



WHERE TO FROM HERE?

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT RACIAL VILIFICATION

AUSTRALIAN ARABIC COUNCIL

NOVEMBER 2001

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The Australian Arabic Council

The Australian Arabic Council (AAC) is committed to defending human rights and combating racism through educational initiatives and its many contributions to community relations in Australia. The Council prides itself on being proactive, undertaking throughout its ten-year history many creative and constructive projects ranging from theatre productions to documentaries, academic articles, educational workshops and conferences, festivals, trade forums and media monitoring. The AAC seeks to promote and encourage the full participation of all Australians in the public sphere.

The AAC was established by a group of Australians who, out of mutual concerns and interests, have come together to address the roots of racism, and the often negative perceptions of Arabs and Arabic culture within Australia. The AAC is committed to the elimination of stereotypes, and works relentlessly to combat any such representations at all levels in Australia.

The Council is non-sectarian, non-partisan and encompasses a wide variety of age groups and backgrounds. It functions primarily in English and as an Australian body with Australian interests and aspirations. Its accomplishments and operations rely heavily on the commitment and participation of its individual volunteer members and as such, reflects the creativity, passion and aspirations of its membership.

OUR COUNCIL

The AAC currently has 26 Executive Members, including representation in Victoria, NSW, ACT, WA, and SA, as well as over 1000 associates. Our membership reflects the diversity of our community, and includes individuals of Arabic heritage across many generations, as well as committed individuals from non-Arab background. The AAC has always encouraged people to exercise their full rights and responsibilities as citizens, under local, national and international laws and conventions.

OUR HISTORY

Arabic migrants have been settling in and contributing to Australia for over 170 years. The population of Arabic Australians is approaching one million.

Founded in response to stereotyping and discrimination directed against the community during the Gulf War, the AAC has served a nation wide membership since its inception in 1991. While many community organisations have emerged, most have a specific professional or parochial focus. The AAC has endeavoured to transcend the community's diversity by expressing a unified voice on issues of common concern. The AAC focuses on issues of national concern, rather than on local ethno-centric issues.

OUR AIMS

- to campaign against racism and address its causes, symptoms and solutions;
- to campaign for more accurate media representation of Arabic issues;
- to defend the image of the Arabic community in the Australian public arena;
- to promote greater Arabic community participation in Australian social, cultural and political life;

- to orchestrate community education projects which enhance greater understanding and dialogue;
- to promote the benefits of the Arabic language to all Australians;
- to promote contributions of Arabic civilisation in human history and in Australian society;
- to act as a consultative group to government, media, and the wider community;
- to provide input into government policies, inquiries and law reform.

AAC MEMBERS

Executive Committee 2001 (based in Victoria):

Roland Jabbour	Chairman
Dr Nabil Sulaiman	Vice Chairman
Halla Marbani	Secretary
Wehbe Abdo	Treasurer
Andrew Batrouney	Public Officer

Executive Members 2001:

VICTORIA

Randa Abdel Fattah
Nashat Abdel-Sayed
Laurence Abou Khater
Inaam Barakat
Rita Fadel
Taimor Hazou
Assyl Haidar
Alexander Kouttab
Rokaya Nabulsi
Robert Tawil
Maro Williams
Zena Yassine

INTERSTATE REPRESENTATION

Jim Hanna (ACT)
Angelique Doueih (NSW)
David Howell (NSW)
Glen Kalim (NSW)
Sari Kassis (NSW)
Joseph Wakim, OAM (NSW)
Minerva Nasser-Eddine (SA)
Amal Wahdan (WA)

OVERSEAS REPRESENTATION

Diaa Hadid (Haifa)
Dr Ray Jureidini (Lebanon)

EXECUTIVE OFFICER (non member position)

Vicki Mau

RACIAL VILIFICATION AND THE AUSTRALIAN ARABIC COUNCIL

The Australian Arabic Council (AAC) is committed to advancing community-relations and community harmony in Australia. It has long campaigned for thorough community education at all levels as the best way to prevent and counter racism and ignorance. As a national organisation, we have actively worked to combat all forms of racial vilification, and initiated numerous education strategies to address the roots of racism, ignorance and xenophobia. Our record in combating racism through pro-active projects is well documented and dates back many years.

Having been consistently identified as one of the four most vilified groups in Australia, the extensive and well-documented experience of the Australian Arabic community provides many salient lessons for the promotion of harmony in our community.

While initiatives such as legislation to deter and punish those who cloak their ignorance in racism should be encouraged, programs must also be in place to address this fundamental cause of racism.

Reforms and programs are required in the most important areas relating to racial vilification, such as schools, policing and government. It is important that all related institutions work for the eradication of vilification and the increased education of our community.

The AAC has always advocated for multi-pronged and hard-hitting educational strategies that can affect social-cultural change in attitudes and behaviours. Education is the key to encouraging an understanding of ethnic and religious groups and their positive contribution to Australian society, as well as addressing the incidents and effects of racial vilification.

In light of the rise in racial vilification against the Australian Arabic community as a result of September 11th and hysteria and scapegoating surrounding local issues such as asylum seekers, crime and terrorist threats, the AAC has undertaken much work with all levels of the community, government and business. Following are recommendations that have been developed as a result of our many consultations, meetings and discussions about how to combat racial vilification .

Recommendations are included for government, police, media and education departments, and the also contain strategies to deal with similar emergency situations in the future, not only with the Arabic communities, but with all diverse communities. Recommendations are broad and brief; for more specific information about the recommendations, please contact the AAC.

The aim of these recommendations is to address racism and work together effectively to ensure that all communities lives in Australia free of vilification and marginalisation. They address the circumstances that give rise racism. These recommendations, if fully implemented, will go a long way to avoiding potential problems that arise in times of crisis – such as we have recently seen - and encourage diversity and acceptance in our community.

Never has a united front on the issue of diversity been more important. Not only has the Arabic community recently been under attack, but Australian multiculturalism has been under threat from our responses to global, federal and local events. This is a golden opportunity for all involved parties to take the lead and instigate courageous initiatives, which have the potential to address the systemic roots of racism, and not just the symptoms.

Fear, ignorance and uncertainty are at the root of racism, and must be central to any response. The issues that the community is currently dealing with are not to be sidelined into minority affairs, but to be part of an overall strategy to improve the legacy we are leaving for the next generation.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

10 STATE AND FEDERAL POLICE

- 1.1 Identify geographic areas with higher rates of incidents of racial vilification;
- 1.2 Increase police presence in areas with a high rate of incidents;
- 1.3 Increase security at Islamic and Arabic places of worship, and Arabic and Islamic schools;
- 1.4 Hold immediate community consultations;
- 1.5 Establish and develop multicultural advisory committees in each state and territory;
- 1.6 Set up a working group to prioritise the discussion and resolution of issues such as access, reporting, identifying racially based crime, dealing with incidents, and community education;
- 10.1 Use police multicultural aides to communicate with the community;
- 10.2 Improve communication between school students and police;
- 10.3 Implement recommendations for the elimination of ethnic descriptors nationally;
- 10.4 Ensure police recruiting truly reflects a multicultural Australian society.;
- 10.5 Implement cross-cultural training for police.

11 STATE AND FEDERAL DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

- 11.1 Task force must be employed to work on introducing an extensive education policy on diversity that will act as the standard and be compulsory for all schools;
- 11.2 Development and implementation of education program dealing with ignorance of diverse communities into the CSF (Curriculum and Standards Framework), to be introduced across all levels of education;
- 11.3 Ensure the teacher *training* and *resources* to discuss racism issues openly with classes;
 - 11.3.1 Teachers to be provided with relevant materials and attending workshops;
 - 11.3.2 Teachers must undergo education about diversity and cultures in their school;
 - 11.3.3 Speakers from the various community groups can be brought in school to answer questions and to speak to the students;
 - 11.3.4 Provide a list of such speakers from different cultural groups for all teachers.
- 11.4 Build on the education brought about by multicultural days with food and dance, and show that cultures go beyond this simplistic view of multiculturalism through:
 - 11.4.1 Guest speakers (such as prominent Australians from different ethnic groups) can be invited to workshops and assemblies where they can share their experiences;
 - 11.4.2 Workshops with these people and smaller groups of students could be implemented;
 - 11.4.3 Initiate peer groups within schools made up of younger and older children where issues of racism are discussed. It is important that the students 'own' the programs and can act in the formulation of school policies. Encourage them to be the leaders and take responsibility for implementing positive initiatives;
 - 11.4.4 Exchange programs with other schools of children from different ethnic backgrounds could also be facilitated. This should be an ongoing program with follow-ups and continued communication and should include rural and city schools.
- 11.5 Encourage an appreciation of diversity within the school community:
 - 11.5.1 Social activities should be regularly arranged between schools, particularly with schools of a different cultural or religious make-up;
 - 11.5.2 Implement inter-school activities, workshops and excursions.
- 11.6 Establish a long term strategy that will counter the increase and development of situations similar to that in the south-western suburbs in Sydney both within that community and Australia-wide;
- 11.7 Establish a short and long term strategy of encouraging Arabic Australian youth back to school and increase retention rates;

- 11.8 Improve the system for reporting and dealing with racism in schools;
- 11.9 Relevant documentaries, such as the AAC's *Tale of Two Peoples* and *Zero to Zenith: Arabic Contributions to Australia*, to be shown as part of an educational package, and used in racism workshops;
- 11.10 Comprehensive education must be undertaken looking at the cultures and history of Arabic and Muslim civilisation;
- 11.11 The Victorian Anti-Bullying Campaign introduced in schools barely touches upon the racism inherent in schools and does not do enough to combat the roots of racism – ignorance. This is an issue that must be written into the syllabus to ensure its establishment and regular application throughout all schools;
- 11.12 The promotion of Arabic as a LOTE subject;
- 11.13 Funding for the re-evaluation by an appointed committee of textbooks, which are notorious for misrepresenting the history and culture of Arabs and Muslims.

12 MEDIA

- 12.1 A taskforce must be established through state and national multicultural organisations and the Press Council with compulsory membership and media representation that encourages regular dialogue with ethnic communities;
- 12.2 Attending media conferences, workshops to increase understanding of ethnic diversity and cultural issues;
- 12.3 Regular information sharing between key multicultural/ethnic/diversity reporters and communities;
- 12.4 Develop and implement guidelines and disciplinary action with regards to comments inciting racial hatred that are broadcast live, in particular on talk back radio and in “letters to the editor”;
- 12.5 Media agencies to develop – with the Press Council and peak multicultural groups –and sign a “Code of Conduct” that outlines the need to respect cultural diversity and be wary of vilification and stereotyping.

13 LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- 10.1 Facilitate community meetings to allow community to share their concerns and get together for support;
- 10.2 Establish, at times of increased vilification, “safe places”, with police caravans set up and a commitment on behalf of the proprietors/coordinators to take action against any vilification;
- 10.3 Prominent community leaders state publicly their condemnation of racial vilification;
- 10.4 Local Councils must take a leading role in establishing local diversity coalitions with representatives from community groups, police, media, Migrant Resource Centres and local schools to advise and discuss with Council relevant proactive and reactive initiatives related to vilification;
- 10.5 Support community groups and Migrant Resource Centres in their work with diverse communities.

11 STATE GOVERNMENT

- 11.1 That prominent state politicians hold a parliamentary press conference with representatives from each major political party unequivocally condemning racial vilification;
- 11.2 Premiers to make a vocal, strong and unambiguous public statement on these issues, preferably with members of the local community present in order to express solidarity;
- 11.3 Encouragement of bi-partisan meetings with politicians and the community. This would be extremely effective and gain a great deal of coverage, as well as successfully portray both major parties as united on this front;

- 11.4 Facilitation and coordination between government departments and diverse community groups;
- 11.5 Encouragement, facilitation and funding of police, media and education initiatives as listed above.

6. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

- .1 Prominent federal politicians and relevant spokespersons hold a parliamentary press conference with representatives from each major political party unequivocally condemning racial vilification and expressing their support for local Arabic and Muslim communities;
- .2 The Prime Minister and relevant ministers must also make a vocal, strong and unambiguous public statement on these issues, preferably with members of the local community present in order to express solidarity. Strong public positions taken by strong public figures have more of an educational impact than many existing laws;
- .3 Encouragement and facilitation of bi-partisan meetings with politicians and the community. This would be extremely effective and gain a great deal of coverage, as well as successfully portray both major parties as united on this front;
- .4 Provide significant funding for local grass roots initiatives by diverse communities to counter racism;
- .5 A nation-wide focus on the improvement of current racial vilification laws to ensure that they are accessible in all states, applicable to all cases of vilification (not limited to the workplace as is in some states) and ensure that all include the threat of criminal sanctions in order to mobilise police on the issue.

6. PEAK MULTICULTURAL BODIES

- .1 Facilitate a media taskforce to be established similar to PACMAC along with the Press Council. The focus of this would be compulsory media membership and representation, and the interaction of community groups and the media;
- .2 Act as an umbrella organisations, facilitating meetings between Arabic community groups and other interested and relevant parties (such as currently undertaken by the VMC);
- .3 To facilitate all state-based education, police and media activities on behalf of the state government;
- .4 Administer community hotlines on racism;
- .5 Increased funding for ethnic community for media monitoring of the mainstream press.

6. ETHNIC COMMUNITIES COUNCILS

- .1 At times of increased vilification, ECC's to initiate press conferences promoting diversity and condemning vilification with:
 - .2 Major community leaders from all ethnicities
 - .3 Celebrities and well know Australians from diverse backgrounds;
- .4 Undertake and facilitate media campaigns in all ethnic media to advise against racial discrimination within ethnic communities;
- .5 Organise a public day of support for ethnic communities, incorporating the public, police, education bodies, media, government, and multicultural and ethnic bodies. On a specified date all these sectors would speak out against racism and launch their respective education campaigns to combat racial vilification and show support towards diverse communities;
- .6 On a grassroots level ECC's could organise the sale of ribbons, stickers/posters etc. and encourage politicians, celebrities, religious leaders, community leaders, and sportspeople to make pubic statements calling for unity and acceptance in time of international uncertainty.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

- .1 Promote accessibility of HREOC to community groups;
- .2 Promote accessibility of Racial Hatred Legislation to community groups and diverse media;
- .3 Internally encourage awareness of diverse communities and report-related issues;
- .4 Voice condemnation of vilification and workshop strategies to combat discrimination of ethnic communities, especially within government, the workplace and the media;
- .5 Encourage greater ethnic representation in staff and on boards;
- .6 Liaise with Federal government agencies to facilitate discussions between departments and community representation

6. STATE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSIONS

- 10.1 Promote accessibility to community groups;
- 10.2 Promote accessibility of local racial vilification legislation to community groups;
- 10.3 Promote avenue of redress and “what to do” fact sheets to community groups and all media;
- 10.4 Work with and/or assist diverse communities to develop key fact sheets on maligned or vilified communities that are then distributed widely to workplaces, media, schools and state government bodies;
- 10.5 Ensure greater ethnic representation in staff and on boards;
- 10.6 Voice condemnation of vilification and workshop strategies to combat discrimination of ethnic communities, especially within government, the workplace and the media;
- 10.7 Liaise with state government agencies to facilitate discussions between departments and community representation.

CONTACT:

For information about this report, listed recommendations or the Australian Arabic Council, contact:

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