communities – despite its obligations under international law and its peace deal pledges. These policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories have been fully documented by every major human rights organisation reporting on the conflict, and in fact, Israel's institutionalised apartheid regime has been given public exposure by eminent Nobel Prize winners and men of peace, Archbishop Tutu and former US President Jimmy Carter. Only recently, the National Council of Churches in Australia passed resolutions that included acknowledgement of the violence being perpetrated on the Palestinians living under Israel's occupation, and more and more voices are being heard in defence of the Palestinians.



Australian Friends of Palestine  
Australians for Palestine  
Women for Palestine

#### ENDORSEMENTS

Phillip Adams AO  
Author and Broadcaster

Beris Bird AM SRN

Geoffrey Bird AM FRACS

Bishop George Browning  
Anglican Bishop of Goulburn and Canberra

Reverend Helen Cox

Bishop Issam John Darwish, BSO, DD  
Eparch of the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church  
of Australia and New Zealand

Dr. Jamileh Abu-Duhou  
Research Fellow, Menzies School of Health Research

Professor Ibtisam Abu-Duhou  
Professor of Education,  
Economics and Senior Policy Adviser, UNESCO

Sheikh Fehmi Naji El-Imam AO  
Grand Mufti of Australia and New Zealand

Andrew Ferguson  
State Secretary CFMEU NSW

Tim Gooden  
Secretary, Geelong Trades Hall Council VIC

Dr Gavan Griffith

The Hon Kris Hanna MP  
Independent Member for Mitchell SA

Paul Heywood-Smith QC  
Chairman, Australian Friends of Palestine

Roland Jabbour  
Chairman, Australian Arabic Council

Peter Jennings  
Executive Officer, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA

The Hon Dr Elliott Johnston QC AO  
Former Justice of the Supreme Court of South Australia

The Hon Sandra Kanck MLC  
Leader of the Democrats SA

John Hanna Karkar QC

Rev Merrill Kitchen OAM  
Head, Churches of Christ Theological College VIC

Associate Professor Jake Lynch  
Director, Centre of Peace and Conflict Studies NSW

Nasser Mashni  
Convener, Australians for Palestine

Rami Méo  
Convener, Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine

The Hon Alastair Nicholson AO RFD QC  
Former Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia

Metropolitan Archbishop Paul  
Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Australia,  
New Zealand and The Philippines

Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees AM  
Director, Sydney Peace Foundation NSW

Archbishop Stylianos  
Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia

The Hon Murray Wilcox QC  
Former Justice of the Federal Court of Australia

You have described yourself as a “man of passion” and we would like to think, a man of principle as well. A suffering people cannot in all good conscience be ignored, particularly when Israel’s current siege of Gaza is on the brink of becoming an unconscionable humanitarian disaster. Just as Australia has increased its relief to the starving Palestinians, it should also call for an immediate end to the occupation which denies ordinary people the most basic right of freedom.

Simply, the Palestinians are being made to pay a terrible price for the sake of a state seeking to be exclusively Jewish in all of the land. A bi-partisan motion, as suggested, would at least give dignity to the Palestinian struggle for liberty and national independence and allow Australia to engage constructively in international initiatives aimed at bringing peace and justice to both peoples. We believe that your voice could make a difference.

Yours sincerely,



Sonja Karkar  
**Women for Palestine**  
**Australians for Palestine**



Assoc/Prof Bassam Dally  
**Australian Friends of Palestine**

*on behalf of the organisations who have endorsed this letter.*

- Arab Council of Australia NSW
- Australia Manufacturing Workers' Union VIC
- Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition NSW
- Australian Arabic Council VIC
- Australian Arabic Palestinian Support Association NSW
- Australian Friends of Palestine WA
- Australian Muslim Advocates for the Rights of All Humanity QLD
- Australian Palestinian Club NSW
- Australian Peace Committee SA
- Australians for Justice and Peace in Palestine ACT
- Campaign for International Cooperation and Disarmament VIC
- Canterbury-Bankstown Peace Group NSW
- Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace VIC
- Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies NSW
- CFMEU – Brick Tile and Pottery Industry Division VIC
- CFMEU – Construction Division VIC
- Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine NSW
- Communist Party of Australia
- Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union - National
- Council of Australian Palestinians NSW
- Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education NSW
- Fair Australia NSW
- Fair Go for Palestine QLD
- Friends of Palestine NSW
- Friends of Sabeel, Oceania
- Geelong Catholic Social Justice Committee VIC
- Geelong Trades Hall Council VIC
- General Union of Palestinian Workers NSW
- Grace Church Joondalup WA
- Green Left Weekly VIC
- Japanese for Peace VIC
- Jews Against the Occupation NSW
- Justice for Palestine Matters NSW
- Just Peace QLD
- Maritime Union of Australia NSW
- Maritime Union of Australia VIC
- Melbourne Palestine Solidarity Network VIC
- Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Justice and Peace Centre NSW
- Moreland Peace Group VIC
- Muslim Business Network QLD
- Newcastle Christians for Peace NSW
- No War SA
- Palestine and Jewish Unity QLD
- Palestine.net.au NSW
- Palestinian Community Association VIC
- Pax Christi, Australia NSW
- Pax Christi Victoria
- Queensland Palestine Solidarity Campaign QLD
- Rally for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament Inc QLD
- SA Interfaith Network SA
- Socialist Alliance - Newcastle
- Socialist Alliance VIC
- Society of Friends (Quakers) Hunter Valley NSW
- Solidarity VIC
- Students for Palestine (Deakin University) VIC
- Sydney University Arab Students' Association NSW
- The Canberra Ecumenical Working Group on Palestine-Israel ACT
- Uniting Church Council North Melbourne VIC
- Unity for Peace VIC
- Women in Black VIC