

Protest concerning the proposed Australia-Israel cultural exchange trip to Israel to be led by Australia's Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard

As citizens of conscience we would like to protest in the strongest possible terms against the proposed Australia-Israel cultural exchange trip to Israel to be led by Julia Gillard and involving other parliamentarians, academics, business people, and journalists. We consider this trip a dreadful affront to the many Palestinians left maimed, wounded, traumatised and homeless by Israel's devastating assault on the Gaza Strip in late 08/early 09. The statistics of dead, wounded and dying are in the thousands, whole neighbourhoods lie in ruins, hospitals are bursting at the seams without adequate medical supplies to help the suffering, and world aid - some of it already rotting - lies massed outside Gaza's entry points unable to be distributed because of Israel's draconian restrictions, a policy of collective punishment that is an egregious violation of the Geneva Convention. Reports of illegal phosphorous attacks are evident in the horrific burns endured by the victims months afterwards. Every parliamentarian ought to think seriously about the moral implications of Australia normalising relations with a state that is still under investigation for war crimes committed during Israel's 'Cast Lead' operation.

Further, Israel is refusing to commit to the two-state solution that Australia supports, it is continuing to build illegal settlements in the West Bank in defiance of the current United States administration and it is continuing to maintain an illegal military Occupation of Palestinian lands that denies Palestinians basic human rights such as freedom of movement. We remind all those contemplating such a trip that Israeli is not a truly democratic society even when it comes to the Palestinian citizens of Israel. As we write the Israeli Ministerial Committee on Legislation has approved a preliminary proposal which would make it illegal to hold events or ceremonies marking Israel's Independence Day as a 'Nakba' or catastrophe for the Palestinians dispossessed of their homes and land in 1948. We remind you that the party of Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman 'Yisrael Beitneu' has submitted a bill, subsequently rejected, for cabinet approval which would require all Israelis, including Palestinians, Christians, and Bedouins, to declare loyalty to 'the state of Israel as a Jewish, Zionist, and democratic state' before they can be issued a national identity document. We remind you that a bill has just passed its first reading in the Israeli Knesset that would institute a one year jail term for anyone who speaks 'against Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state', and that the Second Annual Palestine Festival of Literature in Occupied East Jerusalem was ordered to close down by the Israeli Ministry of Internal Security only moments before its opening on 23rd May, a festival supported by UNESCO and the British Council among others.

We reject the oft touted cliché that Israel is a democracy like Australia, rather we remind those intent on strengthening cultural and political exchange between Israel and Australia that Israel is not a state for all its citizens but a state that explicitly advances the interests of one ethnicity alone, a state of affairs that is simply unthinkable in modern Australia. Along with the current editor of the respected American periodical 'The Nation', we wonder how a 'State that imprisons 4 million Palestinians behind ghetto walls, bypass roads and a blockade, and treats another 1.5 million as second-class citizens, [can] be democratic?'

Yours Sincerely

1. Dr Mohamad Abdalla (Griffith University)
2. Dr Adnan Abdel-Fattah, Kellyville, NSW.
3. Hiroshi Amemiya
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18. Dr Ned Curthoys (Australian National University)
19. Professor Ann Curthoys (University of Sydney)
20. Henry di Suvero, playwright and barrister.
21. Professor John Docker (University of Sydney)
22. Therese Doyle, secondary teacher.
23. Judy Donnelly Tarbuck Bay, NSW
24. Evan English, Film-maker, Writer, Nth Fitzroy, Melbourne

25. Vicki Grieves (University of Sydney)
26. Professor Heather Goodall (University of Technology Sydney)
27. Anne Hardy, Ravens Grove, St.Kilda
28. Rand Hazou
29. Taimor Hazou, Preston, Victoria
30. Peter Hindrup, Bondi Junction
31. Lois Hudson
32. Donal Hudson (Thornleigh, Sydney)
33. Margaret Jacobs (Women in Black)
34. Dr. Evan Jones (University of Sydney)
35. Sonja Karkar (Australians for Palestine/Women for Palestine)
36. Margaret Kaye, Newtown NSW
37. Zaid Khan (Lawyer - Aboriginal Legal Service NSW)
38. Dr Rick Kuhn (Australian National University)
39. Dr Robin Laycock, La Trobe University
40. Antony Loewenstein, Sydney-based journalist and author.
41. Associate Professor Jake Lynch (Director, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney)
42. Cynthia Marchant (Red Hill, Qld)
43. Peter Manning, Adjunct Professor of Journalism, University of Technology, Sydney.
44. Miriam Margolyes O.B.E.
45. Dr Roger Markwick (University of Newcastle)
46. Dr.Glen McConnell, the University of Melbourne.
47. Helen McCue
48. Mrs Mano Navaratnam, retired, Victoria

49. Dr Gideon Polya
50. Dr David Pritchard, The University of Queensland.
51. Abe Quadan, Australian Palestinian Community - NSW
52. Lee Rhiannon, NSW Greens MP.
53. Michael Schembri, Allawah NSW
54. Dr Peter Slezak, University of New South Wales
55. Jan Smith, postgraduate in Islamic Studies, University of Sydney
56. Murray Smith of Trinity Gardens, South Australia.
57. Dr Bill Snowdon AM (Retired CSIRO Scientist)
58. Steve and Sue Stephan, Victoria Park, Western Australia.
59. Dr. Paul Tabar, Director of the Institute for Migration Studies, Lebanese American University
60. Fay Waddington, Woolloowin, Brisbane
61. Kirstie Wallace, Clovelly, NSW.
62. John Weickhardt, Woollahra NSW
63. Dr. Kathryn Welch (University of Sydney)
64. Dr. Ron Witton (University of Wollongong)
65. Lynda Wong (Melbourne)
66. Andrew Worssam, Bondi, NSW
67. Dr. Adel Yousif (Deakin University)