

The AUSTRALIAN FRIENDS OF PALESTINE ASSOCIATION



CHAIRPERSON'S 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

Dear Members and Supporters,

2006 has been a year of action and achievement and I am proud to re-live it with you.

Our first event was the AGM held in February at Marcellina's which included a forum addressed by Professor Ahmad Shboul from Sydney University, Dr. David Palmer from Flinders University, and our own Dr. Bassam Dally. The AGM was well attended and took our membership up to nearly 100. On the topic of membership the Association owes a huge debt to Ibrahim Farran who has worked hard to maintain it and at the same time put our finances in order.

In April over the course of the month we put on the Palestinian Film Festival at the Mercury Cinema in Adelaide. The schedule included documentary as well as feature films from Palestine. The films were excellent and we attracted many new faces and formed new friendships. The highlight was undoubtedly "Paradise Now" but all films were well received.

In May, HE Izzat Abdulhadi was appointed as the new Palestinian representative in Canberra. AFOPA invited Mr Abdulhadi to Adelaide for a series of meetings with us and different organizations. He was also hosted by the Parliamentarians Friends of Palestine in SA for an afternoon function sponsored by us.

The first half of the year saw the Book Appeal on behalf of the Qattan Foundation in Gaza. The appeal was co-ordinated by Merlin Nathan and has only recently resulted in some very satisfying photos recording the receipt of the books in Gaza. Delighted faces all round. Well done Merlin Nathan and all who assisted.

July brought to us the disgraceful Israeli attack on Lebanon and we participated with our Lebanese friends in protest rallies at Parliament House. Mutual suffering has only brought us together with yet another national group who suffer at the hands of the Zionists. The outrage also prompted us to donate medical supplies to the value of \$1,500 to Lebanon.

October was the commencement of an intense period of activity on the part of AFOPA. We commenced with the Edward Said Memorial Lecture delivered by Prof. Tanya Reinhart. It was our privilege to be the prominent mover in the bringing of Professor Reinhart to Australia. Apart from Adelaide she spoke with our assistance in three other cities. Her visit coincided with a revival of the Federal Parliament's Friends of Palestine

Group and Bassam's and my visiting Canberra at that time. I was able to meet with many politicians, including Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, and I was also able to attend a presentation by Professor Reinhart to members of Parliament.

It was necessary at the time of Professor Reinhart's visit to bring the Advertiser to task for its biased reporting, drumming up three year old stories on suicide bombings. Bassam took on this task with gusto and who knows, it may be producing results.

Shortly after Professor Reinhart's visit we were pleased to present a book launch in South Australia of Antony Loewenstein's very worthy book "*My Israel Question*". This event was held at the Rendezvous Allegra in Waymouth Street and was a great success. Houssam Abiad was the principal organizer of this event and is to be congratulated.

In November Ibrahim Farran traveled to Canberra and represented AFOPA at a meeting of similar groups who are interested in promoting peace in Palestine. It is hoped that these efforts will enhance our collaboration with other similar groups nation wide. Also, I was pleased to be invited by new friends in Perth to make a presentation at the University of Western Australia to coincide with the showing of "*Paradise Now*". Some 120 - 150 people were in attendance and the organizer, Reem Freij, has hopes of carrying the momentum of the event into the establishment of a branch of AFOPA in WA. Reem is to visit with is here in Adelaide early in the New Year. Finally in November I was asked to read a paper written by Michael Shaik on the Perspective Radio program on ABC National Radio.

December saw no let up with Claire O'Connor representing us at the UN Asian Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in Kuala Lumpur on 15-17 December 2006. This attendance heralds AFOPA's appearance on the international stage. I am certain that we will not leave it.

Also in December we participated in festive season events at the home of Executive member Gus Shahin - thank you Gus and Ruba- and also as guests of the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine here on North Terrace. Goodwill exists in our State Parliament. We have to learn how to tap it.

Finally, 2006 concluded with a letter of protest being sent by me, your Chairperson, to the Sydney Festival, regretting the choice of the Batsheva Dance Company from Israel to open the Sydney Festival. Our letter of protest coincided with John Berger's recent Press Release from Ramallah calling on all artists to boycott Israeli artistic and cultural events.

Well done to all for 2006. We turn with renewed enthusiasm to 2007.

Your Chairperson

Paul Heywood-Smith QC