

July 21, 2016

The Hon Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk

The Australian Muslim Advocacy Network (AMAN) would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you for your stewardship through the difficult economic times that our State is undergoing as a result of a depression in the mining resources sector. But we are confident that your Government is doing all it can to sustain growth and create jobs in Queensland.

As you are aware Premiere, the Muslim presence in Australia is not new or recent, dating back to the early 1700's. The current wave of migration of Muslims to Australia has seen significant investment into the Australian economy. In Queensland alone, hundreds of millions of dollars are invested into new business projects such as construction and housing development, childcare, medical practices, household appliances and many other medium to small sized businesses. These businesses are a fundamental component to job creation. Muslim medical doctors make up a significant proportion of the public and private sector members in healthcare. The high rate of Muslim graduate professionals like doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other allied medical services make up an essential element to the medical services that are required in our State. Our community also makes considerable contributions in other professions including teaching, law and social justice, social welfare and other conventional professions such as accounting, finance, education and various trade skills.

Considering the community's conscientiousness and commitment to improving the quality of life for all Queenslanders not just themselves, we find it rather demoralizing that no member of the Queensland Parliament, either from your government or the opposition, has voiced formal, strong public condemnation of the bigotry and xenophobia that we witness constantly through many media outlets and by some local politicians. Despite the long and well-established engagement of the Muslim community at all levels of government we have, to date, not witnessed any convincing rejection of the vile abusive and malicious characterizations of Muslims.

In 2014, the Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion study found that overall, Australia's social cohesion remains high with 85 per cent of respondents agreeing that multiculturalism has

been good for Australia. However, 25.2 per cent of respondents had a somewhat negative or very negative attitude towards Muslims, with Queensland recording the highest percentage at 27.5 per cent. Despite sustained investment and commitment to multiculturalism, Queensland faces a range of challenges including:

- rising levels of bigotry including Islamophobia
- racial and religious vilification in public and in the workplace
- economic and social marginalisation, particularly among some newly arrived communities
- the radicalisation of people towards violent extremism, particularly the young.

Recently, statements made by Pauline Hanson, Andrew Bolt and Sonya Kruger, highlight the level of arrogant ignorance and lack of rational thinking displayed by their ilk, purely to suit their own ends. However, more troubling is that we have not heard any substantive rebuttals against the rhetoric. These voices, if unchallenged by parliamentarians, will create disaffection in our youth and only serve to increase the propensity of being drawn to the violent political ideologies that prey on this disaffection.

These issues are compounded by a divisive national political and media discourse, particularly in relation to Islam, Muslims, and immigrants. Marginalization of our youth, and the consequences of it, are all too real. To avoid the consequences of this prejudiced rhetoric, it is important that politicians take a leadership role in stemming the increasingly toxic environment which we, as fellow-citizens have to endure. Politicians need to publicly and openly counteract the bigotry and hate against Muslims, just as quickly as they condemn erroneous non-factual accounts of other controversial issues associated with and attributed to Muslims and Islam.

Our community fears that this deafening silence implies tacit consent to the vitriol, and a complete disregard for the welfare of the members of our community. The sustained malevolent onslaught which, in some cases, is supported by parliamentarians, does not bode well for our state and our country. Failing to counteract the bigotry, will fuel the suspicion that tacit acceptance of the anti-muslim rhetoric is rife within the corridors of parliament. And, shying away for fear of drawing attention to these matters will question the integrity of that cornerstone of our democracy. "A fair go for all".

Please regard this letter as a plea, articulating the concerns of mainstream Queensland Muslims

who are increasingly being sidelined and attacked over issues, both local and international, that are outside of their control, and who are looking for real leadership from their elected representatives which, to date, has been neither evident nor forthcoming.

AMAN is keen to meet with you and your representatives to discuss these important issues.

The Secretary  
Australian Muslim Advocacy Network