

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

UNITING CHURCH MODERATOR DEFENDS ABDALLA

The Moderator of the Uniting Church in Queensland Rev Dr David Pitman has responded strongly to a national newspaper's attack on Dr Mohammad Abdalla and the Griffith University's Islamic Research Unit.

In a letter to *The Australian*, Dr Pitman said Dr Abdalla is an outstanding scholar and a person of great integrity who is making a very significant contribution to the life of the nation.

"The Unit is making a very significant contribution to the Australian community at a time when we should be committed to building trust and respect amongst people of all faiths and all Australians."

"Mutual respect and understanding are crucial to the peace and security of our society. Sure of our own faith, we should never be concerned about engaging in dialogue with people of goodwill from other faiths."

"The Christian faith's belief in hospitality and justice is important in how we approach this conversation."

Dr Pitman pointed to the importance of academic debate and the value of dialogue across disciplines in strengthening trust and respect.

"In a free society debate amongst scholars should not be curtailed or compromised."

The Uniting Church in Queensland has a growing relationship with the Muslim community and Uniting Church members are regularly meeting with Muslims from Mosques in Brisbane.

Principal of the Uniting Church's Theological College Rev Dr David Rankin described Dr Abdalla as informed, moderate and thoughtful academic, with a deep desire to engage with people of other faiths and with Christian scholarship.

"I have found our conversations with members of the Islamic Research Unit to be pleasant and fruitful, demonstrating a clear commitment to engaging with the Australian community."

A Uniting Church guest, Pakistani born Anglican Bishop of Rochester (UK) Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, was recently involved in a public discussion with Dr Abdalla at the Multi-Faith Centre of Griffith University.

MEDIA: For more information on this important interfaith relationship see the May 2008 edition of *Journey* <http://www.journeyonline.com.au/download.php?pdfId=70>.

The Moderator Rev Dr David Pitman is available for interview and high resolution images are available. Please contact Bruce Mullan 0407 702 344 journey@ucaqld.com.au.