



Queensland Forum for Christians, Jews & Muslims

The Abrahamic Faiths Forum of Queensland

Open Letter to *The Australian*

Response to articles:

- "Top university 'begged' for Saudi funding" (Richard Kerbaj, April 22, 2008)
- "Top university 'an agent of extreme Islam'" (Richard Kerbaj, April 23, 2008)
- Editorial, April 23, 2008

The Queensland Forum for Christians, Jews and Muslims ("the Forum") expresses its deep disquiet concerning the two articles and the editorial that appeared in *The Australian* on 22nd and 23rd April on the subject of a Saudi Arabian government grant to the Griffith Islamic Research Unit (GIRU) at Griffith University. We firmly reject the inferences and accusations against the unit and its director, Dr Mohamad Abdalla.

The suggestion that by seeking and accepting a grant from the Saudi government Griffith University, GIRU and Dr Abdalla may be opening the door to an extremist form of Islamic ideology verges on the malicious. As Professor Ian O'Connor, Griffith's Vice-Chancellor and President points out (*The Australian*, 24th April), other renowned universities such as Oxford, Harvard and Georgetown have also entered into partnerships with the Saudis.

Members of the Queensland Forum for Christians, Jews and Muslims have worked side-by-side with Dr Mohamad Abdalla on various occasions. The Forum brings together representatives of Queensland Churches Together, the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies and the Islamic Council of Queensland, the aim being to "build understanding and harmony in the Australian context" (Statement of Purpose). Last year we helped to organize a forum of the Abrahamic faiths hosted by the Queensland Government and held in Parliament House, at which Dr Abdalla was a keynote speaker. His ability to build bridges between the Muslim community and people of other faiths has made him a much sought-after speaker not only in academic circles but also in gatherings of church congregations and local interfaith groups. In August 2007 Dr Abdalla was invited to speak at a conference of Anglican bishops. We are greatly saddened to see Dr Abdalla's integrity questioned. In all our dealings with him and GIRU we have never seen anything that would even remotely justify the accusations described in the articles in question.

The *Australian* is supposed to be one of our country's leading newspapers. It is nothing short of disturbing to note how journalistic standards have been compromised in the articles of 22nd and 23rd April and editorial of 23rd April on this issue. Facts have been

interpreted in a one-sided manner, emotive language used in provocative ways (“A prominent Australian university practically begged the Saudi Arabian embassy to bankroll its Islamic campus...”), and fear-inducing references to unrelated acts of extremism have been placed next to references to GIRU.

Griffith University is to be congratulated for putting its declared peace-building ethos into practice by establishing and supporting an Islamic Research Unit which strives for academic excellence in an Australian context. It is a great pity that the vision behind this move was not the one that inspired the authors of the articles and editorial in question.

ENDS

This letter has been agreed upon jointly by the members of the Queensland Forum for Christians Jews and Muslims