

CHAIRPERSON’S ANNUAL REPORT

Financial Year 2022/23

Delivered at AFOPA’s AGM on 31 August 2023

It is my welcome task this evening to report on AFOPA’s activity in the 2022/23 financial year.

I will be referring in my report to two documents which you have with you: “About AFOPA” a one-page summary of AFOPA’s role, objectives and activities, and our new AFOPA information pamphlet. On the back of “About AFOPA” you will find the outcome of the work undertaken by the Executive Committee on the organisation’s 2022-2025 Strategic Priorities. This planning was made possible through a \$4000 Multicultural SA Grant, which enabled us to work with a skilled and generous strategic planner, Dr Kylie Heneker. In talking about 2022/23 I will refer to the three objectives outlined in the Strategic Plan:

Advocate and Influence: to influence Australian political attitudes and affect policy change.

Engage and Expand: to strengthen our reach and strategic partnerships with allies.

Inform and Advocate: to raise awareness and champion action in support of Palestine.



POLITICAL ADVOCACY

1. The pressure on institutions to endorse the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of antisemitism meant we had to be both proactive and reactive to these attempts. For example, by engaging early with the University of Adelaide we became aware that the University Council was preparing to consider adoption of the working definition. We initiated meetings with senior University staff and provided a detailed submission. We were supported by allies such as the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), the Islamic Council of South Australia, the Australian Jewish Democratic Society and South Australia's local Palestinian community organization, Glimmer of Hope. [The University Council did not adopt](#) the Working Definition and then stood firm in the wake of intense pressure by the Zionist lobby.

We cannot, however, rest on our laurels. This same issue is appearing through another vehicle: *The Jewish University Experience Survey* of the Zionist Federation of Australia and the Australian Union of Jewish Students, prepared by ANU's Social Research Centre. This survey clearly is not about antisemitism but is intended to introduce the IHRA's Working Definition through the back door. To quote from Dr Larry Stillman's article in the latest edition of [Pearls and Irritations](#):

We can see that this survey, on a slick website, is in truth a skewed sample intended for political purposes: to beat up universities about an alleged epidemic of antisemitism, using problems that have occurred in the US or the UK to argue that the situation is similar to that here. The Lobby's objective: to have the highly contentious IHRA non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism imposed on Australian Universities. Thus far, universities have by and large, rejected the working definition, but the Lobby won't take no for an answer.

AFOPA will now begin to work to counter this new threat.

2. We have been persistent and successful in building influential relationships with politicians both at the federal and state levels. In 2022/23 we focused on meeting with new federal South Australian members of parliament and senators, including the new Member for Boothby, Louise Miller-Frost, Senator Karen Grogan and Senator Barbara Pocock.

We were also active in executing letter writing campaigns on specific issues to individual politicians, in particular the Foreign Minister. We are grateful that many AFOPA members joined these campaigns and made their voices heard.

3. At the state level we actively supported the South Australian Parliamentary Friends of Palestine (Tony Piccolo MP (ALP) Member for Light; Josh Teague MP (Liberal) Member for Heysen; Connie Bonaros MLC (SA Best); and Tammy Franks MLC (SA Greens)). We were appreciative of the pro-Palestinian motions brought to the Lower and Upper houses by Tony Piccolo, Irene Pnevmatikos MLC, Connie Bonaros MLC and Frank Pangallo MLC.
4. This year, as well as continuing this work we will focus on encouraging more people, especially our members, to influence the political process. If you would like to join us or have ideas on how we can do this, we would love to hear from you.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Relationships form the foundation on which successful engagement is built. Authentic relationships built on trust and respect lead to shared achievements. Using these principles, we embarked on a planned coordinated approach to:

- *Strengthen existing relationships with like-minded groups.*
- *Build relationships with new allies.*

In 2022/23 we focused on:

- Arabic and Muslim organizations, meeting with four groups.
- Young people through the establishment of Young AFOPA: we facilitated a group of Palestinian and non-Palestinian under 35s, who came together to form Young AFOPA. Eleanor Christaki-Hedrick, facilitator of Young AFOPA presented an overview of the new group's aims and their first event, a highly successful quiz night. Involving young people in AFOPA has, in the past, been challenging. Last year was a breakthrough year with the establishment of young AFOPA and two young people joining the Executive Committee.

INFORM AND ACTIVATE

1. In May we commemorated the 75th year of the Nakba. For the first time, through APAN's outstanding coordination, we participated in a Nakba75 National Day of Action across all states and territories. While each state or territory hosted different kinds of events, the messaging was consistent across Australia.

In South Australia we delivered a series of events starting with a rally at Parliament House, where we heard from young Palestinians. This was followed by a spirited March by over 200 people to the Migration Museum, where the commemoration featured Palestinians sharing their families' experiences. We ended the day with the film *Tantura*, a heartbreaking account of what happened to the people of Tantura in 1947. We were pleased that Tony Piccolo MP, Irene Pnevmatikos MLC, Tony Zappia MP and Vincent Tarzia MP, were able to join us on the day.



Tony Zappia MP speaking at Nakba75 at Adelaide's Migration Museum

2. Once again AFOPA hosted an outstanding Edward Said Memorial Lecture (ESML) presented by Dr Yara Hawari. Dr Hawari's topic, *Imagining a Palestinian Future: Re-Internationalising the Palestinian Struggle*, reminded us that settler colonialism is indigenous erasure. Dr Hawari also redefined "political struggle" as "political joy". She lifted our spirits with:

You have to act as if it's possible to radically change the world and do this all the time. Prioritise joyfulness, love and friendship. We can't mobilize and organise our despair and negativity. Liberation is irresistible!

3. The much-loved Run for Palestine, held to coincide with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, brought together young and old, the fit and the not so fit, Palestinians and non-Palestinians from diverse backgrounds, to run, walk or push prams along the River Torrens for Palestine.



4. As mentioned, the quiz night was an enormous success. A sellout for the first time ever, with an abundance of young people attending and bringing energy and competitiveness to the event. There was even spontaneous Dabke! Thank you to Young AFOPA and their friends for a meticulously planned and fun night.



5. AFOPA continues to be very proud and appreciative of the BDS group, which in its 13th year continues to reach people one-on-one, changing hearts and minds. This incredible group completed street actions to the tune of almost one a week over the year and consistently reported a strong pro-Palestinian swing. A photo of the Palestinian flag proudly billowing from Colonel Light's statue is etched in my memory.



6. Adelaide Writers' Week (AWW) was definitely an occasion to inform and activate! From the moment in early March when Louise Adler, the Director of AWW announced the program, the campaign began to silence the invited Palestinian writers, particularly Susan Abulhawa and Mohammed El Kurd, accusing them of antisemitism. The campaign was also aimed at undermining the festival itself by pressuring the government and sponsors to withdraw funding. But what began as a pretty grim looking and powerful anti-Palestinian campaign by a few Zionist organisations and individuals, *The Advertiser* and *The Australian* newspapers, turned into a victory for Adelaide Writers' Week and the Palestinian writers who attended. AFOPA was very active in supporting the writers before and while they were in Adelaide and advocating for freedom of speech to the South Australian Government and the Adelaide Festival Board. The controversy continued for weeks, but the Premier, Festival Board and Louise Adler stood their ground, the funding stayed in place and the Palestinians came. And so did the people. The sessions featuring the Palestinians, particularly those held in conjunction with Australian First Nations writers, were phenomenally popular; hundreds of people attended these sessions, attracted by the controversy started by the people who tried to ban the Palestinians in the first place.

7. Informing and advocating through comedy is the art of Amer Zahr. Amer is a Palestinian Arab American comedian, speaker, writer, academic, and adjunct professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. He draws on his experiences growing up as a child of Palestinian refugees, performing and lecturing on topics like politics, society, culture, identity, Palestine, Islam, and more. In March we experienced the joy, passion and sheer humanity of this very funny man. Through his comedy and his sharp political mind, he entertained a large audience who were in stitches at his jokes and his clever weaving of political commentary. "Laughter is therapy," he was once quoted as saying. "We need to show the world that Palestinians love to laugh, we love life, we love art."



HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS

Donations to humanitarian projects in Palestine continued to be an important part of AFOPA's work in 2022/23:

- Medical missions by Dr Francis and Merlin Nathan.
- Military Court Watch, founded by Australian lawyer, Gerrard Horton and Salwa Duaibis, monitors, litigates and advocates for Palestinian children to have all the rights and protections guaranteed them under International Law. AFOPA was pleased to provide a donation of \$5000 to support Military Court Watch's outstanding work for Palestinian children.

STUDENT INTERNSHIPS

This year we increased our capacity to host Adelaide University interns. This is the fifth year we have had interns, who are generally studying international relations and politics. This year we hosted nine students, supervised by AFOPA executive and regular members, who researched and prepared reports on:

- South Australians delivering humanitarian services in Palestine.
- Messaging on Palestine in the Australian media.
- The Elusive State: International Law and Palestinian Statehood.
- Australian Foreign Aid and Palestinian Women and Girls.
- Australian Foreign Aid and Disability in Palestine
- Australia's Alliance with the USA: How it Affects Australia's Israel-Palestine Foreign Policy.
- Australian Legislation and the IHRA Definition of Antisemitism.
- Palestinian Children under Israeli Military Occupation: What Role for Australia?

Jeanie Lucas, Coordinator of the intern program presented an overview of the program at the AGM and 2 of the students presented on their reports and their experience of the Internship program.

SECRETARIAT

This broad ranging and expansive scope of work can't have an impact without the critical but mostly unseen activity that underpins the success of an organisation. This includes:

- Business planning and financial management.
- Communications with members and supporters ranging from responding to individual queries through to quarterly newsletters and frequent Member Alerts.
- Preparation of information material.
- Website maintenance and improvement.
- Managing and promoting the Palestine Centre for Peace (PCP) and dealing with online and in-person sales. This is an important source of income for AFOPA, while also supporting businesses and families in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- Importantly, the PCP provides an opportunity to interact with members of the public most of whom are supportive, interested and keen to learn. Occasionally, however, we are confronted by Israeli visitors and Christian Zionists. A few recent confronting experiences remind us of what Palestinians endure every single day.

CONCLUSION

It has been an incredibly productive year and a year that has delivered in important areas. This financial year will be equally busy:

- You know by now that Francesca Albanese the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, is our 2023 ESM lecturer. We are absolutely thrilled about welcoming Francesca.
- In addition to organising the ESML, AFOPA is coordinating a 16 day Australian/New Zealand tour, encompassing Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Auckland and Wellington. Our friends at APAN, Free Palestine Melbourne and Palestinian Christians in Australia are doing a wonderful

job supporting the tour. 30 events are being organised across these cities which include large dinners, University Public lectures, meetings with parliamentarians, first Nations people, Palestine solidarity groups, unions and Jewish groups. An extensive media presence is also in the works.

- 2024 is AFOPA's 20th year anniversary. So stay tuned for announcements on some very special 20th year anniversary events, including a gala dinner.

It remains to me to thank AFOPA's Executive Committee – Edie, Jeanie, Mike, Imad, Margaret, Oceah and Sam for their hard work and generous commitment of time to the cause. It is an absolute pleasure and privilege to work alongside them all. Also thank you to our volunteers and their friends who have given so much time and effort to events such as the Run for Palestine and the quiz night, Sally, our Project Officer who provides skilled and professional support to Executive, our members, stakeholders and the general public. And a very big thank you to you, our members, who support AFOPA, who stand with Palestine and Palestinians and amplify their voices for Justice.

Christa Christaki
Chairperson
Australian Friends of Palestine Association
31 August 2023