

**Australia Palestine Advocacy Network**  
22 National Circuit Forrest ACT 2603  
Postal Address: PO Box 3217 Manuka ACT 2603

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Media Release

## **LAUNCH OF AUSTRALIA PALESTINE ADVOCACY NETWORK**

Following an extensive consultative process, organisations and individuals from around Australia have formed a broad-based national coalition to advocate for the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and an end to Israel's military occupation and blockade of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), which was registered as an incorporated association on 17 May 2011, will engage with the Federal government, Federal and State parliamentarians, business, academia, professional groups, the media and community groups to ensure that Australia and Australians are fully and accurately informed about the issues that form the background to the continuing oppression, human rights violations and despair suffered by the Palestinian civilian populations of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Speaking at the conclusion of APAN's first Executive Meeting, APAN President Jim Barr said the new organisation would be seeking a constructive dialogue with senior levels of government and mainstream Australian society. "A just and comprehensive peace between Palestine and Israel is well overdue", said Mr Barr. He welcomed US President Obama's demand that negotiations for a peaceful settlement be based on Israel's 1967 borders. "Illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and the continuing mistreatment of the Palestinian people is no way to ensure Israel's national security", he said.

Mr Barr said that continuing settlements construction by Israel in the West Bank had demonstrated to the entire world that Israel was not serious in seeking a negotiated settlement. APAN will be urging the Australian government to press Israel to suspend settlements construction and return to the negotiating table in good faith. "If Israel wants the friendship and support of countries like Australia it must act responsibly and in accordance with international law," said Mr Barr.

Referring to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's plans to seek recognition of the Palestinian State at the United Nations this coming September, Mr Barr said the Australian government should join with other countries in recognising the State of Palestine at the UN General Assembly. "The Palestinians have sought self-determination and an end to Israeli occupation through negotiation but this has led them nowhere", he said. "The time has come for a new approach and Australia should be part of it", he added.

Mr Barr said there was increasing concern among Australians about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank. As an organisation with a national reach, APAN would be conveying that concern to the highest levels of government in Canberra and would be urging a rapid and comprehensive review of Australia's approach to the conflict, he said.

**For further information please contact:**  
Jim Barr, President, tel 0425 462 277, or Robert Newton, Vice President, tel 0423 610 849

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**The APAN Executive**

**Revd James Barr, President**

Jim is Co-Minister of the Melbourne Welsh Church and Director of the Major Issues and Theology Foundation. He is on the Board of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, a body working on inter-faith relations, and is a member of the Ethics Committee of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

**Robert Newton, Vice President**

Robert is a consultant on Middle East Affairs. He is a former Australian Ambassador to Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Libya and Tunisia. He is the immediate past Chief Executive of the Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

**Wendy Turner, Secretary**

Wendy is a Brisbane-based unionist, and committed social justice and human rights advocate with first hand experience of Israel's illegal conduct in Gaza and occupation of the West Bank.

**Issa Sharweesh, Treasurer**

Issa is a Board member of the Australian Palestinian Professionals Association and an active member of Australia's Arab community. He is the founder of a management consulting business and a member of the Board of the Australian-Arab Business Network based in Sydney.

**Samira Ghabar, Executive Member**

Samira is a Sydney-based academic, community leader and social worker. She is founder and current President of the Australian Arabic Palestinian Support Association.

**Kris Hanna, Executive Member**

Kris is an Adelaide-based Solicitor. He served for 12 years as a member of the South Australian Parliament and was Co-convenor of the SA Parliamentary Friends of Palestine.

**Gregor Henderson, Executive Member**

Gregor is Co-convenor of the Ecumenical Working Group on Palestine-Israel, and a Member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. He is immediate past President of the Uniting Church in Australia.

**Peter Jennings, Executive Member**

Peter is the Executive Officer of Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA, the overseas humanitarian aid agency of the Australian trade union movement. He has been associated with humanitarian projects in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, the West Bank, and Gaza.

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