

The Council for Arab-British Understanding

Annual Review 2009



Promoting an enlightened and positive approach to Arab-British relations

The Council for Arab-British Understanding

Registered Name

Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding Ltd.

Company Registration No.

5047247

Registered Office

Arab British Centre
1 Gough Square
London
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CAABU Executive Board Officers (from February 2009)

Joint-Chairmen: John Austin MP, Colin Breed MP

Vice-Chair: Yusef Abu Khadra, Shaza Shannan

Executive Board (from February 2009)

James Denselow
Jonathan Fryer
Stephen Griffith
Matthew Jackson
Dr. Ghada Karmi
John McHugo
Christine Russell MP
Martin Short
Gillian Watt
Derek Wyatt MP

CAABU Staff

Director:
Head of Development & Communications:
Head of Administration & Finance:
Parliamentary Officer:
Education Officer:

Fundraising and Events Assistant:
Student Campaigns assistant:

Chris Doyle
Aimee Shalan
Andrew Stylianou
Graham Bambrough
Naira Antoun (until 09/2009)
Ed Parsons (from 09/2009)
Dionysis Markakis
Joe Sammut (from 11/2009)



Report on CAABU's activities in 2009

Introduction

The big issue for CAABU at the start of 2009 was of course the government's response to Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli assault on Gaza. Ministers were keen to emphasise that this was not the same as 2006 when Tony Blair refused to call for an immediate ceasefire over Lebanon, and that the UK had supported a call for an immediate ceasefire and a UN Security Council Resolution. There was, however, widespread disappointment and anger that more was not done and is not being done.

But it did impact British-Israeli relations, which are at their lowest point for some years, even if this did not help the Palestinians. Britain was one of the countries that opposed the upgrading of ties between the EU and Israel, and towards the end of the year, finally introduced new guidance on the issue of settlement labelling. The meeting in May between David Miliband and the new Israeli Foreign Minister was as cold as any UK-Ministerial meeting in living memory. Against that there was huge disappointment with the government's position on the Goldstone report and also its embarrassing caving in to Israeli pressure to change British law on universal jurisdiction, a clear example of interference in the domestic British judicial system by a foreign power. In meetings with Ministers CAABU representatives have constantly raised the need to do more on the issue of the blockade, and that the war on Gaza was continuing through illegal collective punishment. Chris Bryant, the junior FCO Minister did however refer to the siege or "kettling" of Gaza as "morally indefensible". The 2010 question on Gaza is how much longer do we allow 1.5 million

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people to be deprived of the basic necessities of life, including food, fuel and clean water, before we take concrete decisive action. This is a question that Mr Blair, as quartet envoy, has failed to address let alone answer.

Of course, all the promised expectation from the Obama White House has failed to materialise. He dragged a weakened Palestinian President into a trilateral meeting whose sole achievement was to soften the demand that Israel finally halts its settlement frenzy. Nevertheless, Obama's speech in Cairo was a landmark in at least shifting the nature and tone of Presidential speeches about the region, but fine words will be no substitute for concrete actions. The concrete actions have been all carried out by 'Bibi' Netanyahu, whose settlement freeze is more of a colonial heat wave.

British forces did finally leave Iraq after six years. This will not be remembered as the high point of British-Arab relations, whatever Messrs Blair and Campbell might claim. It was one of the most disastrous occupations in history. The prime victims lest we forget were the Iraqis we were supposedly there to liberate. The arguments for and against the war will continue forever, but anyone who claims that the occupation was well organised, well planned and had the interests of the Iraqi people at heart simply belies belief. We will continue to follow the Chilcot inquiry with interest.

CAABU has expressed concerns to the government regarding the on-going crisis in Yemen. The conflict in the north of the country initially passed by largely unnoticed in the British media, and so we have worked to raise this issue with the relevant Ministers in Whitehall. CAABU was therefore encouraged when the UK government pledged £2million to assist Internally Displaced Persons with Yemen, following a letter from one of our chairs, John Austin MP. Any intervention in Yemen must be judged against a sound evaluation of the strategic, military, legal and political outcomes.

There was Dubai's financial crisis as well which at a trade level was perhaps the biggest saga of the year for Arab-British ties. Aside from the serious debate there were also some cheap

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and ignorant comment, not least one article in the Times by Sathnam Sangera, eloquently titled, "Why I'd rather die than visit Dubai."¹

There were some welcome pieces of news from the Middle East. Kuwait has its first elected female MPs. I remember several elections back watching a parallel election for women in Kuwait as they held a mock vote. This is the second election in which they have had the right to vote, but the first time women have been successful. I had the pleasure of meeting one of them, Rola Dashti. She was extremely impressive and I am sure like her colleagues, will make quite some impact. There were also peaceful elections held in Lebanon, an outcome that was far from assured but most welcome.

Chris Doyle

Director

¹ http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/sathnam_sanghera/article5267814.ece

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Parliamentary Programme

CAABU co-authored the report from the Britain-Palestine All Party Parliamentary Group on the February delegation of MPs to Gaza and the West Bank, which followed Israel's brutal bombing campaign against Gaza. The Goldstone report, a blistering 575-page summary of the UN's investigation into the Gaza conflict was largely brushed aside, despite its conclusion that war crimes and probably crimes against humanity had been committed by Israel and Hamas. Worse than that, our Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary openly embraced Ehud Barak at the Labour party conference, who as Israeli Defence Minister was responsible for orchestrating the whole of Operation Cast Lead. So it was a green light from Britain for further war crimes as was the Attorney-General's promise never to detain a visiting Israeli politician.

Parliamentary Officer Graham Bambrough escorted a parliamentary delegation to Lebanon in early July, funded by the Welfare Association. The delegation was led by Andy Love MP, and consisted of Mark Pritchard MP and John Barrett MP. The delegates held a series of high level meetings with senior Lebanese



politicians, including President Sleiman, Prime Minister-Designate Saad Hariri, out-going Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri. The delegates also visited the south of Lebanon to assess the situation following Israel's invasion in June 2006, as well as visiting Palestinian refugee camp Nahr al Bared, in the north. A full report on the trip was produced (available online), while CAABU has worked with Andy Love MP to follow-up on the delegation's work. Representations were also made to International Development Secretary, Rt. Hon Douglas Alexander MP, regarding key projects in Lebanon. Israel has at last handed over to UNIFIL maps for the millions of cluster bombs it had dropped all over

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southern Lebanon. One has to ask - did it need to take this long, almost three years, and twenty killed!

CAABU was also very active with other All Party Groups. We helped arrange briefing sessions with the All-Party Lebanon and Qatar groups. As ever, we coordinated the British Parliamentary contingent to the annual Doha forum on Democracy and Free Trade. There was also a discussion meeting with a very senior UAE Parliamentary delegation that included their speaker.

CAABU enjoyed a busy programme at this year's annual party conference season, with Graham attending all three conferences in Manchester, Brighton and Bournemouth. CAABU hosted a well-attended fringe event at the Liberal Democrat conference with Ed Davey MP. At the Conservative party conference CAABU hosted a joint fringe event meeting in Manchester with the Conservative Middle East Council, at which Sir Jeremy Greenstock, Henry Siegman and the Shadow Minister for the Middle East, David Lidington, addressed an audience of over 200, one of the largest fringe events at the conference.

The political mood in Britain has been very focused on the domestic scene. The economy has taken centre stage in an election season that is in full swing. One of our challenges has been to get international issues noticed in the doom and gloom of cuts and debts. Already Iraq is largely seen as done and dusted, even though the situation remains precarious. Our Joint-Chair Colin Breed has continued to visit Iraq to provide technical assistance to the Iraqi Parliament.

The Britain-Palestine All Party Parliamentary Group, for which CAABU acts as Secretariat, held its Annual Reception in the House of Commons on Monday 9th November. International Development Secretary, the Rt. Hon Douglas Alexander MP, provided the keynote address, in which he called for Israel to open the crossing points into Gaza. Palestinian General Delegate H. E. Prof Manuel Hassassian also addressed the reception, along with Conservative Middle East Spokesman David Lidington MP and the Liberal Democrat's Shadow Foreign Secretary Ed Davey MP. The event was attended by the Arab

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ambassadors to London, 70 Members of Parliament and Peers as well as members of the Palestinian community and representatives of related NGOs.

Elsewhere in parliament CAABU has organised a number of briefings for MPs and Peers. Salvatore Lombardo, the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) addressed a joint meeting of the Britain Palestine and Lebanon All Party Groups. He spoke about the plight of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and the reconstruction of the Nahr al Bared refugee camp.

In addition Dr. Mads Gilbert, a prominent Norwegian doctor who worked in Shifa Hospital during Israel's invasion of Gaza in December/January, briefed parliamentarians on his experiences, whilst members of Action for Palestinian Children met with MPs and Peers, under the auspices of BPAPPG.

With a general election due to be held by the spring of 2010, CAABU has been busy courting the support of the Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) who are standing in key constituencies. The next election is likely to produce the highest turnover of MPs since 1945, so early contact with candidates has been crucial.

Education Programme

Schools:

The school visits continue, and in the aftermath of Operation Cast Lead, more schools than usual were asking CAABU to speak about Palestine. In response we produced a host of new teaching materials, including a series of innovative lesson plans. The lessons are user-friendly and geared mainly towards the Citizenship Curriculum, although some are suitable for English and Media lessons and others may be applicable to History and Geography. The teaching material encourages learning and critical thinking on Israel-Palestine in a number of creative ways – ranging from the analysis of cartoons, through to lessons on fair trade, history, and problems of daily life for Palestinians. All lessons are hands-on activity based and designed to interest and challenge whilst being accessible to a wide range of abilities. They have excellent visual and written materials to support learning.

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CAABU conducted a well-attended session at the Arabic Language and Culture in Schools conference held by the British Council, the Association for Language Learning, CiLT, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and CASAW in March, which focused on teaching on the Arab world, and demonstrated some of CAABU's teaching materials.



CAABU has also been working with the British Council on their Connecting Classrooms Programme for schools linking with the Near East and North Africa and with the Middle East. The aim of the scheme is to build mutually beneficial relationships between schools, local authorities and national ministries of education, in order to increase understanding, share experiences and ideas as well as enhancing teaching and learning by integrating an international dimension into the curriculum.



The V&A organised an Arab World Family Learning Programme and CAABU provided advice and guidance. CAABU has also been involved with the Arab Artist in Residence programme at the BALTIC, the largest centre for contemporary art in the north of the country. The

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teaching resource to accompany the programme is designed to give young people in secondary schools the opportunity to learn more about contemporary Arab art and culture.

Universities:

We have had one of our most active years with student groups and universities. In an article in the Times, it was announced that on the back of campaigns on Gaza, student activism was back. There were around 30 student sit-ins or occupations carried out as a response to Operation Cast Lead. Chris Doyle has been all over England giving talks at Durham, Keele, Exeter, Leeds, Nottingham, Imperial and Cambridge universities.

Fakhoora.org:

CAABU is delighted to be project managing UK activities for Fakhoora.org, a new global advocacy campaign working to protect and strengthen education for children and students in Gaza and the West Bank. The campaign was born during 'Operation Cast Lead', when students in Doha, Qatar, were inspired to raise awareness about the plight of Palestinians after witnessing the escalation of ongoing abuses committed against Palestinian civilians, including children and students.



The situation in Gaza also gave rise to the greatest wave of student solidarity with Palestine in the UK for over a generation and CAABU will be working on behalf of Fakhoora.org to build on the success of the student movement in British universities by supporting existing groups and helping them to develop partnerships and alliances internationally. The campaign's work will consist of capacity building and consolidating the essential work that is already being done with a view to developing a more cohesive and sustainable movement. One of our first activities has been an international student conference with 200 participants from Europe, the US, Palestine and the wider Middle East that was hosted in Doha in January 2010.

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We have also been working on a memorial page for the new fakhoora.org website (to be launched in February) documenting all the child fatalities during 'Operation Cast Lead', covering their personal stories, locations and the details of different incidents.

In addition, we are working on a range of activities in UK schools for the project - including school talks, new online teaching resources and an art competition to inspire school children to think about the effects of the occupation on people in Gaza and to get creative in aid of lifting the blockade. Entrants will be asked to make a work of art out of any materials that are, or have at one time been, banned or restricted under the blockade and to write a brief explanation of why they have chosen the techniques and materials they have used and what they want their artwork to express about the blockade.

CAABU in the Media

CAABU has made regular representations to the BBC about its coverage of the Middle East throughout the year, meeting in May with Malcolm Balen, the BBC's Senior Editorial Adviser on the Middle East, at which we raised issues of concern about the Corporation's coverage of Operation cast Lead. Chris Doyle continued to have meetings with senior executives at the BBC and the BBC Trust about coverage. Chris also spoke at an internal panel discussion on Gaza at the BBC. Of course, there was widespread outrage at the BBC's decision to refuse to air the DEC appeal over Gaza. Criticism of this decision did come from some unexpected quarters, even from staunch pro-Israeli government MPs. There were 209 MPs signed up to an Early Day Motion criticising the decision, which was not popular internally inside the BBC. We wrote to the Director-General pointing out that more than anything this decision brought into question the corporation's impartiality. CAABU also wrote to Sky who got off lightly as it too refused to broadcast the appeal.

There have been the numerous interviews in different media with CAABU staff and board members. In addition, CAABU published eight letters in various national broadsheets over the last year.

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Sadly Muslim bashing is still all the rage - what with Anton Du Beke asking his co-star Laila Rouass (who has Moroccan parents) "You're not a terrorist, are you?", and Jeremy Clarkson's moans about Black Muslim Lesbian BBC presenters. The Daily Mail could barely disguise its paranoia about the Muslim threat in its article on the increase in the global Muslim population, where 'amazingly' the image of Muslims is reduced to a crowd of Niqab-wearing women.



Online Media:

For those who do not know CAABU is on Facebook. Do join up – not least it is rather easier to post photos, videos, etc. on there. There are quite a few photos up from the Gaza delegation. We also have a small You Tube channel which we hope to add to with audio and video recordings. Online media is crucial to our work.

Events Programme

CAABU organised a good, varied selection of events throughout the year. We hosted a screening of the film 'Salt of this Sea', directed by Annemarie Jacir, as part of the Mosaïques Festival 2009. We held our second annual Iftar at the Fakhreldine restaurant, which was again sold out. We also manned a stall for 'Palestine Day' at SOAS, with books, flyers, fact sheets and other relevant information available for students.



Our lecture series addressed a diverse range of topics, delivered by experienced, qualified speakers. Taking place in the immediate aftermath of the Israeli bombardment, Dr. Ghassan Abu-Sittah, Dr. Swee Chai Ang, and Dr. Ahmad Khalidi gave a moving account of the situation on the ground in Gaza, emphasising the medical effects of the operation on the Palestinian population.

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Salman Shaikh and Henry Hogger gave an interesting presentation on the Muslim West Facts Project, an initiative which uses public opinion data to share the views of the world's Muslim populations and the West. Ali Allawi, involved for over thirty years in the politics of Iraq, gave a lecture coinciding with the release of his latest book, *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*. David Gardner, chief leader writer and associate editor at the Financial Times, launched his book *Last Chance: The Middle East in the Balance* with a lecture at the Arab British Chamber of Commerce.

John McHugo, a member of the Executive of CAABU and Chair of the Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine, presented a paper at the BRISMES 2009 Conference, titled 'Israel's Territorial Entitlement - The principles for drawing boundaries with the Palestinians and with Syria'. Victor Kattan gave a terrific presentation on the key findings in his book 'From Coexistence to Conquest: International Law and the Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1891-1949' at a book launch hosted by CAABU, Arab Media Watch and Pluto Press.

Ben White gave a talk on how the term apartheid applies to the situation in Israel, while journalist Ginny Hill gave an informative talk on Yemen, focusing on the conflict in Yemen and what the immediate future holds. Finally CAABU hosted a conference on Algeria and the European Union, which addressed the political, economic, and social factors affecting Algerian-EU relations.

The Board

We will be very sorry that a number our Parliamentary board members will be retiring from the Commons during 2010. John Austin, Colin Breed and Derek Wyatt have all confirmed that they will not be standing in this year's general elections. We are sure that they will continue to make a valuable contribution to CAABU's work post-Westminster.

Several Board members will be running in the next elections including Christine Russell MP in Chester and Jonathan Fryer as the Lib Dem PPC in Poplar and Limehouse.

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Looking Forward

CAABU has plans to engage actively with the new Parliament. There will be a huge tranche of first-time MPs with whom we will have to set up new links and help brief about the Middle East. This will not be easy given domestic and economic priorities.

We are also looking for support for expanding our educational programme. It is crucial that we are able to target earlier years at schools, to introduce them to the Arab World, its people and culture. We will be introducing a new website as well. This has been some time in the pipeline but we hope to roll this out this year.

Staff

We have been joined by Ed Parsons as our new education officer. Ed comes to us as one of the first graduates of the Centre for Advanced Studies of the Arab World, an ESRC/AHRC initiative to combine Arabic language training with high level study of Middle Eastern politics. He took over from Naira Antoun who left us in September after having worked with us for almost two and a half years and did a fantastic job not least in devising new teaching materials and taking the whole schools programme forward. We wish her well.

We are delighted to have been joined by Joe Sammut, our new Student Campaigns Officer, who is helping us with our work at universities.

In addition we are most grateful to Andrew Stylianou for all his handling of the accounts and administration; to Aimee Shalan who has helped both with donor relations, fundraising but also with much of the work on Fahoora.org; to Graham Bambrough for all his efforts inside Parliament and to Dionysis Markakis for his help with membership and the events programme. They are a fantastic team and have helped take CAABU from strength to strength.

Volunteers

As ever we have been fortunate to call on the wonderful support of a large number of volunteers. We are very grateful to all their invaluable help and support.

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The volunteers included: Kate Kingsford, Louise Woolett, Khalid Tabidi, James Agha, Chris Ninan, Lexi Coloutas; Jennifer Thompson, Emma Pugh, Sarah Hudson, Hannah Diss, Sehr Sarwa, Emma Coveney, Noor Baalbaki, Alexandra Walton, Duraid Jalili, Chris Moses, Hannah Maher, Ryan D'Souza, Frank O'Conner, Sara Hussain, Claudia Blunt, Michelle Besa, Saskia Clifford-Mobley, Zinnia Shah, Sairah Ali, Fatema Abuidrees

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THE COUNCIL FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ARAB-BRITISH UNDERSTANDING

**(A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE, NOT HAVING A SHARE CAPITAL)
DETAILED INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2009**

	2009		2008	
	£	£	£	£
Income				
Subscriptions		14,180		13,600
Donations		100,286		54,873
Project income		65,755		27,642
Bank interest received		7,402		7,178
Books and videos		1,097		2,025
Other income		1,251		5,028
		189,971		110,346
 Expenditure				
Staff salaries	152,650		134,636	
Employer's N.I. contributions	15,641		13,087	
Staff pension contributions	-		2,292	
On-line filing incentive	(100)		(150)	
Project costs	29,391		13,765	
Party Conferences	3,883		-	
Travel and entertaining	5,733		16,231	
Office overheads and usage costs	3,469		2,730	
Insurance	1,210		-	
Postage	1,901		3,130	
Stationery and office supplies	3,679		4,874	
Advertising	-		1,586	
Photocopying	1,021		1,698	
Training	50		88	
Telephone	1,521		1,628	
Computer running costs	3,984		3,955	
Entertaining and lunches	-		4,167	
Legal and professional fees	-		464	
Accountancy	2,187		2,009	
Bank charges	260		214	
Exchange loss	-		1,434	
Sundry expenses	978		1,439	
Newspapers and subscriptions	2,324		3,004	
Books and videos	1,189		2,200	
Depreciation	823		1,029	
		(231,794)		(215,510)
		(41,823)		(105,164)