

**Tamara's view:**

**Tamara Swann**

For my first editorial column in CT I was planning to discuss health matters, with particular reference to a breast health event I am organizing for Muslim women. However, two emails I recently received keep popping to the forefront of my mind so you'll have to bear with me for the women's health while I digress to unmapped territory.

Strangely enough, the two emails are opposite in terms of the feeling they left me with. The first overwhelmingly sick, shocked and empty, while the second warm and fuzzy - you know the 'can't help but smile' type of feeling.

The negative email (which seems is being passed around our Muslim community) contains a presentation titled Holocaust regarding past Israeli attacks on Palestine - not unusual given the current events in Gaza. In fact my inbox is littered with verbal debris and literary fallout from the war.

What struck me so deeply about this one was not just the horrific images of our brothers suffering so atrociously (you'll know what I mean if you received it), but the underlying message that we should blame all Jews for this devastation.

There is no doubt the acts of violence inflicted on the Palestinian people by the Israeli Defence Force over many years have been inhumane and barbaric, but to promote this type of categorical message is only going to bring about more hatred and discrimination. How can we justify convicting the whole Jewish population for the sinister actions of a portion? After all we know how unfair it is when the whole Muslim community seem to be represented by the actions of extremists. Moreover, how is this kind of propaganda

helpful to anyone?

I urge my Muslim brothers and sisters at this sensitive and very emotional time to seek credible sources for facts and to keep faith in Allah's final justice firm.

Let's remember the Jews next door are not the ones terrorising Gaza, in fact many are also fighting for justice for the Palestinian people. I have received separate emails conveying the lobbying efforts of groups such as Jews Boycotting Israeli Goods and Neturei Karta - a group of well-known Rabbi's who support the Palestinian cause.

On a lighter note I came across this: 'German lovers - aged six and five - try to elope to Africa' in the Guardian (5/1/09). The article tells the story of little sweethearts Anna-Bell and Mika who decided to get married in Africa "where it is warm", taking Mika's seven year old sister with them as a witness. Setting off early one morning they took a tram to the city but didn't even make it to the airport before a suspicious station guard alerted police. The children's adventure wasn't all lost as they were given a grand tour of the police headquarters before being returned home. I guess we could apply some cultural theory here and talk about the degradation of society and adulterisation of children, however, I prefer to see this as fantastic reminder of that most amazing sense of adventure and realism inherent in children.

I think I have already blown my word limit, please see page 15 for details about the women's health event coming up in February. InshaAllah I will discuss this topic further next time. Assalaamu Alaikum,

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**SPOTLIGHT ON OUR COMMUNITY:**

**Muslim Youth of Western Australia**

**Tamara Swann**

Youth groups always seem such an enthusiastic bunch. *Tamara Swann* caught up with Muslim Youth Western Australia president Shameema Kolia, to discuss upcoming projects.

Muslim Youth Western Australia began as a two-woman operation in 2005, when Shameema Kolia and Maryam Khan decided to act upon their ambition to create an organization solely operated by and servicing the Muslim youth in Perth.

Today, MYWA is run by a group of 10 youth members who plan and host numerous social events and educational workshops for the State's young Muslims.

"MYWA is the peak youth body in the (WA) Muslim community in terms of advocacy, service provision and representation," Ms Kolia said.

With affiliations to University of WA, Curtin and Murdoch universities, MYWA has rapidly expanded its membership to more than 300 people over the past three years.

"Our services were originally targeted at the high school age kids, but now our numbers have grown substantially so I would say our members range from 13-25 year olds.

"There are no requirements for membership, no fees or forms. We have a facebook page that kids can sign up to, to find out about upcoming events and we have a website



Photo: Muslim Youth WA event

where they can join in online forums," she said.

With help from The Muslim Women's Support Centre MYWA have recently completed their second annual girls camp. The five day team-building camp runs each January and is open to high school aged girls.

"There are no men around so it gives the girls a sense of freedom, they can take off their hijab, go swimming and just have heaps of fun. "Last years camp began with 30 girls who didn't know much about each other, but by the end of the camp they had become the best of friends," Ms Kolia said.

**Calls to boycott Israel and shame Australian government**

*Tamara Swann reports on a local group rallying for peace in Palestine.*

On Saturday the 10th of January, Australian Friends of Palestine held their third rally in three weeks in Perth. The group of local Palestinian supporters once again gathered together in the heat to inform and encourage the public to become aware of how they can influence change in Gaza.

This rally was held at Pioneer Reserve in Fremantle and involved a variety of speakers including Australian Islamic College student Reyhan Oz, Greens senator for WA Scott Ludlam, Australian Catholic Social Justice Commission executive officer Terry Quinn, and 7 year old Ali Alardah.

All speakers urged attendees to become active by writing and speaking to parliamentarians on all levels and by spreading word amongst their peers about the AFOP cause.

"Tell the government that you are ashamed of their inaction. Tell Mr Rudd that his silence is taking a stand," Mr Ludlam said.

The group of approximately 250 people almost doubled in size after a march along the Fremantle café strip.

Rally organiser and AFOP leader Alex Whisson said, while it was good to see a passionate group of people involving themselves, he was disappointed there were not more people attending the rallies.

He was also disappointed that the Fremantle City Council had not been supportive of the group's planned street march.

"There is clearly a political agenda as to why we were denied a peaceful march in the streets here on a Saturday. Shame on Fremantle City Council.

"Fortunately we have been able to negotiate with police to be able to march along the pavement with their assistance," he said.

AFOP is not a religious or cultural group. Members come from a variety of backgrounds but all share the common goal of putting an end to the violence and oppression of the Palestinian people.

AFOP representative Sarah Haynes said one of the ways in which people could make this happen was to boycott all Israeli goods, that is to stop purchasing from Israeli owned companies. This would damage the export dependent Israeli economy and subsequently force the nation into a more negotiable position.

For more details or to become a member of the organisation visit: [www.friendsofpalestine.org.au](http://www.friendsofpalestine.org.au)

For more information on boycotting Israeli goods visit: <http://bdsmovement.net>

**From front page:**

**Aussie Jews against Israeli massacre in Gaza:**

"While Israel has the right to protect its citizens and to demand an end to the crime of Palestinian rockets that target civilians, this cannot be used as a pretext for the grossly disproportionate military assault on Gaza because it was Israel that violated the fragile truce on November 4, 2008. Furthermore, Israel ignored Hamas' diplomatic initiatives to re-establish the cease-fire since it expired on December 19. (...) We call for an immediate end to attacks on civilians by Palestinians and Israelis. However, since Palestinians have no means of self-defence against the most powerful military force in the Middle East, we particularly call on Israel to end its brutal assault on the vulnerable Palestinian people of Gaza and to reconsider its rejection of the UN Security Council's call for a cease-fire. Israel has refused to accept Hamas' consistent offer of negotiations since its election win in 2006. There can be no solution to the conflict without Israel being a willing partner to dialogue."



Photo: Muslim Youth WA during national youth week 2008.

MYWA has many projects in the pipeline for 2009, including a similar camp for boys later in the year.

However, this camp is directly related to the Changing Strides program MYWA held at the Australian Islamic College last year. This program aimed to foster a positive relationship between young Muslims and the WA Police Force, and for some opened a potential career path. The same group of Year 11 students would be invited to attend the camp proposed for July.

Another interesting project is the Volunteer Register MYWA has planned. Ms Kolia described this as a way of "getting to know the people in our community who can make a difference" by finding out what they can offer in terms of skills and time.

The monthly lecture series that MYWA

began in 2008 is set to continue in 2009. The lectures are held at UWA on the last Saturday of every month.

In March MYWA will again join forces with MWSC to host the Annual All Ladies Formal. This offers young women an alternative to the traditional high school ball which can conflict with Muslim values and often poses a problem for parents.

MYWA are also proposing to hold the Muslim Students and Professionals Dinner in June and later the traditional Eid Social Dinner for Eid-ul-fitr.

Ms Kolia said 2008's Eid dinner was a huge success and literally a "sold-out" event with more than 300 people attending, so warned people to get in early this year.

In December MYWA is planning a Muslim community awards event for the first time in WA, to recognize those who dedicate much of their efforts to helping the local Muslim community.

Ms Kolia said they were trying to involve all other local Muslim organizations with the aim of making the awards night an annual event.

All this amongst MYWA's regular barbecues, sports days and training courses and you can see why one might suggest youth groups and enthusiasm go hand in hand.