



President's Report

AUSTRALIA PALESTINE **ADVOCACY** NETWORK

www.apan.org.au
www.Facebook.com/AustraliaPalestineAdvocacyNetwork

October 2018

I would like to commence this report by honouring the late Harry Wallace whose death in January saddened us all. We extend our continuing condolence to his wife Pat. Harry's generosity and commitment underwrote our Network. Without his generosity it is hard to imagine the network in its current form.

As I begin this draft, political events affecting Palestine are changing rapidly.

In May, the 70th Anniversary of the beginning of Al Nakba, mass civilian protests in Gaza were met by brutal Israeli force, killing over a 100 and maiming thousands. On 14th May President Trump moved the US embassy to Jerusalem. While the embassy has been moved to West Jerusalem, nevertheless the action pre-supposes the Israeli claim that Jerusalem is its undivided capital and consequently a just settlement of the Israel Palestine question is no longer US policy, if it ever was. The situation has led President Abbas to say that the US can no longer be considered a dispassionate and fair mediator.

In July the Israeli government enacted its Nation State Law, with constitutional weight, that legalises two classes of citizens. Non-Jews have an entrenched inferiority. The law demonstrated that Israel has no current intention of negotiating a just two-state solution, instead claiming undivided sovereignty over Jerusalem and asserting settlement building to be an essential character of Israeli Jewishness. The passing of this law sparked large protests in Tel Aviv by Israeli Jews as well as Druze who do not want to live in a state which is essentially apartheid in character. While the law does not change prevailing practice, it entrenches it.

In late August the US announced it will cease funding UNRWA on the spurious grounds that monies given to the agency are used for terrorist activity. There is of course no evidence to support this claim. The defunding has dire consequences. It means that many educational and health facilities for Palestinian refugees will no longer operate, leaving children without education, or worse, the gap being filled by partisan groups

The point of these US policies is to remove Palestinians from the list of those recognised as refugees with a right of return. This move is serious for all, but for some it is disastrous. As urgently expressed by Dr Olfat Mahmoud on her recent Australian tour, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon now including additional thousands who have fled Syria will be left with no support at all in a country that treats them as people with no rights because they are expected to return.

The move against UNRWA follows similar attempts to discredit humanitarian NGOs with the aim of curtailing their support for Palestinians. In 2016 assertions were made against World Vision Australia that its monies were being misappropriated. Forensic auditing has shown this is simply untrue. Mohammed Al Halabi, World Vision's Gaza CEO, continues to languish in an Israeli jail with no evidence to support the charge and no trail.

"We will not be silenced; the more Palestine and Palestinians are subjected to human rights abuses and infringements of international law, we will double down and increase our efforts."

In 2018 we see another repeat of these tangential accusations, with APHEDA having its funding suspended following attacks in the Daily Telegraph.

Under Trump, the US appears to be positioning itself to force Palestine into a corner.

Unsurprisingly, whenever an Australian media report objectively accounts these moves by Israel and the US against Palestine and Palestinians, the push back from the Israeli lobby in Australia is immediate; too often effectively cowering into silence many who should know better. When politicians or journalists refuse to be cowered they deserve immediate and unequivocal support.

This is the backdrop or context in which we in APAN are working. We will not be silenced; the more Palestine and Palestinians are subjected to human rights abuses and infringements of international law we will double down and increase our efforts.

In this dire context, clearly something needs to change.

This year the APAN Executive has decided to focus on Australian Recognition of Palestine as our immediate political goal. Recognition is be a specific and concrete step for the Australian Government to show we respect Palestine and Israel equally. Our view is that it would not pre-empt the final form of a just peace, but would lay a more equal foundation for negotiations towards either a one or two state solution. And it is winnable. Because of work undertaken in the last few years, the ALP is already discussing the Recognition of Palestine, and several senior former Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers are advocating for it to become Australian Labor Party policy. This would be a massive step forward, as we would be the first of our major allies to make this step.

Lobbying Parliamentarians

APAN has continued to be active in direct parliamentary lobbying. In this reporting period APAN visited parliament in August, September and November 2017, as well as June 2018 (and most recently in August 2018, though this is in the next reporting year). APAN has also organised events in the Queensland, Victorian and New South Wales State Parliaments. In addition to these visits and events, APAN has been lobbying for parliamentarians to be active on particular issues. Julie Bishop leaves the Foreign Ministry with a very large stack of disappointed letters from APAN!



Federal Parliamentary Friends of Palestine convenors with Military Court Watch
L-R The Hon Sussan Ley MP; Maria Vamvakinou MP; Salwa Duaibis; Gerard Horton; Senator Janet Rice; Ken O'Dowd MP

As already mentioned, APAN's political lobbying focus this year has been towards the Labor Party adopting a policy to Recognise Palestine. The ALP conference was due in July but has been postponed until December. In preparation we are lobbying parliamentarians, as well as mobilising our support base. The latter work is being implemented, with training and support for those who will lobby delegates who are expected to have an influence at this conference. We have booked a Fringe event and have 9 serving parliamentarians scheduled to participate. We are excited to be working with supporters around the country, lobbying their local members. The move to a community model is significant to APAN - we believe this to be the future.

We have gained access and influence throughout the parliament, though disappointingly not at the most senior levels of the Coalition. The leader of the Australian Greens has become increasingly vocal about Palestinian rights, while many Labor parliamentarians remain strong advocates for Palestine. Nineteen parliamentarians attended our most recent event.

BDS

APAN has been pleased to see the emergence of *BDS Australia*, under the banner of the Palestine Support Network of Australia. We are strengthened by a dedicated group whose role is to focus on BDS campaigning in Australia. We have supported BDS by arguing to parliamentarians and other policymakers that it is a legitimate nonviolent response to oppression. The fact that so far there has been no attempt in Australia to legislate against BDS activities is a testament to the work being done to legitimise BDS by many people.

Media and Communications

This year we have deliberately targeted more of our resources and energy in media and specifically social media. To this end we have been delighted to welcome Sara Saleh on staff. An immediate outcome is that social media followers have more than doubled, while we have regularly secured high level media interviews and published Opinion Pieces.

We are building on our network of journalists and producers from flagship shows like *The Project*, *RN* with Fran Kelly and *Drive* with Pat Karvelas. Through key speakers/guests events, we have created new and shareable online content, successfully engaging with a new digital demographic. Expanded capacity has enabled our media, messaging and content to be proactive rather than predominantly reactive, as in the past.



In February the executive undertook a one day media training workshop, helping us to strengthen our media skills and better understand the changing media landscape.

APAN's primary media engagement has addressed unfolding events involving Palestine and Palestinians. In December when President Trump announced the US Embassy move, APAN issued two media releases, focusing on our Foreign Minister's response. We enjoyed

SBS TV and ABC radio coverage and believe this helped build pressure for the Minister to resist

following the US lead. Similarly, in the lead up to the 70th Anniversary of Al Nakba we issued a press release, gained radio coverage on ABC and community radio, and successfully published opinion pieces in the Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian.



We also worked with Palestinian Young people to record videos about what Nakba means to them and released this on our Facebook.

We were really pleased to be featuring the voices of young Palestinians. We did a Facebook live event with Noura Erakat, which reached 8,000 people.

Our most popular video to-date is a highlighted clip of Roger Waters' Palestine event which was shared widely on Facebook, reaching over one million people worldwide!

APAN has sought to produce both mainstream and social media content. We resisted Israeli politicisation of the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of Beersheba, generating media coverage about this issue. We also invited our supporters to activate following a cartoon about the whitewashing of Palestinians from the commemorations, and were excited that 10 supporters had their letters published. In January we issued a media release about our withdrawal from Paypal. One of the journalists who went on the APAN study tour wrote a substantial piece about it in the Australian Financial Review. Our biggest media moment of the year saw Roger Waters on *The Project*, talking about Palestine with Waleed Aly. *The Project* has a reach of at least 600-700,000 viewers. This interview (with no “counter” or “debate”) was unprecedented for *The Project*, and contributed to a major narrative shift.



APAN continued to generate our own substantial amount of content through social media.

To mark Ahed Tamimi's 17th birthday in January we tweeted supporters to take action on her trial (via Avaaz's online petition); through this we were able to raise the wider issue of Palestinian children in detention. APAN was mentioned in the Senate by Senator Urquhart, and Senator Rhiannon shared our post to her 26,000 Facebook followers. In the lead up to International Women's Day, APAN led an online #FreeAhed mothers and daughters social media 'poster' campaign - an interactive way that successfully attracted Palestinian people, especially youth, and got them involved. Our infographics and pictures went viral, in some instances, reaching 10,000 people.

We were pleased to support BDS Australia with their press release regarding Argentina's football boycott of Israel, and Gaza Freedom Flotilla with their Australian media strategy (including digital, press releases and contact lists).

APAN was approached to write a piece for the Australian Muslim Times (35k reach) about our annual dinner - our largest yet! This was our first interaction with this outlet, we published in print and on the website.

We pitched our Military Court Watch speakers to several flagship media programs and though this was unfortunately derailed due to the change of Prime Minister, however in the process we were able to build new relationships with 8 prominent journalists and producers.

Engaging Palestinian Young People

APAN has decided that engaging and equipping Palestinian young people to be active in the movement is a major strategic objective. In all our work with Palestinian youth we have sought to ensure this is a genuine, ongoing, and consultative process.

Building on our initial workshop in Melbourne last May, we facilitated a workshop for Palestinian young people in October, focusing on debating skills. This was led by younger professional Palestinians with skills in academia and/or debating. At this session, as well as in other forums, young people have indicated they want to learn more about Palestine, and so we are planning a series of webinars that should help them grow in knowledge and confidence.



Palestinian and Australian mothers and their daughters taking action in the lead up to 17-year-old Ahed's trial

"...Parliamentarians who have become some of Palestine's most vocal advocates in the parliaments."

In July we were honoured to work with AFOPA Edward Said memorial lecturer Noura Erakat during her visit to Australia. We were delighted to work with Mona and Hanna in Sydney who undertook a Facebook live event with Noura.

We also hosted her Melbourne event with Australians for Palestine where we sold out the State Library. Noura's message about connecting the Palestinian struggle with other social justice issues resonated with many.

Our current aim is to build and sustain a pipeline of active Palestinians who can take more public facing roles. We are arranging for them to undertake media and advocacy training, both within our wider 'lobbying' / advocacy strategy, as well as workshops specifically designed to upskill them.



L-to-R: APAN Executive Nasser Mashni,,
Noura Erakat, APAN Staff Jessica Morrison

Trips to Palestine

APAN continues to see study tours to Palestine as a vital strategy. Experiencing reality on the ground is worth more than a thousand words in terms of advocacy. Many study tour participants have become committed activists, or have built on their existing involvement. This includes parliamentarians who have become some of Palestine's most vocal advocates in the parliaments.

In 2016-2017 we facilitated four study tours - one generalist tour, one for journalists and two political trips, one for the Australian Greens and one for Labor Federal parliamentarians. This significantly stretched our financial and human resources. Our specialist trips rely on sponsorship from donors, while our generalist tours rely on the capacity of participants to pay the increasing costs.

APAN has not facilitated any study tours since November 2017 but we hope to do so in the coming year.



Australian Labour Party Parliamentarians in Jerusalem in November 2019, as part of APAN's study tour

Overseas Visitors and Major Events

We worked with other solidarity groups in Melbourne to host the second Palestine National Day in Federation Square on the 15th November, seeing Palestinian flags proudly flying. We enjoyed music and dance performers from the community, as well as prominent Palestinian Australian speakers – Olympic medallist Loudy Wiggins (Tourky), and senior journalist Maher Mughrabi.

In November 2017 we were delighted to work with Adelaide University and AFOPA to host the *Palestine and the West* symposium with many wonderful national and international speakers.

Through November and December 2017 we supported Gideon Levy's tour in Australia. We supported his meeting with political leaders in Canberra, as well as hosting very successful events in the Victorian and National parliaments. We also organised a Melbourne public event with the Australian Jewish Democratic Society, selling out the State Library for our first time.

APAN members noted international superstar and BDS champion Roger Waters was coming to Australia in February 2018, and encouraged APAN to seek to work with him. Following several persistent inquiries from APAN and members, with just 10 days' notice Roger Waters indicated he'd be willing to work with us. Supporters were mobilised around the country and 20,000 Palestine postcards were distributed at his concerts. We also hosted a public event in Melbourne attended by 500 people.

The late Harry Wallace began organising and investing in an Australian speaking tour for Gerard Horton & Salwa Duaibis of Military Court Watch. APAN, working alongside MIAT and the Wallace Family, took up the tour organisation while it was funded by the Wallace Foundation and MIAT, including APAN's staff time.

The tour focused on engaging new audiences, particularly legal networks, as well as policy makers. In August Gerard and Salwa spoke with hundreds of people in public and private forums, including a significant proportion of legal networks. Two events were held with the Law Council, one in Canberra and one in Adelaide. In addition, an event was held in conjunction with the Law School at the University of Tasmania, and one at the Pro Bono Centre at the University of Queensland.

The tour also included a very successful event at Federal Parliament, where 19 parliamentarians attended, a round-table with 8 DFAT staff, and meetings with State parliamentarians of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

APAN also organised or supported a number of other smaller events. We worked with the Australian Jewish Democratic Society and Sun Moth bar *Pale Stein for Palestine*, where Hawkers Brewery donated a keg, and we engaged many a more hipster audience. We were also pleased to support the Big Ride for Palestine. We also gave online support to campaigns supporting Ahed Tamimi and Issa Amro. We were pleased to support an APAN member Gaye as she ran a creative Nakba commemoration in Melbourne. We of course also supported other larger demonstrations and key events throughout the year – including the Palestinian Film Festival.

"APAN needs to increase its capacity to mobilise people into existing and emerging advocacy opportunities....we are seeking to further increase and diversify our membership."

Membership

Our membership continues to grow, with APAN now having 228 members, an increase of over 50 since our last report, who have come both from people already involved in the movement, and those who have not had any previous involvement. In addition to the new members there are another 42 that are yet to renew from last year.

We have one new organisational member this year, ActionAid – making three aid and development organisations and 31 organisational members in total.

The growth in individual memberships represents a significant income stream for APAN. However, even more significantly it represents both a challenge and opportunity to engage these people actively in the movement. APAN needs to increase its capacity to mobilise people into existing and emerging advocacy opportunities.

In the coming year we are seeking to further increase and diversify our membership, hence bringing a concessional membership category proposal to the AGM.

Jerusalem Peace Prize

APAN has been working with Australians for Palestine to establish the *Jerusalem Peace Prize*.

This prize honors an extraordinary Australian's work for Palestinian justice. The inaugural winner has been announced as Stuart Rees, and the prize will be awarded in the Victorian Parliament on the 29th of November this year.

Fundraising

APAN has significantly diversified its funding sources in the last 12 months and is in an increasingly stable financial position. We are very pleased to have been able to secure sufficient funding to extend the contract for our second staff member, at least to the end of this calendar year, and hopefully beyond.

Our largest income stream continues to be very successful annual fundraising dinners, held in Melbourne in August 2017 and Sydney in August 2018. The success of these dinners is attributable to massive work by Executive members in those States and a group of APAN members and supporters.

We have enjoyed an increase in general donations and are particularly grateful for major donors who have contributed significant funds, including



for study tours. We have also successfully invited donations through our emails, focusing on the employment of our digital based campaigner in 2017.

We are also grateful for increased membership income and will focus on continuing to grow this in the coming year.

We have secured our first philanthropic grant this year. We look forward to developing our partnership with this Trust, and to identifying other Trusts and Foundations that may be willing to support our work. We are also grateful to APAN members and supporters who offer APAN in-kind support, including volunteering their time as well as their homes or cars when APAN Executive or staff are travelling.

The Executive

This year the executive membership has been George Browning as President, Bassam Dally as Vice President, Nasser Mashni as Treasurer, Ros Harper as Secretary, Peter Slezak, Wendy Turner, George Hatoum, Rouba Rayan and Asem Mousa. During the course of the year Asem felt the need to withdraw for personal reasons, leaving us without a representative from WA. As always, the executive have been extremely hard working. The network is blessed to have such a diverse team from a range of backgrounds and skills representing them. We are particularly indebted to Bassam, Nasser and Wendy who along with myself work to ensure that the day today responsibilities and challenges that face us are dealt with. Unfortunately, Rouba and George Hatoum have announced they will stand aside next year for personal reasons although still assisting the network and its goals in other ways.



Executive Officer and Campaign Officer

It has been a great joy (and relief) that the Executive has this year been able to employ a second member of staff in Sara Saleh. She and Jessica are an excellent team, not only expanding APAN's capacity and outreach but feeding each other's energy. Jessica has now been in her role for over 7 years. This is a considerable time for a person to work within a not-for-profit organisation and remain sane, full of energy and focussed. Jess is all of these things, but she and we must continue to work hard in maintaining her health and professional expertise. This year she has undertaken invaluable skill training which she has found immeasurably helpful.

The strength of the network lies in the grass-roots, but it is the skill and dedication of these two that enables the grass-roots to be effective. Michael Shaik and Lisa Arnold continue to support APAN in smaller but no less valuable roles, and we are very fortunate to have their skills and experience supporting APAN's work.

In Solidarity

Bishop George Browning
APAN President



L-to-R: Senator Richard Di Natale, Gideon Levy, Bishop George Browning



www.apan.org.au

www.Facebook.com/AustraliaPalestineAdvocacyNetwork