

Executive Council of Australian Jewry Inc.

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Executive Council of Australian Jewry slams statements by Bethlehem mayor

Grahame Leonard, President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the peak body of the Australian Jewish community, said today:

“Recent comments to the press by Bethlehem mayor Victor Batarseh, leader of a delegation to sign a sister-city agreement with Marrickville, have justified earlier concerns voiced by the Australian Jewish community.

Dr Batarseh predictably blamed Israel for Bethlehem’s economic woes. It is unfortunate that Australian media representatives did not press him about the real reason for its decline, the driving away of its Christians, Bethlehem’s economic backbone.

In 1995 Israel gave control of Bethlehem to the Palestinian Authority which in turn gave the Muslim population carte blanche to do what they wanted. Subsequent increased Islamisation, thuggery and intimidation of Bethlehem’s Christian population has seen it decline to just over 10%, an increasing trend elsewhere in the Middle East. And while Batarseh may be nominally Christian, he is also a wily politician who recognises which way the wind is blowing.

Earlier this year Marrickville Council issued a press release stating that the sister city relationship is aimed at recognising the valuable contribution that Palestinian and Arab speaking citizens make to the Marrickville area.

That may be. However of all Palestinian cities that Marrickville could have entered into a relationship with, it chose one whose administration is dominated by Hamas, declared a terrorist organisation by the Australian Government. This is a very political statement. And facilitating the politicisation of a civic relationship by Batarseh’s statements does not reward Marrickville’s Arab population. Rather it contributes to the alienation many of them seemingly have from Australia and local issues”.

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