

Palestine International Institute

Aspiring to Bind Palestinians in Diaspora
And Expatriates to the Homeland

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PROFILE OF PALESTINIAN SUCCESS IN AUSTRALIA

Foreword

The Palestine International Institute (PII) pioneers in producing studies provided by researchers in the Diaspora in coordination with the Institute, under the broad category, 'Palestinians in Diaspora'. This time we are pleased to present our readers with the 2008 reviewed and updated edition of our study titled, 'The 3 Palestinian Community in Sweden'. This study falls under the category of the 'Horizontal Studies' series which examines the emergence and evolution of communities and tackles issues related to the origins, structure, makeup, size, problems and challenge of Palestinian communities in the Diaspora. The PII also issues the 'Parallel Studies' series which are supplemental studies with indirect bearing on communities, such as the study on Arab-European relationships. These studies are overseen and supervised by the executive chairman and the research team. Before scrutinizing the data, statistics and information contained in this study, we wish to indicate that it presents academic insight based on scientific and objective research. This is indeed one of the goals for which PII has been established. Our researchers have exerted considerable effort in order to overcome the

difficulties imposed by the scarcity of resources and documents in an attempt to achieve integrated, rather than fractured data at a time when scientific research is considerably lacking and insignificant. The importance of this study, as well as other PII studies, emerges from a number of factors, the most important of which are the following:

- It comes as an early harvest in virgin territory, where documents and sources of information on these subjects, in both Arab and foreign libraries, are virtually nonexistent, including the Internet and centers which specialize in Palestinian issues.

- No scholar or institution has come up with a partial, needless to say complete, series of studies about Palestinians in the Diaspora in countries where they exist, or about communities in the countries which have hosted Palestinians. Despite all, we acknowledge that the present study is in its early stages and is open to further development and expansion on the basis of professionalism, authenticity, transparency and documentation, and with the intent of being broadened and updated. Our mission and duty dictate that we ensure it is subject to the above processes in each of its new editions. The PII welcomes any comments on the development of its studies and scientific and

research references with the aim of achieving its final goals and aspirations. If it appears that we are slightly lagging, it is because our human and financial resources are limited and the conditions under which research is being conducted are difficult.

The time to pick the fruits of our labors is near. All this has been the result of efforts exerted by a dedicated team, despite our humble resources. Our gratitude goes to all scholars and researchers who have contributed to this and other studies which aim to reach those interested, address their patriotic, national, human and intellectual aspirations, and reveal facts and data previously unknown to those who have previously had no access to such information. We further reiterate our desire to receive feedback and urge our readers to send us their comments and suggestions which would serve to improve or advance our studies.

As'ad Abdul-Rahman,

Executive Director

Acknowledgement

The Palestine International Institute wishes to extend its heartily appreciation and gratitude to Mr. Ali Qazaq, the former Palestinian ambassador to Australia, who conducted the main bulk of this research.

The institute also wants to express deep gratitude to all of those who contributed to this study in various ways, including translation, editing and typing... etc. Thanks are due to all PII staff, including researchers and technical support, for their hard work and dedication, which is why this study has been produced with useful content and in proper form.

The Political System in Australia

Following a democratic federal political system, Australia consists of six states and two districts that are united together in a federal union based on a federal constitution that was enacted in January 1901. Every four years, elections take place, and each state has a governor appointed by the local government and considered as the representative of the Queen of England, who is also accepted as the Queen of Australia. According to the federal constitution, there is a federal parliament that is composed of a house of deputies and a senate. The House of Deputies represents electoral districts, the number of deputies for each of which is determined by the population size in that district, a system that gives the most populated states more deputies than the less populated. In the Australian senate, for the purpose of giving equal weight to the less populated states, all states have equal number of senators, namely twelve senators.

There are three main political parties: Labor, Liberal and National. The Liberal and The National Parties always run together in the federal elections. The Prime Minister has to be an elected deputy and a member of the party that wins the election. Ministers can be appointed from members of the Senate.

The Senate consists of 76 members, and, as said above, each state has the same number of senators, 12 from each state regardless of its population. All enacted laws have to be approved by both the House of Deputies and the Senate. According to the 1901 constitution, the High Court is the highest court in Australia similar to the Supreme Court in the USA. No amendment to the constitution can be made without a majority approval in a plebiscite, together with the approval of at least four states.

Appointed by the Federal Government, the Queen's Representative is the highest ranking member in the Government. Elections are held every three years to elect the house of deputies and half the members of the Senate. Six years is the tenure of every senator, compared to three years for every deputy.

Immigration System

According to the Australian Census Bureau, the population has increased by 5% and is now close to 21 million. New immigrants make up 54% of the population, and New Zealand has become the primary source of immigrants during the year 2006-2007 in which 23,906 immigrants came into Australia. Britain is the second in number, 23,223 immigrants. The total number of immigrants who landed in Australia in 2007 reached 152,000 immigrants of whom 70% were skilled labor. For humanitarian reasons, 13,000 immigrants were allowed, among which were many from Sudan and Iraq. This does not include immigrants of high qualifications who were granted a special visa (No. 457) and whose number was 48,000 immigrants. The immigration system encourages skilled and highly qualified immigrants because of their ability to speak English and the availability of jobs that suit their skills, which enables them to integrate easily into the society.

According to the immigration program of 2007-2008, out of 13,000 immigrants seeking political asylum in Australia, 4,500 from the Middle East, especially Iraqis living in Syria and Jordan, were granted immigration permits.

Multiple Ethnicities

The Former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, leader of the Labor Party, put an end to the old policy which only allowed white Caucasian immigrants to Australia, a policy that was taken further by the former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, leader of the Liberal Party, who enacted laws to preserve their heritage within the mosaic unity of the Australian nation. But the Government of John Howard, who lost the elections of 2007, annulled the policy of multiple ethnicities in all its facets and changed the name of the Ministry of Immigration to become Immigration and Citizenship, because, according to him, the assertion of multiple ethnicities has created cantons that inhibit integration into one Australian nation.

The Arab and Islamic Community in Australia

Each community has tried to preserve its national identity by creating schools and Islamic organizations of its own, like the Islamic Turkish Committee, the Egyptian, etc. To give a united image to all these different entities, the Australian Union of Islamic Organizations, formed by members representing all Islamic organizations from each state, was established to represent all Muslims in Australia in dealing with the Federal Government. This union officially receives government assistance to maintain Islamic schools and houses of worship.

The Ministry of Immigration has a record of the first arrival of Arab immigrants to Australia that goes back to a hundred years ago, when Masoud al-Nashbi left his hometown of Bshirri in Mount Lebanon in 1860. Al-Nashbi was heading for the United States, but his ship anchored in Australia instead. He later brought his family and many of his relatives from many towns in Lebanon. In 1860, the conflict between the Christians and the Druze in Mount Lebanon triggered wave after wave of Lebanese immigrants who wanted to flee the conflict in which many lives were wasted. Through the years, other conflicts in the Arab and Islamic worlds gave rise to similar waves of immigrants from Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and now Iraq.

Where do the Arabs Live in Australia?

According to official statistics, the Arab residents in Australia represent 5% of the total population of 20 million. The Lebanese community is the earliest and the largest among the other Arab communities. According to 1996 census, the Lebanese community is around 350,000 people, 44% of whom were born in Australia. The Egyptian community totals about 100,000. As the fastest growing Arab community, the Iraqi community, composed of various ethnic minorities in Iraq, namely the Assyrians, the Turkmans and the Kurds, as well as the Arabs, totaled 20,000 in 1996.

Most Arab immigrants live in New South Wales in Sidney. They are mostly young and have been born in Australia. Many Arabs live in Victoria, the State of Queen's Land, the Capital Canberra and Tasmania.

The Arab communities, especially the Lebanese, are of high social status, and have taken advantage of the democratic political system in Australia which provides equal opportunity regardless of ethnicity or religious affiliation which was greatly enhanced by the Labor Party. Many Arabs have attained very high positions in the political life in Australia. Mary Bashir is a lady of Lebanese descent became General Governor of the State of New South Wales; Steve Brax became the Prime Minister of the State of Victoria, the second state in Australia. Mr. Edward Obeid, from the State of New South Wales, is among the renowned senators in the Australian Senate.

There are more than 100 Mosques and Churches built by Arab immigrants, together with 20 elementary schools and eleven secondary schools, catering to Australians of Arab descent. After Christianity, Islam is second in the number of adherents among Arab immigrants.

The Arab and Islamic Foundations and Organizations in Australia

There is no organized lobby to defend Arab rights in Australia, in spite of many efforts over the years to establish one. Many committees were established for this purpose as a reaction to many events, like the first and the second Gulf wars, as well as the attacks in 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. Yet, all these efforts vanished into thin air.

In fact, the Arab and Islamic communities is but a reflection of the disunity of the Arab world in Australia, rendering them ineffective in the Australian political life. Here, we must say, however, that the individual Arab immigrant is not well attached to the Arab Community. All the achievements of many Arab immigrants were attained by their individual efforts without any effective assistance lent to them from their communities. It is fair to say, though, that Arab immigrants had to focus on getting themselves settled in a new environment first before focusing on collective efforts to enhance the status of their communities.

The Council of Arab-Australian Relation

Established to stop the anti-Arab campaigns that had been waged by the various information media in Australia, this council has a membership of two thousand people. Mr. Roland Jabbour was instrumental in establishing this council which has become very effective in protecting and assisting new Arab immigrants in attaining self-sufficiency. This council has introduced many legal studies concerning immigration which have become a legal reference for the enactment of immigration laws in Australia. The achievements of this noble council are great and too many to count. One of them, however, must be mentioned, namely making Arabic an official language among the local languages which form part of the curriculum in the educational system in Australia.

The Council keeps a watchful eye on the various legislations which affect Arab immigrants in Australia. In order to create a positive awareness within the Australian population towards the Arab cultural heritage, the Council has set the following targets to be attained:

- Raising general public awareness to the Arab contributions to the advancement of Western civilization,
- Raising public awareness to the necessity of attaining and serving the national Australian interests in making foreign policy,
- Encouraging activities needed to bring about mutual economic benefits to Australia and the various Arab countries,
- Presenting the democratic image of Australia as a country of multiple ethnicities and cultures which has achieved great strides in high technology, industry, agriculture, education, art and sports,
- Identifying the exact areas in which opportunities can be found to enhance mutual cooperation between Australia and the Arab countries.
- Drawing a long range strategic plan to strengthen and enhance relations between Australia and the Arab countries.

The activities of the Arab-Australian Council have been focused on four levels:

- 1- Information media campaigns,
- 2- Education,
- 3- Commercial Aspects,
- 4- Cultural Aspects.

The Committee of Arab Australians

This Committee was established to defend Arab rights when Iraq had tied its withdrawal from Kuwait with an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza. The Committee ran a public relations campaign, including many lectures to make the public aware of this truth. The Committee was headed by Eddy Zananiri, who was assisted by a secretariat and an information department run by As'ad al-Abedi and Samir Qassis respectively. They focused on the Democratic Party which denounced Bob Hawke's Policy that was blindly following the American policy, regardless of its negative impact on the Australian national interests.

The Arab Community's Support for the Palestinian Cause

There are only 90,000 Jews in Australia compared to the hundreds of thousands of Arabs and Muslims. The Jewish Lobby's influence, however, is much greater than its number compared to the Arabs, because of the disunity and internal conflicts besieging the Arab and Islamic Communities in Australia, which exactly reflects the fragmentations within the Arab and Islamic worlds.

The biggest problem facing the various Arab and Islamic organizations is the lack of coordination and cooperation among themselves. They still do not have a united voice which can be translated into blocks of votes to be given to the most suitable political candidate. Even cooperating in raising charitable funds through a united effort has failed. Unity of purpose to realize a well-thought-and-agreed-upon plan is needed in this case. This can only be attained by selfless action that is not hindered by personal and regional self interests.

The attacks of 9/11 in New York and of 2002 in Bali

After September 11, 2001, the Arab and Islamic communities in Australia faced a concentrated media campaign which distorted the image of Islam and Muslims in Australia. Unable to respond in a convincing way, the Arab and Muslim communities failed to deter the rising discrimination against their members in the mainstream Australian community.

THE PALESTINIAN IMMIGRATION

Reasons for Palestinian Emigration

Who are the Palestinians in Australia?

In the opinion of some social scientists, one result of the 1967 defeat was the evolution and growth in support for an independent Palestinian national identity and this, in turn, was due to the Palestinian people's character.

The people from Palestine exhibit various characteristics which bind them together and have insured their own survival and that of their long established traditional and cultural values. They strongly believe that they have inhabited Palestine from the dawn of history; they have clung fast to their Arab national culture; they identify themselves as Palestinian Arabs; and Arabic is their national language.

What is termed above as the "Arab Culture" encompasses various fields of human activities inherent in the culture of the Palestinian people, which are expressed in art, literature, science, industry, economy, agriculture, etc.

Needless to say that Arabic language is the major factor that binds together all Arabs everywhere in the world. As Prophet Mohamed said, "Arab affiliation does not come from a father or a mother; it is rather

from one's tongue. Therefore, anyone who speaks Arabic is an Arab. And in God's own words: `The Koran was revealed in Arabic`."

Just as the Arab culture means that the Palestinians share the same history as other Arabs, so does the common bond of Arabic implies that the linguistic aspect of the Arab culture is the life and soul of the whole Arab nation. A Palestinian, carrying the Palestinian national identity within himself or herself, feels that he or she belongs to a people who share the common Arab heritage of history, language, culture, as well as politics.

Thus, the Palestinian in Australia is the carrier of the Palestinian Arab identification. Whether he or she has immigrated from Occupied Palestine, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria or from any other place in the world, that common cultural, traditional and historical bond abides within the Palestinian.

It must be reemphasized that the Palestinian people everywhere have inherent characteristics which identify them as independent people. The Palestinians in Australia are an invisible part of the Palestinian people. Despite mingling with other communities, they have never been dissolved or assimilated into the surrounding communities. They have preserved their Palestinian identity, believing that to abandon it means to betray their own history and cause.

However, fear has been persistent in the various Palestinian communities worldwide, and the 1986 Australian Census is a case in point. In answering the question regarding their origin, the majority of Palestinians, perhaps out of fear or ignorance, stated that they were Jordanians, Lebanese or even Israelis. Only 2149 people said that they were Palestinians, whilst in fact, Palestinians during that period may have numbered as many as 15,000.

In the early 1970s, some Palestinians who held Jordanian passports considered themselves as legally belonging to Jordan. This was a common thread in the community, as similarly, Palestinian holders of passports from other Arab countries consider themselves nationals of those countries. Again the reason goes back to their desire to distance themselves from the so-called "terrorism" that has been associated with the Palestinians worldwide.

For a brief period of time, therefore, Palestinian identity among immigrants was somehow camouflaged. But because of the global efforts of the PLO in preserving the Palestinian identity and the support these efforts received from some of the earliest Palestinian settlers and notables in Australia, the Palestinian identity in that country was successfully preserved.

These **notables** have encouraged Palestinians to announce to the world that they belong to the Palestinian **people**. Among them was the late Bishara Stephan (who arrived in Australia circa 1968 from Nigeria and died in 1980). There were others **like**, Yousef Dabit, Jamil Batshon, Sayel Qassis, Mansour Youakim, Haider Saed, the late Jalil El-Issa, Hassib Elias, Nabil Elias, Kamel Nemrawi, Metri Dahdal, Mahmoud Al-Sheikh, Father Gordon Boutaji, Edmond Dafesh, Abdallah Dahdah, Fawzi Ghandour, Nabil El-Kaddoumi, Jamal and Nabih Zureikat, Basem Abdo, Hussein El-Alami, Fawzi Zeytouneh, Fuad Shureidy, Fares Jahshan, Said Hamid Ribhi, Thabet Dajani, Yousef Abu Jaber, Fawzi Khaled, Hanna Mubayyed and Hani Elturk.

Palestinian Immigration

By the end of World War II, some of the Palestinian young men who had been enlisted in the Australian Army in Palestine came to Australia with the other returning Australian soldiers. A few of these returned to Palestine, but the rest stayed on and had been naturalized as Australian citizens.

Although the nineteenth century had seen the beginning of the Zionist colonization of Palestine, Palestinian emigration became noticeable only after the the Palestinian Catastrophe of 1948. Fear of Zionist atrocities was the main force behind the Palestinian exodus from Palestine to the various Arab neighborhoods.

These refugees had never thought of leaving Palestine permanently, but had been sure of returning as soon as the war would come to an end. Perhaps this was the reason why many of them, at least during the initial stages of the exodus, had never thought of immigrating

to the various Western countries, like the Americas and Australia. It was at a later stage after their exodus that some Palestinians, having realized that returning to their homeland was likely to take a long time, thought of immigrating to none-Arab countries of better opportunities. Perhaps this thinking was enhanced by their being treated as second degree citizens in the neighboring Arab countries.

Although Palestinian migration abroad began with the 1948 Catastrophe, it reached its zenith in the 1960s. Palestinian immigrants arriving in Australia can be divided into three successive groups as follows.

Please note that the names below appear in no specific order.

The First Group

One of the first recorded individual Palestinian immigrants to Australia was Tony Batheesh in 1947. Coming originally from Nazareth, this man was married to a Jewish woman, and was engaged in international trade, particularly between Australia and America.

The first group of immigrants who left Palestine for Australia included Richard Hockey (originally **Haqqi or Haqqian**), who worked in the real estate business (now retired), and Jack and Rose Hockey, all of whom came from Palestine around 1948. There was also Gordon Boutaji who came from Haifa in 1948 (and who was the Consul General for Jordan in Australia), and his brother Charlie Boutaji (a Priest), who also came from Haifa in 1949. Adib Shahin came from Lebanon in 1950. Tony Ghattas, together with his brother Raymond and their mother Mary, came from Jerusalem in 1952.

The Second Group

This group, which began its arrival in the 1960s, came mainly from the Arab states for reason partly mentioned above and for other reasons including:

- The economic circumstances of the Near East, and the search for new sources of livelihood.
- The oppressive policies of the Arab states, leading to restriction of freedom and sometimes to persecution.
- The immigrants' feeling of being exiled in the Arab states whilst their own country was occupied (many felt that exile always felt the same, whether one was close to the homeland, or far away from it).

Our inquiries have revealed that the second group included the following: Sayel Qassis, Samir and the late Shakib Qassis, Raji Ghanayem, the late Habib Khouri, George Shahood, Samir Alshayeb, Nabil Tannous, Nicola, Salim and Jalil El-Issa, Salim Missieh, Al-Susu family, Doughman family, Turjuman family, the late George Youakim, Alexander Petro, Henry Wahhab, Albert Bakheet, George Wahhab, Muneer Hifawi, Albert, Maurice, Lora and Anton Sansour, Sabella family, Simon Hussari, Emile Alwahhab, Wadea Alkhouri, Mohamed Alajami, Robert Hanna, Robert Kalees, Basim and Petro Ghanayem, Jamil and John Rizkallah, Mitri and Hanna Dahdal, Fahmi Alshammas, Habib Antar, Nasser family, the late Mourad and Linda Ishak, George and Saliba Dabbagh, Ghassan and Wadie Zarifeh, Fawzi Khaled, Thabet Dajani, Ahmad Mohamed As'ad, Khadhr Abdul Majeed, Fawzi Wahhab, the late Yousef Yasmineh, Dr.Ghalib Hamad, Ali and Mahmoud Nasr, Nicola and Joseph Nour, the late Mousa Bayyouk, Fahd, Basem, Fouad, Nicola, Ibrahim and Fares Jahshan, George Soudah, Abdo Qahoush, Elias Kharman, Samir Siryani, Abdallah and Fadel Dahdah, Elias Albina and his sons, Daoud, Richard, the late Maurice and the late Hanna Soudah, Kamel Mseise, Mike Nasser, and Faraj Abu-Ghazaleh, Boulos Himmo, Farid Nouri and Naim Mallas.

These names mostly represent the heads of the families. Again the list is not complete.

The Third Group (1970s and After)

Among the many who came to Australia in the Third Group were the following: Mansour and Yousef Youakim, Yousef Kharman and family, Abboud Qamar and family, Jaber Awad and his sons: Khalil Tawfik and Khadr, Yousef Dabit, Nicholas Turk, Suad, Hani, Labib, Maurice, Mazen, and Suheil Elturk, Hanna Rafidi and family, Manuel Rafidi, Jaser family, Adel and Maurice Mansour, Joseph Azzam, Salem, Samir and Sami Hanania, Hanna, Nicola, George and Anton Hanania, Simon Turjman, Foad Rafidi, George and Hanna Bastoli, Simon Batarseh, John and Joseph Nesnas, Saed Elias and his sons: Joseph, Nabil, Labib, and Hassib, Hanna Fayyad, Ellen (Um Issa) Batshon and her sons: Issa, Jamil, Samir and Bassam, Raymond and Samir Fleifel, Suheil Liddawi, the late Farah Telegraph, Hanna Barhoumeh and his sons: Ibrahim, Nabil, Nasser and Maher, late Nicola Awad and his sons: Jalal, Tawfik, Gabi Samir, and Issa, the late Hilaneh Dahdah and son Nicola, George Hajjar and Mother, Elias Shehadeh, Anton Hajj, the late Arshalous Mirana and his sons Issa, Joseph and Farid, Elias and Andoni Asfour, Jamil, Samir, Nabil and Waleed Abu Ali and Mother, Moussa, Issa, Zahi Marji and Mother, the late Issa Shishani: Francis Dickha and his sons: Frederick, Hanna, Michael and Raymond, the late Khalil, the late Saad, the late Victor and Joseph Ennab, Fernando Francis, Issa Eid, late Khalil Eldeir and his sons: late Elias and Samir, Tawfik and Anton Haddad, late George Banyan and Family, Satrak and Alex Hogobian, Sarkis Khashadourian, Jamil Jubian and his sons: Alex and Albert, George Jubian, Kharoufeh, Alex Kassissieh, Anees Haddad, Baseem Rabih and family, the late Nimer Shamshoum and son Suleiman, Maurice Sayegh and his sons: Raymond, Nabil and Samir, Salloum family, Samawi family, Wardini Family Simon Saed and son Nabil, the late George Zabaqleh and Family, Victor Ghoubar, Issa, Joseph, and Elias Lolas, Mousa Abunucerah, Dr. Habib Talhami, Sam Moussa, Rami Meo, Elias El Jeldah, George Al Dalou, Fayez Tarazi, Khader Dabit, Anton Amseis, Jack Shiber, Johnny Fakes, Esam Husari, Johnny Alqare, Sami Hajjar and Gladys Srouji Zaccak, Simon Sayagh, Sami Dabbagh, Farah Dabbagh, Ethan Dabbagh, and the Counsellor of the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, Mohammed Abu Dagga. Costa Shaber, Jack Shaber, Essa Shaber, Elias Shaber, Nabil Srouje, Jack Srouje, Abdo Suroujje and Basem Suroujje.

In Adelaide: Edwar Jamil Madbak and family.

Palestinians Who Immigrated to Melbourne

Sonya Karkar, wife of the barrister Hanna Karkar (QC); Sabah Abdulla; Shaher Mashni and son Nasser; Muammar and Kamal Mashni (Ambassador of Palestine to Australia); Izzat Abdulhadi; Mohamed Hijazi; Afif Nasser-Eddin; Samir Jarasimos Mattar; Philip Andreas El-Saqqa; Elias Mikhail Awad; Michel Awad; Dr. Kamal Kaabar; Abdul-Latif Almatrah; Mohamed Nimer; Imad Sukkar; Amin Abbas; Rafiq Kutifan; Tony Shaer; Adib Fares; Tayseer Al-Hissi; and Labib Elturk.

The Successive Migration

By 1975, the total number of Palestinian who had immigrated to Australia may have reached 6,000. By 1992, the number was thought to have exceeded 15,000, including the first, Australian-born, generation. The fact that many Palestinians landed with different national passports, and no accurate records of the Palestinian population is available, our records here are only estimated.

It is noticeable that most, but not all, of the early Palestinian immigrants belonged to the working class, and had relatively low levels of education. Since they had very little money, some came to Australia at the expense of the Catholic Church, while others were assisted by those who had preceded them.

Like many other migrant communities, successive Palestinian migration suffered from the restrictions in immigration regulations, which led to a decline in the number of new immigrants. Unlike the easy immigration conditions encountered by the early immigrants, it became impossible to obtain immigration visas except under family reunion category, or unless the immigrant carried a university degree

Relative to other Arabic-speaking communities, Palestinians have a high level of education and skills, and their women participate actively in the workforce and in the Australian life. A relatively recent book by the Palestinian academic Dr. Ibtisam Abu Dahou (co-authored with Richard Teese) entitled "*Education, Workforce and Community Participation of*

Arab Australians", that was published in 1992, described how Palestinians were well educated and well integrated into the Australian society.

The Gulf war of 1991 led to the expulsion of large numbers of Palestinians from the Gulf States, particularly from Kuwait. Many of those people were forced to immigrate to Australia. Unlike those in the previous groups, these Palestinians were often professionals, highly educated and brought with them significant capitals. It could be said that they formed a "Fourth Group" or the Fourth Wave.

Among those who immigrated in the Fourth Wave were: Khadr Sultan, Mahmoud Yousef Sultan, Mahmoud Mohamed Sultan, Majid Sultan, Mohannad Sultan, Sharif Zakout, Mohamed Zakout, Ahmed Zakout, Abdel-Aziz A'thamneh, Fayez Murad, Jareer Alhamuri, Jibril Bashir Hillis, Nazier and Elias Ayad, Emad Sheblaq, Nabil Habibi, Mu'taz Skaker, Ramzi Khuri and Zuhair Shahin.

PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATIONS

The Palestinian Embassy in Canberra

When PLO was recognized worldwide as the legal and sole representative of the Palestinian people, it became possible for this organization to have diplomatic representations in various countries of the world. One of those is in Canberra, Australia.

The PLO and the Commission's Work

In the past, Palestinian delegation in Canberra was unable to effectively unite the Palestinian community in order to build the necessary political and social infrastructure needed for an organized Palestinian "co-operative" (i.e. co-operative web, which could interconnect the Palestinian, Arab and the general Australian communities politically and

socially, such that the Palestinian Cause could have an appropriate effect as a balancing force within the media).

Many believe that the Delegation's role in establishing a united Palestinian organization in Australia has been a major failure and it is also felt that some strategic miscalculations by the Commission have left the Palestinian community divided for a long time.

It was only when Dr. Izzat Abdulhadi was appointed in early 2006 to lead the Palestinian diplomatic delegation to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, that the Palestinians there became more effectively united around their cause. The major difference was that a wise and an independent leadership, able to effectively communicate with different organizations within the Palestinian community, had been brought to force.

This leadership has had to deal effectively with many regional organizations and communities.

Palestinian Organizations in Australia

The Palestinian organizations in Australia are certainly larger in number than one expects in the relatively small Palestinian community. These organizations are generally socio-political, have different goals and objectives, but have one thing in common, namely belonging to one Palestinian people and considering PLO as their sole representative.

In their social gatherings, picnics, sporting activities, folklore exhibitions, or any other traditional functions, these organizations have one guiding principle, namely defense and promotion of Palestinian rights in Palestine.

Palestinian organizations in Australia (and in fact globally) have set as their focal aim, the struggle for Palestine. Again, these organizations are not perfect and, at times, because of personal politics, some have deviated from their original path. Petty problems have for example, prevented the formation of the National Palestinian Council which would have overseen

all organizational activities and operations. Because there is such a gap – a gap in the form of the absence of a unifying national Palestinian force – there has been a degree of fragmentation within and without many of these organizations.

Organizations in Sydney

The 1967 war which ended with the defeat of the Arabs, had led to an upsurge of what might be called a Palestinian nationalism. Consequently, many Palestinian-Australians began to form organizations having the objective of fighting and defeating Zionism.

The first Palestinian organization was founded in 1967. This was a time when a separate Palestinian identity was not widely recognized. The organization was named the Australian Jordanian Society, the membership of which included Palestinians as well as Jordanians. A Palestinian by the name of Albert Bakheet was elected as its first President. Few in number at that time, the Palestinian immigrants were in desperate need of social interaction with other Palestinians and Arabs, which prompted that society to hold social gatherings in order to bring the community closer together. That society also provided immigration assistance to the Palestinians who were in need of such service. This service included provision of legal advice and representations on behalf of the applicants at the then Federal Department of Immigration.

The Australian Arab Jerusalem Club

In line with the PLO objectives, and to foster the burgeoning Palestinian identity in Australia, there was an urgent need for a Palestinian organization to form a "focus group" dedicated at creating an independent Palestinian identity. This prompted Palestinians in Sydney to form a founding committee for the establishment of the first Palestinian

organization in Australia. The meeting was chaired by Mansour Youakim, with the presence of Bishara Stephan, Mitri Dahdal, Sayel Qassis, Abdulla Dahdah, Fauzi Ghandour, Nicola Awad, Saed Hifawi and Jamal Zureikat.

After discussing their goals and objectives regarding the Palestinian community, this group called for a general meeting to be held on 2nd September, 1972 in the hall of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Redfern. In that meeting, the attendants discussed the proposed rules of the organization, after which elections for the administrative board of the first ever independent Palestinian organization in this country took place. The newly born organization was christened The Australian Arab Jerusalem Club, and was led by Mansour Youakim as president, later followed by Bishara Stephan.

The goals of the said Club included the following:

- Upholding the rights of its members.
- Welcoming newcomers to Australia, and helping them with relocation and settlement.
- Holding social gatherings open to both the Arab and the general Australian communities.
- Offering financial, moral and other support to the Friends of Palestine movement, and to other Arab groups in Australia who were working to bring about a just solution to the Palestinian problem.
- Helping with the consolidation and reinforcement of the Palestinian identity, in order to counteract the Israeli government's denial of that identity.

The name of the Club was later changed to *The Australian Palestinian Club*.

The Australian Palestinian Club

With the objective of enhancing its Palestinian identity, members of The Australian Arab Jerusalem Club, notably Joseph Dabit, Jamil Batshon, Nicola Awad, Edmond Dafesh, and Elias and Michael Barjil, agreed in 1974 on changing its name to become The Australian Palestinian Club, marking a slowly, albeit steadily growing Palestinian lobby.

Yousef Dabit, who was the force behind the establishment of the Palestinian Club, particularly the architect of the idea of building the Club at its location in Guildford, Sydney, served as President of the Club for a considerable period of time. Elias Barjil was the Club secretary, and George Fahel, Henry Wahhab and Jamil Batshon were members of the Club committee. Fouad Shureidy was also an active member.

The Palestinian Club cooperated with other Arab Australian organizations in its efforts to enhance and increase the political, social and communication activities of the Palestinians and other Arabs. The most significant goal of the Club was to pursue the political means of defending and promulgating the Palestinian cause. The opening of its main facility at Guildford in 1994 was a major milestone for the Club. This was also the time when the Club was officially registered as a limited shareholders company in Greenacre. It was a proud moment for all Australian-Palestinians when the Palestinian flag rose in the air above the building.

Most of the members of the Palestinian community and other Arab communities conduct their meetings and functions at the Club's hall.

The immense support of the Palestinian people allowed for the continued development of the Palestinian Club, with members attempting to acquire another facility with more capacity to accommodate ever increasing numbers.

On 22 May 1994, the first stage of the new Palestinian Club in Guildford was completed. It consisted of a ground floor and a car park. At the time of its opening ceremony, a function was held and was attended by representatives of the Palestinian community and by Arab and Australian dignitaries. In his opening night speech, Club President Yousef Dabit paid tribute to the efforts and dedication of the Club's shareholders and committee members. He also made special mention of past Presidents Mansour Youakim, Bishara Stephan, Edmond Dafesh,

Fouad Shreidi, Jamil Batshon, Hani Shahin, Elias Kopty and Tawfik Awad. The occasion was a joyful one, and Palestinians were proud because they were determined to build their "home" and they had succeeded in doing so.

Stage two involved construction of a hall to accommodate over 300 persons. Palestinian engineers, the brothers Zuhair and Saleem Habibeh were contracted to complete the construction. The Australian Palestinian Community Association was amalgamated with the Australian Palestinian Club in 2002 and 2003. Jalal Asfour was elected President of the Club in 2006.

Some of the major activities of the Palestinian Club have included:

- In 1975, with the cooperation of other Arab groups, the Club sponsored the Australian visit by the American based Sami Hadawi, to give lectures in Australian universities in relation to the Palestinian cause.
- Again in 1975, the Palestinian Club extended an invitation to the PLO representative in Cairo, Jamal Al-Sourani, who was accompanied by Edmond Dafesh on his tour of the main population centres of Australia and New Zealand. During the tour he met officials from the then departments of immigration and foreign affairs.
- The Club commissioned a visit by a delegation of its members to Tunisia lead by the club president at the time, Tawfik Awad, to see the late President Yasser Arafat and to inform him of the progress of the Palestinian community in Australia. President Arafat sent a hand-written note in Arabic congratulating the Club, its members, and the Palestinian community in general for establishing the organization in Australia.
- At the time of President Yasser Arafat's demise, the Club opened its doors for consolations, for the benefit of all Palestinian and Arab factions in Sydney.
- In 1980, the Club began publishing a magazine in English called *Palestine Review*, for which a property was purchased in Greenacre

which functioned as the Club's centre (the property was paid for by selling shares to the members and from funds generated through Club functions).

- The Club has provided considerable financial aid to Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip and it is currently contributing to twenty poor Palestinian families whose members have endured internment and other humiliations under the Israeli occupation.
- The Club supported the Palestinian Olympic team which participated at the 2000 Sydney Olympics in Homebush.
- The Club received and hosted many Palestinian dignitaries including, among others, Nabil Shaath, Zuhair Tarazi, Mustafa Barghouti, Sami Sidawi and the Palestinian Ambassador to Australia, Izzat Abdulhadi.

Today, the Club has an active membership of about 380 Palestinian families. The current President is Samir Musallam and the seven committee members include Tawfik Awad as the Secretary. The Club's current value is about 3 million dollars.

It must be noted that the Palestinian community, which is not the largest Arab community in Australia, is the only Arab community in Australia that owns a centre which serves its own people and other Arab communities also.

Recently, the Club celebrated its 37th Anniversary. The celebration was attended by Hon. Barbara Perry, Minister of Health, Ambassador Izzat Abdulhadi, The Syrian Ambassador to Australia, Mr. Khaldoun Asfour, representing Bankstown Council, most of the former presidents of the Club and many of the respectful Palestinians and Arab guests.

The Australian Palestinian Professional Association

APPA is a group of Australian-Palestinian professionals who are self-employed or employed in professional industries (engineering, law, accounting, business consulting, medicine, IT, etc). They have the following attributes in common:

- They live in NSW and of high professional calibre and ethical conduct.
- They are proud of their Palestinian origin in addition to their pride in holding the Australian citizenship or being residents of Australia.
- The members are very keen on advocating the Palestinian Cause independently from any specific party or group directions in Palestine and Australia. On the contrary, they work on reconciliation and use differences as a strength factor to synergise a buoyant Palestinian lobbying body in Australia and Palestine
- Members work cooperatively regardless of any religious, social or regional background.
- APPA members work closely with all existing Palestinian advocacy bodies in Australia and abroad and endeavor to avoid any dispute or negative competition.

Mission

- Influence effectively the Australian decision-making structure and process to make it more even-handed and balanced towards the Arab-Israeli struggle.

Specific Objectives

- Help in the creation of awareness and support in the Australian community to the Palestinian Cause and the Arab-Zionist struggle in general and advocate the Palestinian just cause in all fields, especially the information media and public relations.
- Develop leadership, dialogue and political skills at the Australian-Palestinian community with special focus on the younger generation.
- Provide assistance: financial, educational, health and trade for the Palestinians in both Palestine and the Diaspora. This objective is carried out mainly by working on having access to the Australian government and NGO's aid and donation funds.

Strategies / Programs

- Advocacy strategy which can include: networking and coalition building, public education, effective media strategy and lobbying
- Institution building including: organizational, leadership and human resource development.
- Consultation, networking and cooperation with all relevant civil society organizations in Australia

Palestine Workers Union

At the request of the General Union of Palestinian Labour in the Arab countries, representatives from a number of Palestinian organizations in Australia (The Palestinian Club, the Palestinian Association and the Arab Cultural Centre) met in 1976 and elected the executive committee of the Australian branch of the Union. Its President was Nabil El-Kaddoumi and its most important aims focused on promoting the Palestinian cause and arrangement of celebrations on occasions of national significance.

On 18 August 1982, the Union joined The Palestine Human Rights Committee and The Palestine Information Office in calling for a press conference in Melbourne, which served as a platform for calling on Australia to provide support and emergency assistance for the victims of Israeli aggression in Lebanon against both Palestinians and the Lebanese. The spokespersons at the conference were unanimously critical of the unprovoked aggression and asked the Australian people to contribute by providing medical staff and equipment to Lebanon.

Persons who were active in The Palestine Workers Union included: Sati Abu Khalil, Abdul Qader Karanouh and Khalil Alhumsi. The Union organized several seminars commencing in 1991, which were presided over by Peter Indari, Hani Elturk, Habib Shams, Robin Savillian and others.

The General Union for Palestinian Workers

The General Union for Palestinian Workers, Australia Branch, is one of the oldest active Palestinian organizations in Australia. It has always supported the various Palestinian and Arab groups through consultation.

Through its work, the General Union was also an important contributor to the official recognition of PLO as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people worldwide.

The General Union has twenty members in the Palestinian National Council (both working members and observers). These members attend all relevant conferences and contribute to the decision making process in relation to various Palestinian stands. The Australian branch is considered as one of the most important branches of the Union. It participated in the Union's international general conference held in Amman, Jordan. The conference was attended by the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and it was where the deputy President of the Australian branch, Abdul Qader Karanouh was elected to be a member of the international Union's High Council. Munir Mahajnah was also elected as the media consultant to the international branch, tasked with developing media strategies in relation to the re-shaping of the Palestinian Media Speech, to better communicate the Palestinian cause.

The goals and activities of the General Union for Palestinian Workers include the following:

- Strengthening the relationship between Palestinian families and Palestinian people and assisting new Palestinian immigrants.
- Ensuring the awareness of Australian-born Palestinians in relation to their own history.
- Reviving and preserving Palestinian customs and traditions.
- Supporting the youth through cultural, educational and reform programs both in the Middle East and in Australia.
- Helping Palestinian families living in camps or detention centres at home and in the diaspora.
- Educating the general community in Australia, so that it can recognize and understand all the problems faced by Palestinians in the absence of a proper Palestinian state.
- Holding an annual ceremony honoring high school and university graduates. This important ceremony also has the purpose of highlighting the fact of the high standard of education among Palestinians.

- Annual charity night ("food in the month of Ramadan") designed to gather the Palestinian people together and to highlight their various contributions.
- Annual celebration honoring the pilgrims of Mecca.
- Gatherings to honor the early Palestinian immigrants to Australia who encouraged the next wave that followed.
- Ceremonies honoring Palestinian innovators in the fields of the arts, media and culture.
- Community picnics and cruises.
- Establishment of "sympathy" centre at the Union's premises for national personalities, martyrs and demised Palestinians in Australia.
- Gatherings and functions honoring Palestinian delegates who participate in sporting activities, international conferences and municipal and union delegates who travel to Australia to meet the community for the purposes of dialogues and discussions.
- Sending union delegates and children to Palestine to know and study their origins and history.
- For the purpose of preserving Palestinian cultural and artistic heritage, the Union holds art exhibitions and provides a forum where various Palestinian artists, including vocalists and singers, can express themselves. It is worth mentioning that the Palestinian singer, Marwan Ekermawi, is a committee member of the Palestinian Workers Union and is in charge of its artistic division. He has produced a song in Australia called "Mish Hansa" ("I will never forget") which won first prize in 2004 in Tunisia. In the Palestinian Satellite Channel Competition.

This is not a single layer organization, but rather composed of several Palestinian organizations that have pooled resources to effectively achieve their own individual and collective goals. Some of these organizations include the following:

- The United League of the Australian Palestinian Workers.
- The Palestinian Press Bureau.
- The Palestinian Heritage House.
- The Australian Palestinian Arts Committee.
- The Australian Palestinian Girls Graduates Association.
- The Australian Red Crescent Association.
- The Palestinian Group in the Australia Greens Party.
- The Palestinian Group in the Australian Labor Party.
- The Palestinian Group in the Liberal Party.
- The Australian Palestinian Sports Committee.
- The Palestinian Women Union.
- The Australian Palestinian Youth Committee.
- The Australian Palestinian Association for Blacktown.

The Union's Australian branch is considered the only Palestinian press centre which researchers of the Palestinian cause can resort to. The research is carried out by means of archived documents and/or personal meetings with committee members at the Press Centre.

The Union is also home to various film production companies which produce documentary films having to do with the Palestinian Cause. The productions are sourced from personal meetings with subject persons and are based on firsthand accounts. A special committee observes the process of the film making and ensures that the final product bears the desired quality.

For its media campaigns in Australia, the Union issues its annual calendar which includes a simple media reminder message about the daily suffering of the Palestinian people. The calendar depicts some of the significant historical events relating to the struggles of the Palestinian people in the last seventy years.

Together with other Palestinian organizations, the Union has participated in peaceful demonstrations in the country. The Union and the Australian Palestinian Club, to cite an example, had convened a gathering of protesters (three bursting buses were taken from Sydney) outside the Federal Parliament in Canberra. At the end of the demonstration, which was led by Mahmoud Sultan, Vic Sovelian and Khalil Humsi, and which was joined by the members of the parliament, Anthony Albanese, Laurie Ferguson and Janice Crosio, a memorandum was submitted to the Parliament.

The Union also supported and facilitated Palestinian sporting delegation from Palestine who participated at the 2000 Sydney Olympic and Paralympics Games. The contributions in relation to the Olympics are as follows:

- Meeting the Palestinian athletes and delegation at the Sydney International Airport.
- Arrangement of media coverage before and during the time the delegation was in Sydney.
- Counteracting Zionist propaganda in Australia against the Palestinian participation, as well as opposing the proposed minute of silence, mourning the Israelis who were killed in 1972 Munich Games.
- Transportation of Paralympians.
- Allowing the full use of the Union's headquarters and facilities located near the Olympic Village at Homebush.
- Holding a reception party and a picnic attended by members of the Palestinian community to honor the delegation.
- Purchasing and donating ten wheel chairs for the benefit of the Paralympics delegates.
- For the purposes of Athens (Greece) Olympic Games of 2004, publishing a media booklet about the Palestinian sporting activities and Olympic Endeavour's, entitled *Athletes in Exile*. The Palestinian embassy in Athens entrusted the Union with the

development of this booklet and 9000 copies were printed and distributed to Greek delegations and organizations.

At various times, functions and political gatherings were arranged by the Union. Some of these have included the following:

- Revival of the Catastrophe (*Al Nakba*) Remembrance.
- International Jerusalem Day.
- Land Day.
- Palestinian Revolution Day.
- International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.
- Palestinian Independence Memorial Day.
- Memorial of the Disastrous 1967 War and the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- Martyrs Day.
- Memorial of the Death of Yasser Arafat.
- Memorial of the Al-Aqsa Uprising (*Al-Intifada*).

The Australian Arab Palestinian Support Association (AAPSA)

Formed in 1998 by Samira Ghabar, the AAPSA is a charitable, non-profit organization that was registered with the Australia Taxation Office in 1997. This association, which has received acknowledgement and commendation for the quality of its services from many organizations and individuals, is an outstanding example to be followed.

The AAPSA goals and achievements have included the following:

- Offering various high quality services to both general Australian and Arab communities.
- Working with governmental and non-governmental organizations to secure the needs of the Palestinians and other Arab communities.

- Working to establish a network of affiliations with governmental and non-governmental organizations.
- Representing the Australian Palestinian community at all levels of the government.
- Working to encourage peaceful co-existence and co-operation.
- Securing financial grants for four years (2004-2008) from the then Department of Social Services, to sponsor a project in relation to the provision of services for women and juveniles.
- Recently many AAPSA members have supported a new initiative to commence dialogue between the Palestinian and Jewish communities in Sydney, believing that peace and Justice are the only means of resolving the problems between the two peoples.
- Many state and federal government parliamentarians attend most AAPSA activities.

The Palestine Committee

In 1982, Palestine Workers Union joined the Palestinian Club and the Palestinian Red Crescent in establishing The Palestine Committee. Some of the Committee's activities have included the following:

- Broadcasting a thirty minute weekly program in English on the radio station 2SER FM, which continued for 18 months. The number of listeners was estimated to be as high as 11,000, mostly university students. The broadcasts were ended because of lack of resources.
- Organizing a number of functions, including celebration of the Declaration of the Palestinian State, to which many Australian officials and members of the Palestinian community were invited.
- Holding receptions for international Palestinian visitors including such personalities as Zuhdi Al-Tarazi and Hanna Siniora.

- Working to facilitate better co-operation between the Palestinian community and the Australian government and people.
- Strengthening relations with other Arab organizations in order to resolve some of the problems facing the Palestinian community.

The Palestinian Red Crescent

Equivalent of the Red Cross, the Palestinian Red Crescent was established under the direction of PLO. The initial committee held its first meeting on 25 October 1981. Its President was Mansour Youakim, and other members included Dr. Mahmoud Hourani, Mahmoud Awad, Bassam Batshon, Muneer Haifawi, Ahmad Faraj and Sami Hajjar. The meeting was held under the auspices of Mahmoud Nouredien Saada, a member of the Central Committee of the Palestinian Labour Union.

The goals and the achievements of the Red Crescent have included the following:

- The collection of donations for the purchase of medicine, hospital equipment and other needs, for Palestine.
- Encouraging doctors to work in hospitals and medical centres in Palestine.
- Facilitation of Palestinian nursing services in Palestine.
- Inviting Dr. Fathi Arafat, President of the Palestinian Red Crescent in Palestine to visit to Australia.
- On 2 October 1983, the Red Crescent sent a letter to the Australian Prime Minister at the time, Bob Hawke, asking the Labor government to officially recognize the PLO. The Government's reply was received on 2 March 1984, in the form of a letter from Deputy Minister Susan Ryan. The Minister stated that the current policy of the Australian Government was to find a comprehensive and a just solution to the Palestinian problem, conditional upon guaranteeing the security of Israel within recognized and protected borders. Against this, Palestinians would gain recognition of their rights to self-determination in an independent state. This could

only be accomplished with the agreement of neighboring countries. The Minister wrote that the Australian Government would adhere to its non-recognition of PLO so long as PLO did not recognize Israel's right to exist.

In 1988, with the approval of Dr. Fathi Arafat, then President of the Red Crescent's Council in Cairo, the Palestinian Red Crescent in Australia was dismantled.

The Palestinian Cultural Centre

The Palestinian Cultural Centre was established in the early 1980s by a group of Palestinian intellectuals, headed by As'ad and Nabil Abdi, Dr. As'ad Shiban, Rita Stephan and others. The group leased premises at Marrickville owned by the then Department of Ethical Affairs. Among the Centre's goals was the promotion of Arab-Palestinian culture in Australia and increasing public awareness of Palestinian political concerns.

The Centre's work is important because, as compared to other Palestinian organizations, it has the closest relationship with both the Australian media and the Australian political sphere.

The Centre was the first organization in Australia to establish an English library of Palestinian heritage. The texts and materials, press releases, photographs, paintings and visual arts work, were exhibited to the public. During these exhibitions, the Centre would raise funds through book sales. The Centre has also held and participated in seminars on Palestinian issues.

The Immigration to Australia in 1988 of Eddie Zananiri was a significant event for the life of the Centre. He had long and deep experience with the Union of Palestinian Students, an important affiliate of the PLO. In Australia he became responsible for the re-organization of the Cultural Centre in co-operation with Asaad Abdi, Anita Jubyan, Samir Qassis, Rita Qassis and others.

After the 1990 Gulf War, many highly qualified Palestinian professionals who were based in the various Gulf States immigrated to

Australia, and a good number of them joined the Centre and enriched it with a new blood that was needed for its expansion and evolution. Eventually, the Centre became a communication tool between the Palestinian and the Australian communities.

In addition to other Palestinian and Lebanese cultural organizations, there is the Arab Cultural Centre, which was established circa 1975 by Haidar Saed and Elias Asfour. This centre, led by Dr. Mahmoud Hourani, was represented by the Committee for the Support of the Intifada (the Uprising), and was established to raise funds for the Palestinians in the occupied territories. The Arab Cultural Centre has concentrated its efforts on publicizing the Palestinian Cause, and has been joined by other Palestinian organizations in holding demonstrations, events, functions and seminars on issues related to Palestine.

The Council of Australian Palestinians

The Council of Australian Palestinians, under the presidency of Albert Jubian, is an organization which celebrates the Palestinian National Day annually at the Parliament House of NSW in presence of the of NSW Prime Minister and the head of the general Palestinian Delegation, Dr. Izzat Abdulhadi. This celebration is regularly attended by various politicians, Palestinian people and other Arab dignitaries.

ORGANISATIONS IN MELBOURNE

The Palestinian Community Association of Victoria

The Palestinian Community Association of Victoria is an Australian registered organization located in Melbourne, Victoria. The original name of this organization was The Palestinian Charity Association, and in June of 2006, adoption of the new name was approved by the Association's

general assembly. (The web site of the Association: www.palestine-victoria.org.au).

The Association's Mission

The primary mission of this Association is to involve the Palestinian community in the wider Australian society, while safeguarding and promoting the Palestinian identity in Australia.

The Association's Objectives and activities have included the following:

- Promoting strong social relationships amongst members of the Palestinian community.
- Fostering Palestinian community integration with the Australian society whilst maintaining the unique Palestinian heritage, values and "sense-of-belonging".
- Improving the welfare of Palestinian Australians, and seeking assistance from governmental and/or non-governmental bodies when required.
- Enhancing the role of the youth in the community by engaging them in social, cultural and sporting activities.
- Supporting the Palestinian cause and the aspirations of the Palestinian people.
- Creating and cultivating relationships with Palestinian communities in Palestine through charitable, cultural and social activities.
- Acting as a consultant body to governments, media organizations, or individuals with respect to all matters relating to Palestine and the Palestinians.
- Promoting awareness and knowledge of the Palestinian identity, culture and history.

- The Association carries out many social activities, one of which is the celebration of the graduation ceremony for the community's students.
- The Association has also participated at the Palestinian Immigrant Museum, to exhibit old Palestinian people's tales, and pictures of Palestine. Again, the major aim is to enlighten Palestinians about their ancestors' history.

Structure of the Association

Having seven members with defined roles and responsibilities, the Management Committee of the Association is annually elected. One of its earlier founders was Mohamed Nimr, with the secretary Amin Abbas.

Beit-Jala Palestinian Association

Many Palestinian associations in Melbourne, Victoria were previously organized under one umbrella known as the Palestinian Organizations Committee. The most famous of these associations in Melbourne was Beit-Jala Palestinian Association.

A charitable and social Palestinian association, Beit-Jala was founded in 1988 with about one-hundred members. Two of its founders are Philip Endrawes Al-Saqqa and Elias Mikhail Awad.

With the purpose of safeguarding the Palestinian identity, this association carries out social, cultural, artistic and political activities. Some of its activities include picnics and gatherings held with the purpose of consolidating cordial relationship among its members.

A most significant activity of the Association, which is used to counteract the said generational regresses, was the publication of the book entitled, *Australians from Palestine*. The book was an attempt to present a summary of Beit-Jala's members' stories relating their experiences of immigration to Australia. It was also a survey of the

causes and consequences of the migration, highlighting the important role of the immigrants in relation to preserving the Palestinian heritage in the diaspora. The book also aimed at being useful for new Arab immigrants to Australia. Because the book was essentially a listing of members' names, it was used as a means of familiarizing the Beit-Jala members in Australia with one another and with others abroad. Elias Mikhail Awad was the book's general editor and the cover was designed by Dr. Kamel Kathar. The book was translated by Abdul Latif Al-Makrah.

Australians for Palestine

The idea of Australians for Palestine arose when a group of people who have the same line of thinking decided that a new strategy had to be formulated in Australia to advocate Palestinian human rights, and justice and peace for Palestine. The group is an informal "network" of individuals committed to raising awareness about Palestine in Australia and operated through a media centre run by a steering committee. The media centre relays information to the network in order to assist it maintaining credible public relations through honest, accurate and responsible reporting and communication.

Australians for Palestine does not purport to represent the Palestinian communities in Australia, but they see themselves as defending the Palestinian position according to the fundamental principles to which all people are entitled: freedom, peace, security and prosperity. That position is based on achieving the *final status issues*, which are still the subject of on-again, off-again negotiations since 1991 and includes the following positions:

- The inalienable right of Palestinians to self-determination in their own homeland.
- The establishment of an independent sovereign state with Jerusalem as its capital.
- The establishment of a genuine, contiguous state without any Israeli settlements, on all of the territories occupied in 1967 as decreed by the UN resolution 242.

- A fair and an acceptable solution to the refugee problem consistent with international law and the UN resolution 194.

The disinformation, myths and inaccuracies disseminated in Australia about the tumultuous events that dispossessed, displaced and denied the Palestinians self-determination since 1948, require a pro-active, concentrated and constructive approach. Australians for Palestine defends the legitimate position of Palestinians and challenges the Israeli-weighted opinions and policies that have been increasingly adopted to the detriment of the Palestinian identity in Australia.

Australian Foundation for Palestinian Children

The mission of the Foundation is to improve the lives of Palestinian children.

The Goals and Objectives of the Foundation have included the following:

- Facilitating medical aid and assistance to Palestinian children.
- Development and support projects that enhance independence and living conditions of Palestinian children with permanent disabilities.
- Collection of donations and conduct of charity functions to support and contribute to projects that help improve general health, wellbeing and education of Palestinian children.
- Offering any form of relief and assistance to Palestinian children suffering from the effects of the Israeli atrocities.
- Development and support projects that enhance expertise and abilities of the personnel, organizations and volunteers that specialize in the welfare of Palestinian children.

Palestinian Organizations and Unity

As can be seen, the Australian-Palestinian community expresses itself through various endeavors – these endeavors (each in turn involving other

areas of interest to the Palestinian community) aim to demonstrate to the Australian society and government that the Palestinian community has been an integral part of the Australian multicultural society through:

- Social activities;
- Cultural activities;
- Artistic activities;
- Sporting activities; and
- Political and media related activities.

Several attempts had been made to bring more unity to the Palestinian community. Such attempts have involved moves towards formal union under one umbrella in the early 1980s, and efforts to unite the Australian Palestinian Association with both the Australian Palestinian Club and the Palestine Workers Union. Unfortunately, none of those unification attempts have lasted more than a few months. In the mid 1980s another attempt was made to set up a committee comprised of members from the Palestinian Club, the Union and the Red Crescent, but the committee was dissolved after about three years because of internal disagreement.

A further attempt was made to establish a Palestinian action committee composed of representatives from all of the Palestinian organizations, but that body was equally short-lived. Another such effort was the call made by Ali Kazak, PLO representative in Australia, for the establishment of the Australian-Palestinian Council to act as an umbrella organization for all Palestinian groups, together with private, non-affiliated individuals. A general meeting was held circa 1988, but the moves came to naught.

In light of what has been said above and usually due to personal politics, it is evident that attempts to unite the Palestinian community will be doomed to failure; whereas a united federal council is likely to be able to mobilize all Palestinian talents, to resolve internal and external communal problems, and to carry out a variety of activities, including those related to the informational needs of Australian Palestinians (and Australians in general), as well as social, sportive and cultural activities.

Unfortunately, however, Palestinian organizations will remain, for the foreseeable future, in a state of painful disunity.

Influence of the Palestinian Community on Australian Policies

The size of the Palestinian community, compared to that of the Jewish community, may be a contributing factor in relation to the bias tendency of the Australian government.

The Palestinian community in Australia is relatively new and small in number. Hence, there are a few Palestinian intellectuals who can have proper influence on government policies. Unfortunately, however, their influence, again due to their small number, is relatively ineffective.

As discussed earlier, the majority of the members of the Palestinian community are working class people who came from disadvantaged societies in occupied Palestine or in other Arab countries, where tyranny and political oppression had prevailed. Unaccustomed to freedom back in the Middle East, they were afraid to express their views in Australia on government policy that might have an influence on the Palestinian Cause. In addition to that, members of the Palestinian community refrain from participation in the media or in the political activities, which, in turn, has reduced their influence on policymaking. Besides, it is important to mention that, despite the fact that there are six Palestinian organizations in NSW alone, lack of an umbrella organization or a uniting council has a negative effect.

Therefore, the Arab communities in Australia are somewhat fragmented and lack centralized national representation. On the other hand, the Australian Jews, whose number is only about 90,000 as compared to about 300,000 Arabs, have a considerable influence in all walks of life, an influence that they exercise through a single Zionist organization. The opening of the PLO office in Canberra has, indeed, provided a motivation for Palestinians at least in overcoming some of the shortcomings of their own community. Since its inauguration, PLO's office, through its contacts at the diplomatic and the media levels, has increased the networking and support opportunities for the Arab community as a whole. However, as discussed in details earlier, both the

Labor and the Liberal governments have been consistently in favour of Israel and its position in relation to most geopolitical debates and discussions related to the Palestinian question. Some examples about the bulwark against these barriers may help clarify the situation.

Former Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, was renowned for his friendship and support of Israel. He was succeeded by Paul Keating, whose government was more understanding of the Palestinian Cause. The Keating government policy in this area continued until the Liberals won the next election led by John Howard, whose government closely followed and perhaps mimicked the American policy towards the Middle East, particularly in relation to the guiding principles followed by both Bush senior and junior – guiding principles which perhaps produced the worst imaginable results in terms of the Middle East and Palestinian policy. The Howard government, which granted Israeli policies great support, despite the criticism Israel was facing at the United Nations and the international community, was also one of the least friendly governments towards the Palestinian Cause.

The support meted out to Israel by the previous government was great, and the example of the Peter Costello illustrates the point. In an interview with the *Australian Jewish News* paper, and in response to a question about the influence of the global Islamic terrorism and any countervailing measures against it, Mr. Costello, the Treasurer in the Australian government from 1996 to 2007, mentioned that Australia and Israel have the same policy in relation to overcoming Islamic terrorism. Peter Costello also claimed that the support for Israel would weaken if the Labor Party were to win the Federal elections. (This seemed to relate to some Labor parliamentarians, like Julia Irwin, who showed sympathy towards the Palestinians more than they did toward Israel. In effect, Costello was certain that the trade union movement, together with the Labor Party, would destroy the Australian cultural and the political relationship with Israel.) He added that in 1982, the Labor Party granted a visa to Sheikh Taj al-Din al-Hilali, who divided the Islamic community and was a centre of resistance with respect to assimilation with the Australian people. Sheikh al-Hilali appointed himself as the Australian Mufti, but resigned later. Despite all the criticism against him, Costello

continued his full support of Israel and stated that his government might even make tax-deductible donations to Israel.

All these factors combined contribute to the Palestinian community's ineffective response to governmental policies.

The new position taken by Rudd Government

It is encouraging that this consistent trend has lately changed a bit under the new Labor leader Kevin Rudd, who is a supporter of the Road Map that was designed to bring about a level of peace in the Middle East. We say this in spite of the fact that Rudd's position in relation to the Palestinian Cause still leaves much to be desired, as will be explained below.

During the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, Kevin Rudd said that Israel had the right to defend itself and condemned Hezbollah and Hamas for entering Israeli territory, a comment with which he thought would strengthen the relationship between the Labor Party and the Jewish community.

After winning the 2007 Federal elections, Rudd came to power with a new strategy aiming at strengthening Australia's relationship with Israel. He congratulated Israel on its sixtieth anniversary celebrations and proposed to this effect a draft called the Israel Support Draft, which was quickly approved by the opposition party when submitted to the Parliament. This was perhaps the first time in Australia's history that such a draft is accepted by both opposite parties in the parliament.

In a meeting with Ibrahim before the elections, Kevin Rudd again confirmed his support for Israel's view in relation to the conflict. He refused to submit a proposed draft to the Australian Parliament calling for safeguarding Palestinian rights as per international law.

Later on, a Palestinian political and media campaign was launched to petition the Prime Minister to implement Australian public policy which supports and adheres to international resolutions in relation to

Palestine. Palestinian and Australian organizations sent their representatives to the Prime Minister requesting him, out of being of fair, to change his position in support of Israel. The Palestinian Labour Union (PLU) collected 1500 signatures in a petition protesting the Israel Support Draft. The petition was handed over to a federal parliamentarian (Brice) at his Blacktown office requesting him to submit it in turn to Kevin Rudd and to the Parliament.

In addition, Women for Palestine and The International Council of Churches, together with other groups, launched a strong media campaign which ultimately resulted in an advertisement that appeared in *The Australian* newspaper signed by academics, various intellectuals and others demanding that the Prime Minister submit a draft proposal in the Australian Parliament on the 60th anniversary of the Palestinian Catastrophe. Again Kevin Rudd refused to reply. It was clear, then, that the official policy of the new Australian Government was, in essence, the same policy that had always been: a copy of the American policy that blindly supports Israel.

In response, the Palestinian community intensified its activities with a strong campaign to unmask and shame the Israeli policy against the daily lives of the Palestinian people under occupation, as well as the continued Israeli violations of international law.

The campaign was supported by the appointment of a new Palestinian ambassador to Australia, Dr. Izzat Abdulhadi, who had enjoyed a significant experience in the field of human services, which enabled him to establish an effective Palestinian lobby. This lobby was in turn able to achieve many things for the Palestinian Cause, one of which was coordinating its activities and making an alliance with the so-called Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, a parliamentary group that was in support of the Palestinian Cause.

Although the alliance had members within the Australian Parliament, Kevin Rudd seemed to ignore their point of view and refused to deal with them. He did not allow a member (Julia Irwin) to speak in the Parliament when he submitted the Israel Support Draft.

In a later development, Australia voted in favor of the United Nations' decision that outlawed building Israeli settlements on Palestinian land. Australia also voted in favor of another UN resolution demanding Israel to comply with the Geneva Convention on Palestinian Territories.

The fact that Australia voted at the United Nations against Israel and, essentially, against the USA, and as the previous Howard Government was consistent in its voting record with the USA and in favor of Israel, the vote was considered a momentous change in Australia's stance towards Israel and the Palestinian Cause.