



Annual Report on Kurdish Lobby Australia (KLA) Activities, 2018

Summary

2018 was a busy year for Kurdish Lobby Australia. KLA held monthly meetings, wrote and distributed 13 reports, four statements and many letters. The reports, statements and our letter to President Donald Trump are distributed internationally, with some being published on other sites. KLA gained three honorary members (see below) and KLA members met with parliamentarians, senior advisors to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra on four occasions, also meeting the Israeli ambassador. In addition, KLA members met with other Australian Kurdish groups and participated in demonstrations protesting the invasion and occupation of Afrin, and met with community and business leaders outside the Australian Kurdish community. KLA is in contact with numerous overseas organisations involved in issues related to the Kurdistan Regions, sending these organisations our reports and statements. KLA continues to run a Facebook page, update its website, and in mid 2018, KLA began tweeting on Twitter. As of the 26 January 2019 the KLA website had 14,787 visitors and 36,201 visits since mid 2018. People appear to be interested in issues related to Kurds and the Kurdistan Regions because traffic is increasing dramatically week on week! As well, KLA undertook three small overseas projects, one in Kermanshah, Iran, another in Kobane, Syria, and another in Sulaimani, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Honorary Members

In 2018 KLA gained three honorary members, bringing our honorary members to four. They are:

Michele Harding: Mother of fallen Australian hero, Reece Harding, who lost his life whilst trying to save the lives of others' when clearing landmines in Rojava (northern Syria).

Rev Bill Crews: Minister of the Uniting Church Ashfield, NSW, and Founder and Chairman of the Exodus Foundation, which serves around 800 meals a day to those in need. Crews also operates a multipurpose Health & Outreach Centre and has a popular radio program on 2GB.

Julian Burnside AO QC: A leading Australian Human Rights lawyer and refugee advocate, author, and recipient of the Sydney Peace Prize and Order of Australia. In 2018, Julian Burnside produced a documentary called *Border Politics* in which he travels around the world visiting refugee camps and interviewing people. The film can be rented and/or purchased [HERE](#)

Profesor Ofra Bengio: Head of Kurdish studies at the Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, and lecturer at Shalem College, Jerusalem. Her many books in Hebrew, Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish include *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State Within a State (2012)* and the forthcoming *Kurdistan's Moment in the Middle East*.



Reports on Overseas Projects

[Earthquake Appeal and Distribution of Funds, Kermanshah, 6 April 2018](#)

[Report on KLA Donation to Kobane Reconstruction Board, 8 December 2018](#)

[Initial Report on KLA's donation of a Flow Hive to the University of Sulaimani, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, December 2018](#)

Other Reports

[Turkey's links with HTS \(Hayat Tahrir al-Sham\) and other Jihadi Militia in Syria, 9 February 2018](#)

[Turkey's Invasion of Afrin, 16 March 2018](#)

[Turkey's Invasion of Afrin \(updated\), 20 March 2018](#)

[Post ISIS States Report VII, 2 May 2018](#)

[Turkey's occupation of Afrin, 9 July 2018](#)

[What is happening in territory secured by the SDF \(Raqqa, Hasaka and Deir Ezzor\), 12 July 2018](#)

[Human Rights Update in the Kurdistan Region of Iran, 26 July 2018](#)

[Scenarios for Idlib \(northern Syria\), 27 August 2018](#)

[How to stop Turkey's aggression in Syria, 20 November 2018](#)

[Post ISIS States: Iraq, May – December 2018, 12 December 2018](#)

Statements

Statement 1 (Afrin) [Call to respond to Turkey's invasion of Afrin in Syria, 22 January 2018](#)

Statement 2 (Afrin) [Call to respond to Turkey's invasion of Afrin, 29 January 2018](#)

Statement 3 (Afrin) [Turkey's war crimes in Afrin, 21 May 2018](#)

[Iran's attack on Koya and execution of political prisoners, 28 September 2018](#)

Letters:

- Letter to Alan Jones, Andrew Bolt and Miranda Devine for media coverage of Turkey's invasion of Afrin;
- Letter from Tony Burke MP, Member of the Federal Parliament of Australia, 25 January 2018
- Letter to RSL Presidents of National and State Branches, 26 March 2018, asking the RSL to boycott ANZAC celebrations at Gallipoli in April 2018
- Letter to various Australian parliamentarians asking them to raise a question from the floor:

Is the Australian Government willing to support internationally mediated negotiations between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Government of Iraq to resolve disputes according to the constitution of Iraq, and also support the right of representatives of the Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria to participate in negotiations on a political transition in Syria?

There was no response.

- Letter to Israeli Ambassador to Australia, Mark Sofer, about PKK being relisted as terrorist organisation by Australian Government despite Permanent Peoples/Tribunal and Belgium Court of Appeal's rulings, and importance of Turkey making peace with Kurds in Turkey and Syria, 7 November, 2018
- Letter to President Donald Trump, 14 November 2018 about protecting Kurds in Syria, delisting PKK, referring to American Declaration of Independence which claims people have the right to rise up against tyranny.

Meetings in Canberra

30 January, 2018, Parliament House, Canberra

Meetings with Phillip Eliason (Senior Advisor to Foreign Affairs Minister, Julie Bishop), Stephanie Hunt, DFAT European Task Force attended by Ismet Tastan and Neclé (previous chair) from Democratic Kurdish Community Association of NSW, which organised the meetings, with Zirian Fatah (KLA), Mohammed Sorani (from Bashur) and Kayhan Oncu (IHD) in attendance.

14 February, Parliament House, Canberra

Meetings and a demonstration in protest against the invasion and occupation of Afrin outside Parliament House attended by Bill Crews, Peter Boyle (journalist for Green Left Weekly) Ismet Tastan, Brusk Aieveri and Ronahi Qandil (NSW Democratic Kurdish Community Association), Cekder Deger, Mahmut Kahramanm (Democratic Kurdish Community Association of Victoria), Dr Sherko Kurmanj, (Adelaide), Zirian Fatah (KLA) and Alison Buckley (KLA). Meetings were had with Andrew Wilkie (Independent), Tim Wilson (Liberal), Anthony Albanese, Peter Khalil and Penny Wong's advisor, Allan Behm (Labor).



Politicians had some understanding of the issues but said Australia must liaise with the US in all matters.

Twitter posts of demonstration:

<https://twitter.com/ICafrinresist/status/963706582369480705>

<https://twitter.com/ICafrinresist/status/963707647097794560>

Please note: These posts may have been taken down as a result of Twitter censorship.

15 March, 2018, NSW Parliament House, Sydney

NSW Parliament 5:30 – 7pm on Turkey's invasion and occupation of Afrin, attended by Zirian Fatah. Speakers: Jamie Parker (Greens MP/ Host of event), Peter Boyle (Greens left/ Rojava Solidarity – Sydney), Mira, a young woman from Afrin & her 10-year old daughter, and Dr Hawzheen Azeez, recently returned from Kobane. Hawzheen explained that Afrin families have 5-7 litres of water PER FAMILY PER WEEK. Other speakers were Brusk Aevieri (Australian Kurdish Federation) and Ronahi Qandil (NSW Democratic Kurdish Community Association).

29 June, 2018, Canberra

Zirian Fatah and Gina Lennox met with:

1. Ambassador Mark Sofer, Israeli Embassy;
2. DFAT staff including Iraq-Syria Task Force and those focused on Turkey and Iran;
3. Philip Eliason, Senior Advisor to Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, at Parliament House.

Issues related to all four regions of Kurdistan were discussed.

1 August, 2018

Zirian Fatah and Gina Lennox attended DFAT meeting for Australia-Iran Human Rights Dialogue, as a follow up to KLA's written submission.

Liaising with members of the Australian Kurdish community

3 February: Demonstration against Turkey's invasion of Afrin, Sydney Town Hall

14 February: Demonstration against Turkey's invasion of Afrin, Parliament House, Canberra

Afrin Campaign Committee meetings attended by Zirian Fatah and Sam Baban.

KLA liaised with other members of the Australian-Kurdish community to improve the effectiveness of any demonstration, suggesting:

- Speeches are conducted in English facing the general public;
- Each speaker speaks on a different topic;
- Flyers are handed to the general public explaining the reasons for the demonstration;
- Protesters approach interested passers-by to explain what the demonstration is about;
- Well thought out placards outnumber flags; and
- A large banner illustrates what the demonstration is about.

KLA designed placards and a banner for the 25 March demonstration.

25 March: March to Circular Quay protesting Turkey's invasion of Afrin



- 16 March: Halabja Commemoration
Organised by Sydney Kurdish Youth Society. 6:30 – 8:30pm. Attended by Zirian Fatah, who spoke, in summary saying: *Halabja was 30 years ago. A repeat is happening before our eyes and the world's silence is the same, so if Kurds/people are asking what can we do from here, I call on all Kurds in Australia to write to their State and Federal MP about Afrin and other Kurdish issues. This is grass roots action for Australian Kurds to be heard.*
- 29 April: Protest at Circular Quay regarding Turkey's invasion & occupation of Afrin

September 2018 public submissions related to the Australian Government relisting the PKK as a terrorist organisation

In early 2018, KLA suggested to the Kurdish Democratic Community Centres of Victoria and NSW that for the next submission to the Joint Parliamentary Committee for Intelligence and Security regarding the de/re/listing of PKK as a terrorist organisation that a lawyer be employed to present the case. The Kurdish Democratic Community Centres of Victoria and NSW employed Stary Norton Halphen and Australians for Kurdistan was represented by Dr Victoria Sentas, in making written and verbal submissions in September 2018. They did so admirably, noting many matters including that European jurisdictions classified the PKK struggle as an armed conflict that comes under international humanitarian law, and that Turkey has committed war crimes in the period 2015 – 2016. They further pointed out that there was a problem for Australian Kurds if the Australian Government does not distinguish between advocacy for self-determination and being 'linked' to PKK. The Joint Parliamentary Committee for Intelligence and Security sought clarification on these and other matters with the Department of Home Affairs. The Department responded by saying PKK threatened Australians because Turkey is a popular tourist destination, that classifying PKK as a terrorist organisation sends a clear message and helps if an Australian citizen is injured or killed in Turkey and the case is brought before a court of law. The committee also responded that Australian law distinguishes between advocacy and supporting terrorism. In writing up the session allowing public submissions, the Committee made four significant recommendations. These were that (1) the Australian Government should liaise with Australian Kurdish organisations to explain the differences between advocacy and supporting a terrorist organisation; (2) in future reviews, the status of a non-international armed conflict must be taken into consideration; (3) the application of international humanitarian law in such cases should be considered, and (4) the quality of information provided in the government's 'Statement of Reasons' on which a ruling is based should be improved and open source. Number (4) is significant as the Australian Government seems to accept as evidence the Turkish State's most spurious claims, for instance, that PKK kidnapped 300 children over a four month period. As a result of the submissions and (1) to (4) the Joint Parliamentary Committee for Intelligence and Security is seeking an updated regional briefing by ASIO within 18 months. Unfortunately, KLA missed the date of written and public submissions for 2018, but the quality of the other submissions and the subsequent result, are significant.



Liaising with Australian organisations and communities outside the Australian Kurdish Community to talk about Kurds and the Kurdistan Regions

In past years KLA members have met with:

- Tony Burke MP, 31 March 2016;
- Lefand Group Annual Building & Property Summit, 24 February 2017;
- Australian Lebanese Chamber of Commerce, 1 June 2017;
- Australian Arab Business Council, 17 October 2017;

In 2018, KLA members attended the following functions to raise issues:

- Lefand Group Annual Building & Property Summit, 2 March, 2018;
- Newroz function organised by the Australian Kurdish Association (now NSW Democratic Kurdish Community Association) in Blacktown, speaking with Blacktown City Councillor, Mr Susai Benjamin, who is eager to advance the Kurdish language in Blacktown area;
- UDIA - Western Sydney Luncheon, 17 May, 2018 Bicentennial Park;
- SW Bankstown Chamber of Commerce (SWBCC), together with the Canterbury-Bankstown Business Advisory Service (CBBAS) and a number of key stakeholders at the Innovation & Manufacturing Industry Event, 12 June, 2018;
- Annual Community Iftar Dinner, 1 June 2018, held by the Lebanese Muslim Association. Talked with MPs Jason Clare and Jihad Dib, Tony Burke, members of the State Parliament, Father Rod Brown of the Gosford Anglican Church and others;
- Screening of *Border Politics* in Randwick in July. Talked with its 'star' Barrister Julian Burnside, the roving interviewer/narrator of the film. Definitely worth seeing. Can be rented for \$3 for 48-hours or purchased for \$35 at <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/borderpolitics2> ;
- Function in July at GleeBooks, where George Karapanagiotidis from Melbourne spoke about his book, *The Power of Hope*, and his experiences with refugees & asylum seekers;
- Israel's 70th Independence Day, May 2018;
- Rabbi Bob Kaplan, Director of the Centre for Community Leadership, Community Council Relations of New York, August 2018;
- Canterbury Bankstown Chamber of Commerce (CBCC) – formally SWBCC, Gala night, 10 November 2018;
- 'Clash', a confronting film and discussion on the Arab Spring in Egypt organised by Bill Crews at Event Cinemas - George Street, Sydney, 14 November 2018. Afterwards, Eziz Bawermend and Alison Buckley met with Bill Crews to discuss ways Australian Kurds could be more effective in advocacy and actions. Bill asked 'Are the Kurds united?' We all know the answer to that question;
- Tradelink NSW Major Builders & Developers Dinner, 24 November 2018 (spoke with Andrew Malouf – his great grandfather having migrated from Lebanon in the 1890s, and on settling in Australia established businesses and did a lot of community work);
- Jewish Museum, Sydney, 3 December 2018. Function focused on Jews who had been expelled from Iran and Arab countries. Many recounted their ordeal or that of their parents. Renewed acquaintance with Lynda Ben-Manesh and Vic Alhadeef who originates from Morocco;
- Whilst visiting the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in December 2018, Zirian Fatah talked to numerous people about KLA and its functions.



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Priorities for 2019

In 2019 the KLA plans to:

- Hold a seminar on 'Tax Minimisation and Wealth Creation Strategies' involving two presentations 'Effective Ways to Gain Financial Security' and 'How to Grow Rich in the Share Market' at Olympic Park, to collect money for an overseas project.
- Hold debates and mock trials on topics to be decided to collect money for overseas projects;
- Create panel discussions and conduct interviews to be broadcast via podcasts or other means over the internet; and
- Continue to lobby and write reports on behalf of the people and administrations of the Kurdistan regions of Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran.

Call for new Members

KLA is a small group of volunteers. As you can see we have been very active, and are ambitious. To become even more active we need new members with ideas and a willingness to take responsibility for specific tasks.

PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING KLA IF YOU WANT TO ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO ADVOCATING ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE OF KURDISTAN OR HAVE IDEAS, CONNECTIONS OR A WISH TO RAISE MONEY FOR SMALL OVERSEAS PROJECTS.