



Multi-Faith Centre

Professor Toh Swee-Hin
Director

Telephone +61 (0)7 3875 7053
Facsimile +61 (0)7 3875 7131

s.toh@griffith.edu.au
www.griffith.edu.au

Nathan campus, Griffith University
170 Kessels Road
Nathan, Queensland 4111
Australia

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Editor,
The Australian

Dear Editor:

An essential criterion of quality and reliable journalism rests on careful and accurate investigation of the subject under scrutiny. In regard to the issue of funding of the Griffith University's Islamic Research Centre by the Saudi Government, it is disappointing that articles in The Australian have appeared under highly sensationalized, erroneous and "fear mongering" headings, including branding Griffith University as 'an agent of extreme Islam'.

Richard Kerbaj's strong suggestion that the Saudi Government's donation to GIRU has resulted in or will lead to Griffith propagating "extremist" interpretations of Islam needs substantive evidence rather than a simplistic guilt by association logic. Surely Mr. Kerbaj needs to examine the details of research projects and courses being conducted under GIRU auspices in order to draw fair and valid conclusions.

Over the past four years, the Griffith University Multi-Faith Centre has involved the GIRU's Director, Dr. Abdalla, and his colleagues in numerous activities and events to promote interfaith dialogue for a culture of peace. I have also attended seminars and conferences organized under GIRU auspices, including the recent conference on "Islam and the West". I can confirm that I have not heard anything in the presentations of GIRU scholars or invited Muslim speakers that support "Wahhabism" or justify extremist views and practices espoused by individuals or groups labelled as "al- Qa'ida". On the contrary, GIRU scholars have emphasized the core values and principles of peace, justice, human rights and intercultural respect in interpreting and practising Islam.

Recently, I was a member of the Australian delegation at the Fourth Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue for peace and harmony, hosted in 2008 by Cambodia following previous meetings in Indonesia, the Philippines and New Zealand. These dialogues, as well as a growing number of interfaith programs and initiatives worldwide, yield the positive outcomes of greater understanding and cooperation among diverse faiths, cultures and civilizations so urgently needed for building a peaceful world. The manner in which the Australian has chosen to report on the issue of Saudi funding to Griffith University will not help in enhancing interfaith dialogue and understanding. Unfortunately, it has catalysed, as seen in blogs and other venues of public expressions, further stereotyping and vilification of Islam as a faith.

The Australian received deserved praise for your detailed research and fair reporting on the case of Dr. Haneef. I sincerely hope and appeal for a similar standard of journalism on this issue of Saudi funding to the Griffith Islamic Research Unit.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S.H. Toh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Toh Swee-Hin (S.H.Toh)
Director, Multi-Faith Centre
Laureate, UNESCO Prize for Peace Education (2000)

