



Muslim Women Australia



ISLAMOPHOBIA  
REGISTER  
AUSTRALIA

**MEDIA RELEASE** | For Immediate Release | Friday 5 July 2024

## **Beyond Tokenism: The Treatment of Senator Fatima Payman, Discrimination in Politics and Media, and Speaking About Palestine**

As a leading voice for Muslim women in Australia for over 40 years, Muslim Women Australia (MWA) has tirelessly advocated for representation, equality, and support at local, state, national, and global levels. Today, we express our deep disturbance and disappointment regarding the treatment of Senator Fatima Payman by her former Party colleagues, the media, and other political figures and spokespeople.

We unequivocally condemn the media for their ongoing discrimination and double standards when reporting on issues related to Islam and Muslims. The recent character assassination attempts on Senator Payman are a stark reminder of how the media often deflects from addressing the real issues, opting instead to target individuals.

“The focus on Senator Fatima Payman’s faith and unwarranted attacks on her integrity have not only misrepresented her character but have also fuelled a climate of increased discrimination and harassment against Muslim women”, said Maha Krayem Abdo, CEO of MWA.

Senator Fatima Payman is a woman in leadership, a visible Muslim wearing hijab, is a young leader with two years in her political career and comes from a refugee background. Her vote for the recognition of the state of Palestine was a matter of conscience, grounded in an established party platform, during a current and ongoing genocide where 40,000 people have been killed, yet the focus has been unfairly shifted away from these crucial concerns.

As the Human Rights Commission prepares to launch a National Anti-Racism Framework later this year, it is evident that institutional and systemic racism and discrimination are still deeply embedded within our nation's capital. The introduction of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 was meant to signify a step away from the White Australia Policy, signalling a commitment to embracing diversity as a strength. However, the recent treatment of Senator Payman reveals that appreciation for diversity remains conditional.

To truly foster an inclusive and harmonious society, multiculturalism must transcend superficial cultural tokenism, which is often limited to ethnic foods and celebratory events. While these aspects are valuable and cherished, a healthy society must engage more deeply with the diverse experiences, values, and perspectives that different communities bring. Recent events have starkly highlighted the need for this deeper engagement.

Moreover, the issue of demonstrating what Respect at Work looks like, particularly within media and politics, cannot be ignored. If our federal parliament fails to uphold respect, dignity, and just treatment for its representatives, it sets a poor example for the entire nation.

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"Since 7 October 2023, the Islamophobia Register Australia has seen an unprecedented 581% increase in reported incidents. These incidents, both offline and online, are abhorrent. The fight against Islamophobia requires a national effort. Government, media, civil society, and individuals all have a role to play. It is essential that we come together to combat hate and prejudice. We must ensure that every Australian, regardless of their faith, feels safe and valued."

Politicians and the media have a responsibility to ensure the safety and respect of all members of society. The discriminatory reporting, undermining, and insulting of Islam and Muslims, and the overall treatment of the first hijab-wearing woman in parliament have severely impacted how Muslim women are treated in public. There has been a drastic rise in anti-Muslim behaviour and sentiment, leaving women feeling increasingly unsafe and fearful for their safety in public spaces." Dr Nora Amath, Executive Director, Islamophobia Register Australia

The intersection between gendered violence and Islamophobia is real and ever present.

"Media and politicians need to bring back their conscience and own their role and responsibility in fair and balanced reporting, as they are playing a major role in shaping public perception and have the power to either promote inclusivity or division", said Maha Krayem Abdo, CEO of MWA.

We call on media, politicians, and the community to reflect on these issues and work collectively towards a fairer, more inclusive society. It is time to move beyond tokenism and embrace genuine multicultural engagement that respects and values the contributions of all Australians.

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This media release addresses the current issues faced by Muslim women, particularly in the context of Senator Fatima Payman's treatment, and calls for greater respect and fairness in media and politics. It also emphasises the need for deeper engagement with multiculturalism and the responsibility of public figures to set positive examples.