

Moreton Electorate: Griffith Islamic Research Unit

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (4.12 pm)—I rise on this day, the 16th anniversary of the Mabo decision—a decision that restored justice and ended the farce of terra nullius—to talk about an institution in my electorate, Griffith University's Islamic Research Unit, GIRU, which promotes social inclusion and racial and religious harmony in Australia. GIRU was set up to organise, participate in and assist with educational activities that seek to bridge the gap between Islam and the west. Among its stated aims is the provision of scholarships for research aimed at examining the condition of Islam and Muslims in Australia, research that strives for understanding in order to bring positive and lasting change in our communities.

Griffith University's Islamic Research Unit is overseen by its director, Professor Mohamad Abdalla. He is highly regarded in Queensland for his efforts to build cultural and religious bridges and is a man I highly commend and admire. Professor Abdalla was invited to the Prime Minister's Australia 2020 Summit in April. That is why the *Australian* newspaper's assault on the good reputation of GIRU last month was so damaging to the Islamic community, not only in my electorate but also throughout Australia. The attack was based on nothing more than gossip and innuendo. A series of reports in the *Australian* alleged that a secret \$100,000 grant made by Saudi Arabia to Griffith University's Islamic Research Unit was to promote Wahhabiism, or extreme hardline Islamic ideology. The report even went as far as to link GIRU to al-Qaeda. This kind of irresponsible fear mongering by the *Australian* is a kick in the guts for Queensland's Islamic community, who have been working so hard to strengthen their reputation and promote tolerance.

To correct the public record: Griffith University did not request the funding and the cheque was not presented in secret. Instead, it was presented at a public function attended by dozens of academic staff, students and invited community members. In doing so, the Saudi embassy expressed support for GIRU's moderate and progressive approach to the study of Islamic and Muslim issues. Far from being an agent of extreme Islam, Griffith University's Islamic Research Unit was established to help create social inclusion. Griffith University is just one of many institutions throughout the world to receive funding from the Saudi government. The Saudi authorities are actively seeking more positive relations with the west and want to build bridges with western academic institutions—for example, other 'dubious' institutions such as Harvard, MIT, Georgetown, Berkeley, John Hopkins, Cambridge, Oxford and the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies.

It is not just universities that have been the beneficiaries of Saudi investment and benevolence. I was very interested to learn that Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal has a 5.5 per cent stake in News Corporation. However, we have not seen any reports about that appearing in the *Australian*. But my concern is for the Islamic people in Australia, especially in Moreton. These latest reports have created tension, concern and feelings of hopelessness among our Muslim community. I hope that they have the strength to rise above it. GIRU promotes harmony and understanding every day and I hope its endeavours will long continue. (*Time expired*)