



Friday 29 August 2014

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **ANIC CONCERNED ABOUT PROPOSED ANTI-TERRORISM LAWS**

The Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) believes that all citizens have a vested interest in the ongoing safety and security of the country. However, ANIC is not convinced that the threat, no matter how serious, warrants sacrificing basic human rights and imposing on citizens the unnecessary burden of living in constant fear and paranoia.

Later today His Eminence, Professor Ibrahim Abu Mohamed, Grand Mufti of Australia and ANIC plans to meet with the Attorney-General in relation to the proposed anti-terrorism proposals. During this meeting ANIC plans to raise the following concerns about the proposed changes:

**Unreasonable Timeframe:** ANIC is concerned by the speed with which the government is trying to get the current amendments through parliament. As a result, proper and thorough scrutiny of the proposals has not been possible. Given the possible serious implications of the changes, the government must provide more time for review.

**Piecemeal Tranches:** ANIC is also concerned that the government seems to be introducing proposed changes to security and counter-terrorism legislation in a piecemeal fashion with two or three separate sets of proposals. Given the complexity of the legislation it would have been more appropriate had the government issued one comprehensive set of proposals for the community to review.

**Unhelpful Discourse:** In a recent press conference the Prime Minister called on "Team Australia" to get behind the proposed laws. ANIC believes that such language is unnecessarily divisive and sets those who have genuine concerns about the changes in direct conflict with the government. In addition, the report that the government allegedly dropped proposed changes to section 18C of the racial discrimination act to appease Muslims so it could gain support for the anti-terror provisions unfairly scapegoats these Australians. The government's use of the word "jihadist" is particularly problematic given that the unusual combination of an Arabic word with an English suffix negatively stereotypes the noble Islamic concept of striving for what is better. ANIC calls on the government to use inclusive and responsible language.

**ASIO Powers:** The government has before parliament proposals to grant ASIO greater powers including access to third party computers on the same system or network and immunity from prosecution to intelligence officers engaged in special operations. ANIC is concerned that increased powers will only increase the lack of accountability and oversight of intelligence officers. The prospect of these powers being abused in the absence of proper safeguards is of great concern.

**Lowering Arrest Threshold:** The government stated that the legislative changes will make it easier to arrest terrorists by lowering the threshold for arrest without warrant for terrorism offences. ANIC is extremely concerned that further lowering of current thresholds may have the effect of criminalising legitimate, non-violent activism and calls on the government to reconsider this change.



## Australian National Imams Council

مجلس الأئمة الفدرالي الأسترالي

Postal Address:  
P.O.Box 145  
Lakemba NSW 2195  
Ph: 1300 765 940  
Fax: 1300 765 964

**Promotion and Encouragement:** The government's proposal includes the provision that advocacy should capture promotion and encouragement of terrorism. ANIC believes that this may have serious implications on the right to free speech where anything said which could be deemed to be in support of terrorism may run foul of the law. This will be a particular concern to preachers who spend a large proportion of their time teaching and advocating on social justice issues.

**Travel to Designated Areas:** The government's proposal includes a new offence of being in a designated terrorist area and making individuals justify why they were in such a location. ANIC believes that this is a serious attack on the right to freedom of movement. This provision will have the unintended consequence of capturing unwitting and innocent travelers. ANIC believes that this would be an unnecessary intrusion into an individual's privacy with regard to freedom of movement and reverses the traditional legal onus of being innocent before being proved guilty.

**Cutting Dole Payments:** On Saturday 16th August 2014, the Prime Minister announced a further proposal that any Australian citizen assessed as being a serious threat to national security would have their unemployment benefits and other welfare payments cut off. ANIC is seriously concerned about the justification of denying payments to someone who may not have been convicted of any criminal offence. Already the confiscation of passports in the absence of any conviction is causing extreme angst within the community. ANIC understands that under current social security laws, welfare payments can only be cancelled if the recipient no longer meets social security eligibility rules for example criminals serving jail sentences. ANIC believes that denying welfare payments to people who are not incarcerated may paradoxically drive these individuals into engaging in criminal activity.

**Funding for Community Engagement:** As recent as Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2014, the Prime Minister announced that \$13.4 million would be allocated to strengthen community engagement programs in Australia with an emphasis on preventing young Australians from becoming involved with extremist groups. ANIC supports all measures to counter the threat of violence at home but believes that these programs are merely cosmetic band aid solutions. The main causative factor is the Australian government's military involvement in the Middle East. If the government is serious about reducing the threat, then it must review its foreign policy decisions with regard to this region. ANIC believes that the current trend to support unjust, dictatorial regimes and unilateral military aggression based on duplicitous foreign policy positions will only aggravate the state of global fear and violence.

END

.....

ANIC consists of more than 250 Imams across Australia representing their respective communities.

Contact:

Imam Shady Alsuleiman, ANIC Secretary, [secretary@anic.org.au](mailto:secretary@anic.org.au)

Mr Samir Bennegadi, ANIC General Manager, [samir@anic.org.au](mailto:samir@anic.org.au)

Web: [www.anic.org.au](http://www.anic.org.au)

Email: [info@anic.org.au](mailto:info@anic.org.au)