



Tuesday 14 October 2014

MEDIA STATEMENT:

ANIC CONCERNED ABOUT PROPOSED FOREIGN FIGHTERS BILL

His Eminence, the Grand Mufti of Australia, Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammad and the Australian National Imams Council affirm that, like all citizens, we have a vested interest in the ongoing safety and security of Australia. However, we are not convinced that the threat, no matter how serious, warrants sacrificing basic human rights and imposing on Australians the unnecessary burden of living in constant fear and paranoia.

ANIC is also concerned with the haste with which the introduction of these new laws is being pursued. Passing new laws in the current climate of fear and heightened anxiety has never been a good idea. The review should be carried out under more considered and reasoned conditions.

ANIC nonetheless, given the restricted time frame to assess the proposed bill, submitted to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security's inquiry into the *Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Foreign Fighters) Bill 2014*, that these new measures will broadly limit key human rights such as freedom of movement, freedom of speech and freedom of association.

We are especially concerned that the new laws will broaden the definition of "advocating" terrorism to include "promote" and "encourage", as well as "counsel" and "urge"; and if an organisation is deemed to have advocated terrorism, they could be proscribed. ANIC is aware that this provision is of particular concern to preachers who spend a large proportion of their time teaching and advocating on social justice issues. "The proposal has serious implications on free speech and will have a chilling effect on legitimate religious and political debate. We recommend that the provision for advocating terrorism be removed," said the Mufti of Australia.

ANIC supports the concern of academics and community groups in Australia that the new travel offences contained in the Bill are extreme and unnecessarily burdens people who may need to visit designated areas for innocent reasons such as religious pilgrimage. We recommend that the declared area provision be removed or alternatively amended to include as part of the offence a specific illegitimate purpose for being in the area rather than the traveller being required to provide a legitimate defence.

ANIC is also concerned that the new law, which lowers the threshold for Customs offices to detain a person will lead to an increase in the number of cases that have been reported recently where innocent travellers were detained for questioning causing them to miss their flights. It is our view that the inconvenience caused and associated financial impost are unjustified.

"We are extremely concerned that basic human rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of movement will be affected by provisions contained in the Foreign Fighters Bill," said Dr Abu Mohammad.

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