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## LABOR REITERATES ISRAEL SUPPORT AMID PALESTINE CONTROVERSY

# STATE OF CONFUSION

GARETH NARUNSKY

SHADOW foreign affairs minister Penny Wong has assured that "Labor has always been and remains a strong friend and supporter of the State of Israel. That will never change," in the face of a storm over its policy on the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

It comes as a 2018 ALP federal conference resolution calling on the next Labor government to recognise Palestine as a state was included as a "statement in detail" in a draft platform for the party's Special Platform Conference at the end of this month.

It remains non-binding on an actual future Labor government.

"Labor supports an enduring and just two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the right of Israel to live in peace within secure borders internationally recognised and agreed by the parties, and reflecting the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to also live in

peace and security within their own state," Senator Wong told *The AJN* this week.

The 2018 resolution reiterated this position and "reflected the desire of the conference to recognise Palestine as a state", while also making clear it was up to a future Labor government, she said.

The inclusion of the resolution - which was omitted from earlier versions of the draft platform - led to *The Australian* speculating that Labor is preparing to officially recognise a Palestinian state.

The Liberal Friends of Israel concurred this week with an op-ed written by former Jewish Labor MP Michael Danby, who claimed there were far more pressing issues the party needed to address, and by prioritising the Palestinian cause, it was making itself unelectable.

The policy would put Australia out of step with other Western nations and allies, the Liberal Friends noted. Liberal Senator James Paterson said Labor is "following a dangerously similar path



Shadow foreign minister Penny Wong speaking at the ALP Conference in December 2018. Photo: AAP Images/Lukas Coch

to Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party in the UK, and failing to support Israel when it really counts".

But Danby's Jewish successor, Macnamara MP Josh Burns, countered, "There is no change to the Australian Labor Party policy on Israel-Palestine -- We remain a steadfast friend and supporter of the Jewish State."

Colin Rubenstein cautioned introducing the language to the platform would "hinder rather than help" Israelis and Palestinians who genuinely seek coexistence.

"Adopting such a stance appears particularly difficult to understand in the wake of last year's landmark Abraham Accords," he said.

"These transformative agreements are opening up new avenues for peacemaking, provided outdated ideas are not allowed to stifle this opportunity."

Zionist Council of Australia president Jeremy Leibler added the "only path to peace" is the resumption of negotiations, and recognising a Palestinian state in their absence "imposes pressure only on Israel and discourages both parties from making any compromises".

"We acknowledge comments made by Penny Wong, which reinforced the ALP's long-term commitment to a two-state solution and support for Israel's right to exist within secure and recognised borders," he said.

### ECAJ'S VIEW

## A symbolic rather than substantive change but nonetheless disappointing

VERY little has changed from the ALP's position following its 2018 National Conference. It remains committed to a two-state outcome "recognised and agreed by the parties". The call for the next Labor government to recognise Palestine as a state was also part of the resolution.

The only difference is that all resolutions that are being preserved have now been given the higher status of being part of the ALP platform itself. This is a symbolic rather than a substantive change.

Although symbolism matters, it will not bind a future ALP government



PETER WERTHEIM

to recognise a state of Palestine. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that the wording fails to come to grips with the sea change that has occurred in the politics of the Middle East over the last two years.

One would have expected the national conference of the party of Australia's alternative government to have welcomed the normalisation of

relations between Israel and Bahrain, the UAE, Sudan and Morocco.

One would have hoped that it would say something positive about Israel's titanic efforts in vaccinating its citizens - Jews and Arabs, Muslims and Christians - against the COVID-19 virus.

Instead, the proposed new platform is bogged down in a sterile argument about recognising a Palestinian state. The Palestinians have no entity that meets the criteria of a functioning state, and the draft platform is at odds with the ALP's own frequent statements that

nothing should be done to pre-empt the outcome of key issues which can only be resolved through direct negotiations.

Recognising a Palestinian state other than as part of an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians would only act as a disincentive, rather than an encouragement, for them to resume negotiations. It is entirely counterproductive.

It is also strange this was never included in any draft of the new ALP platform disseminated when the ALP conducted consultations with its members and the wider community.

So there was no opportunity for anyone to discuss it.

As it happened, ECAJ had several consultations with the ALP which focused on religious freedom and the Religious Discrimination Bill and other domestic issues. We could have provided feedback on the proposed recognition of a Palestinian state if that proposal had been included.

But it was not, and we therefore did not have that opportunity.

Peter Wertheim is co-CEO of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ).

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