

The Council for Arab-British Understanding

# Annual Review 2008



*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  
EC4A 3DE

## **CAABU Executive Board Officers (from February 2007-2009)**

**Joint - Chairmen:** John Austin MP, Colin Breed MP, Crispin Blunt MP

**Vice-Chair:** Hisham El-Solh

**Treasurer:** Steve Sherman

## **Executive Board (from February 2007)**

Omar Al-Qattan  
Layla Derraz  
James Denselow  
Jonathan Fryer  
Haifa Hammami  
Dr. James Howarth  
Matthew Jackson  
John McHugo  
Lord Redesdale  
Christine Russell MP  
Martin Short  
Derek Wyatt MP

## **CAABU Staff (2008)**

<b>Director:</b>	Chris Doyle
<b>Head of Development &amp; Communications:</b>	Aimee Shalan
<b>Head of Administration &amp; Finance:</b>	Andrew Stylianou
<b>Parliamentary Officer:</b>	Gillian Watt
<b>Education Officer:</b>	Naira Antoun
<b>Fundraising and Events Assistant:</b>	Dionysis Markakis



## Report on CAABU's activities in 2008

Based on Director's Speech at AGM, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2009

### Introduction

Recent annual reports have been noted for their gloomy overtones. We make no apologies for that, but there were at times faint rays of optimism in 2008. Iraq had its least terrible year for a while and UK troops are pulling out. Syria was reincarnated as a modern political travel destination. The Turks brokered indirect Syrian-Israeli talks. The Qataris brokered a deal on



Chris Doyle - CAABU's Director

Lebanon. The Egyptians brokered a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The Bush administration seemed to do nothing. The British government finally started to make the point a bit more forcefully that settlements were genuinely an obstacle to peace. Barack Obama won the American elections. At least it was not John McCain, who notably failed to tackle racism in his campaign. Remember the woman who cried "he's an Arab. He's not . . . ?", McCain replied, "No, ma'am. He's a decent family man, a citizen that I just happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues, and that's what this campaign's all about. He's not. Thank you." We bid farewell to George Bush – in the words of Jon Snow, "*the nightmare is over*". On a more serious note, the very idea that that the Baghdad Clogger, Muntazer al-Zaidi, could get up to 15 years for his offence is an affront to any idea of democracy and sensible rule of law. There is a point to all this, that anti-Arab racism, indeed racism generally, is still a major issue, and not just in Israel where Avigdor Lieberman has become more and more popular. We expressed our concerns to the FA about racist chants against an Arab footballer, and there was the fatal stabbing in August of a 16-year old Qatari

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student in Hastings. And the BNP's success in the local elections on a publicly anti-Islamic platform also does not bode well.

The year started much as it was to end with Gaza in the news. The last four days of December had enough disturbing stories and images to last a decade, as Israel pounded an already pauperized Gaza into rubble – 600,000 tonnes of it according to one estimate. This leaves as rubble not just Gaza, but the very possibility of a Palestinian state. Graham Bambrough, our new Parliamentary Officer, returned from taking a delegation of six MPs out there and also to the West Bank this January.



CAABU delegation to the West Bank

Let us not forget the West Bank in all of this. I was there in November with the new Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs Spokesman, Ed Davey, who also went on the recent Gaza visit as we were not allowed into the Strip during the autumn trip. The combination of the settlement expansion, road building, checkpoints, trenches, earth mounds, and the wall made nonsense of the post- Annapolis Olmert-Abbas coffee

mornings we were told were going so well. There was the story of Umm Kamel and her husband, already refugees, who were evicted from their home over 40 years. We went to visit them in a specially-made protest tent. Her husband was in hospital. He later died. Having visited this site, we only just made it to the tunnels checkpoint, when news came through that a crane had been used to demolish the protest tent.

Gordon Brown of course has got it all sussed, as he stated in a joint press conference with Salam Fayyad. "Israel should be the capital of Israel and a Palestinian state". And in terms of gaffes, CAABU has always suffered various indignities to its name, but the Guardian did well to call us "the Council for Our British Understanding".

## **The Council for Arab-British Understanding**

### **Our Work with Government and Parliament**

New Labour's Minister for the Middle East number nine was Bill Rammell, following Fatchett, Hoon, Hain, Bradshaw, Symons, Howells, O'Brien, and Wilson. His willingness to engage NGOs has to be praised. CAABU has had three meetings with other NGOs since December. David Miliband also addressed the All Party Palestine Group annual reception we organised in February last year, as well as William Hague. You may be interested to know that Israel now sees the UK as a problem country in some ways, not least on settlements. The UK opposed the upgrade of relations between the EU and Israel. Small steps...

CAABU's Parliamentary work has been extremely productive in 2008, and so far in 2009. For this we must pay a warm tribute to Gillian Watt, who left us after eight years in November.



We had two delegations to Palestine – one of which went to Gaza and came under Qassam shell fire, one to Qatar consisting of 21 Parliamentarians and Chris Doyle also joined a Conservative Middle East Council (CMEC) delegation of six Conservative MPs to Riyadh. Our Labour Chair, John Austin, went to Tunisia on a delegation, a country also visited by CAABU's Director Chris Doyle in October. Parliamentary interest in the region has rarely been higher. We have had many debates on Gaza for example; it was debated three times on the floor of the House in the first week back after the Christmas recess, quickly followed by several adjournment debates. We had many expert briefing sessions in the House with increasing attendance numbers. There were other briefing meetings, not least one with the IPU delegation from Algeria. We also helped brief delegations prior to going to Syria this January. Our Liberal-Democrat Chairman, Colin Breed, has been working with the fledgling Iraqi Parliament on how to set up their committees. And we are still producing briefing papers once a week for MPs, bespoke briefings for debates, and delegations. MPs have been active securing these debates and putting down questions. Our thanks go to them and their patient staff. We had another Palestine Lobby Day in November. Many Early Day Motions were also put down.

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### Our Work with Education

Once again CAABU sent speakers to run workshops at around 90 schools in 2008 on a variety of hot topics. We had the usual gems – a novel solution for Israel-Palestine – that Hindus should run the whole place – while one student kept on referring to Hummus when he meant Hamas. But the question of the year to our Education Officer, Naira Antoun, was “why do Muslims wear those fancy trainers?”



Nonetheless, the importance of our work is underlined by Rebecca Lindsay, an RE teacher at Thomas Alleyne’s High School. She commented: “My students are often bringing up these issues and asking questions that I don’t know how best to deal with. Things like the veil, and terrorism and what it means to be British. So [CAABU] being here has been really useful for me and for them.”

We have also been developing teaching materials geared to the national curriculum, to be used in preparation or follow-up classes. This will enable a fuller exploration of the issues that are brought up in school talks and workshops. These teaching materials cover not only the topics on which CAABU addresses students – Israel/Palestine, Islamophobia, Iraq – but also others relating to the Arab world. They are downloadable for free from the CAABU website.



Every year we also hold student campaign workshops for students from different schools to learn about effective campaigning methods and strategies, and how they can effect change through Britain’s political system. We are very grateful to Naira Antoun for all her hard work, but also to our associate speaker, Nandita Dowson. CAABU speakers have also been to other associations and groups around the country, not least at universities. This represents yet another possible area of expansion for our work. It has to be said that student activism on Gaza has been as strong as ever in recent memory.

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### Our Work with the Media

We are still very active in the media. The BBC continues to be a key focus. We had two meetings last year with the BBC's Head of News, Helen Boaden, as well as meeting with the Editor of the Today programme and the head of international news on BBC online. The latter meeting can be attributed to the fact that we give the online editors quite a hard time. We sent about 50 different emails to them over the course of 2008. To give you an example, we complained to Newsnight last February. They did a round up of the news including that the Israeli Deputy Defence Minister had warned Palestinians that things would get worse in Gaza if the rockets continued. Of course Matan Vilnai's precise comments, that every other media outlet focused on, was that it would lead to "*a bigger shoah because we will use all our might to defend ourselves.*" We were glad to see Newsnight were apologetic. CAABU also had articles and letters in the press on a whole range of issues – approximately 17 in total.



### Our Work with 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 recent Gaza delegation. Online media is crucial to our work. I do urge you to become email only members if possible – cheaper and greener (Please contact Dionysis Markakis - markakisd@caabu.org). We are also looking at designing a new website – indeed a youth oriented one as well.



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### Our Work with Events

We had a wide variety of speakers including the Independent's Middle East Correspondent, Patrick Cockburn, on Muqtadr Al-Sadr, Marwan Muasher, the former Jordanian foreign Minister on the Arab moderate centre, as well as Hanan Ashrawi, a former Palestinian minister, who came and gave a private briefing to journalists and politicians. We held a successful fringe meeting on Iran and the Arab World at the Conservative Party conference in Birmingham, in conjunction with the Conservative Middle East Council. We also held a 'Middle East Question Time' at the Liberal Democrat conference in Bournemouth.



Hanan Ashrawi & Chris Doyle

We held a poignant briefing both at CAABU's offices and in Parliament by Mohammed Omar, a brave young award-winning journalist from Gaza, who was here to receive the Martha Gellhorn Award for journalism. Little were we to know that upon his return he was to be interrogated by Shin Bet. He has recently undergone crucial medical treatment in Europe as a result. We wish him well.

We also hosted a very successful inaugural Iftar in September, which was well above capacity. We shall certainly follow that up with another event this August.



CAABU's Iftar

## **The Council for Arab-British Understanding**

### **Changes to the Board**

It is with mixed feelings that we learnt of the promotion of our Conservative Joint-Chairman, Crispin Blunt, to the Tory front bench team. Simply he had to resign from his position as CAABU Chairman, but we are delighted for him personally, and pleased that someone associated with CAABU is rising up the ranks. We wish him well, but above all would like to thank him for his huge efforts, not least in a party where his voice has on occasions been rather lonely.

Following CAABU's annual elections, certain board members had to step down for at least two years – we would like to thank very much Hisham El Solh, our Vice-Chair, Steve Sherman, our Treasurer, Lord Redesdale and Haifa Hammami for all their support. Our thanks to all the board over the last couple of years for their efforts, ideas and enthusiasm. Thanks also to Andrew Stylianou, our Head of Finance and Administration, who has so ably helped the board and Chris Doyle in administrative and financial matters.

### **Looking Forward**

It will be very unlikely if the next two years do not hold some profound changes. We have a new board, general elections in 12 months time and a Middle East where some of the key players are changing, or may change, all working out how they relate to an Obama administration. The full impact of the economic downturn is yet to be fully realised, not least of course on our own ability to fundraise successfully.

For CAABU, we shall drive forward. We have a twelve-point plan, which defines some of the key areas we will be developing – including targeting aspiring politicians and getting involved in more training issues related to education, media and lobbying, as well as programmes with the British-Arab communities.

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### **Staff Changes**

After eight years of outstanding work for CAABU, Gillian Watt decided to move on to pastures new. We miss her but are very pleased to have in her place, Graham Bambrough. His first day in the office coincided with the Israeli land operation in Gaza, so it was certainly into the deep end for him – to the extent that by mid-February he was taking a Parliamentary delegation to Gaza and the West Bank.

We have also been joined by Aimee Shalan. Aimee was formerly Director of the Olive Tree Scholarship Programme at City University, while before that she taught at Queen Mary, University of London. She is a regular contributor to the Guardian Review's non-fiction round-up and is an Executive Committee Member of Friends of Birzeit University. She has joined us as Head of Development and Communications, a newly-created position.

The staff do not do it alone. We had an incredible 42 interns last year. Our thanks to each and every one of them. They make a huge contribution to our efforts. They included: Basmah Mockbil, Salem Osserian, Katie Boase, Eliska Waldstein, Laura Sitzia, Dion Markakis, Amira Aziz, Fatima Jafri, Ashley Brasseur, Caroline Maurice, Zohrain Valji, Louis Allday, Jovy Sargent, Monica Telani, Zaynab Dost, Magda Qandil, Robin Martin, Catherine Seif, Adam Takla, Vicky Taylor, Omar Lababedi, Fiona O’Cleairigh, Felicity Dennistun, Ivan Gladstone, Zina Azem, Sarah Bradley, Frank O’Donnell, Will Todman, Mimi Randolph, Eyad Abu Ali, Alex Reynolds, Farah Farouk, Rod Mamudi, Tarah Nawaz, Laura Smith, Alex Jackson, Faten Hussein, Fatimah Amer, Keziah Mastin, Lucie Kroening, and Oliver Ellerton.

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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 2008**

	<b>2008</b>		<b>2007</b>	
	£	£	£	£
<b>Income</b>				
Subscriptions		13,600		15,417
Donations		54,873		175,780
Project income		27,642		68,962
Bank interest received		7,178		5,055
Books and videos		2,025		1,528
Other income		5,028		3,726
		110,346		270,468
 <b>Expenditure</b>				
Staff salaries	134,636		120,774	
Employer's N.I. contributions	13,087		12,104	
Staff pension contributions	2,292		-	
On-line filing incentive	(150)		(250)	
Project costs	13,765		32,636	
Contributions to The Arab British Centre Limited	2,730		8,462	
Postage	3,130		2,520	
Stationery and office supplies	4,874		3,144	
Advertising	1,586		-	
Photocopying	1,698		1,482	
Training	88		-	
Telephone	1,628		1,795	
Computer running costs	3,955		6,435	
Travelling expenses	16,231		4,459	
Entertaining and lunches	4,167		1,087	
Legal and professional fees	464		-	
Accountancy	2,009		1,950	
Bank charges	214		293	
Exchange loss	1,434		-	
Sundry expenses	1,439		3,939	
Newspapers and subscriptions	3,004		3,229	
Books and videos	2,200		1,990	
Depreciation	1,029		1,286	
		(215,510)		(207,335)
		(105,164)		63,133

NB: this is an excerpt from our Annual Accounts that were distributed at the CAABU Annual General Meeting on the 26th February 2009.