



MEDIA STATEMENT
Wednesday, 22 April 2020

Turnbull revelations point to a problem in need of a solution from Australia's institutions

The revelations contained in Malcolm Turnbull's 7:30 Report interview about anti-Muslim sentiment fostered between certain politicians in the Liberal Party leadership and Newscorp media, point to longstanding problem that needs proper examination and a responsive plan of action, from our political and government institutions, and media industry.

Mr Turnbull said, speaking of Mr Abbott:

“At a time when terrorism was our biggest ... domestic security issue, Abbott was determined to ramp up the rhetoric in a way that was calculated to inflame animosity against Muslims. That was obviously lapped up and echoed by the Murdoch press, who were doing the same thing. That made Australia less safe. It was profoundly dangerous.”

In those years where overseas terror groups were seeking attention; certain media outlets chose to give it to them in abundance.

There has been significant reflection by international and national security bodies and academics on this coverage and the language choices of politicians – pointing to how counter-productive and dangerous this has been.

This is the first time we've seen confirmation from a former Prime Minister, and from within the Liberal Party, about the 'profoundly dangerous' nature of that anti-Muslim rhetoric, and relationship with the most powerful media company in Australia.

This lack of care towards the safety, security and wellbeing of Australian Muslims, particularly considering the risks that Australia now faces from 'far-right' extremism, now demands a forward-looking response.

Today, there continues to be online communities dedicated to the removal and expulsion of Australian Muslims, and abuse in very places, particularly targeting women in hijab.

As a small minority of Australians, Australian Muslims are working very hard to challenge this harmful narrative, but we cannot do it alone. Institutional awareness, leadership and accountability on this matter will be critical to the nation's security.

We are also now facing the growing international threat of disinformation and mal-information that is being intentionally exploited within prejudice-motivated communities online.

The sustained anti-Muslim rhetoric that began with conflating Islam with terrorism, provided a foundation for 'replacement' narratives that featured in the so-called 'manifesto' of the Christchurch terrorist.

Frighteningly, this rhetoric continues to seep through public discourse, parading as mainstream opinion online and offline.

AMAN encourages bodies such as the Australian Press Council, Australian Communications and Media Authority, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, and the e-Safety Commissioner, as well as media and digital platforms, to work with us on these challenges through policy development and strengthening community engagement and community awareness of dispute resolution options.

AMAN's areas of interest include responses to disinformation, digital platform moderation of harmful or extremist content, public interest journalism, relationships and awareness within the media industry, as well as legal frameworks to deter incitement of hatred and violence.

We recently contributed to a substantial submission by the Australian Hate Crime Network on the proposed Online Safety Act; and were in the news for our investigation in Facebook's moderation processes with Birchgrove Legal.

As a member of the Australian National Muslim Community Summit, we stand ready to work on policy measures with institutions in the government, corporate and community sector to advance a more united and safer Australia.

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Further Background on the impacts of media saturation from Australian perspective:

All Together Now, *Social Commentary and Racism 2019 Report*. <<https://alltogethernow.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Social-Commentary-and-Racism-2019-1.pdf>>

Australian Press Council, *Religious Terms in Headlines*, Advisory Guidelines, April 2004.

K O'Donnell, R Davis & J Ewart (2017), 'Non-Muslim Australians' Knowledge of Islam: Identifying and Rectifying Knowledge Deficiencies', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 37(1), 41-54.

Onepath network, *Islam and the Media: A Year Long study*, 2017. <<https://www.onepathnetwork.com/islam-in-the-media-2017/>>

University of South Australia, *Media Release: Young Muslims despair of media representations of Islam*, Press Release, 24 November 2015. <<https://www.unisa.edu.au/Media-Centre/Releases/Young-Muslims-despair-of-media-representations-of-Islam/>>