



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**PROOF**

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

**QUESTION**

**Thursday, 16 February 2017**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## QUESTION

**Date** Thursday, 16 February 2017  
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**Questioner** Roberts, Sen Malcolm  
**Speaker**

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder** Brandis, Sen George  
**Question No.**

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### Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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**Senator ROBERTS** (Queensland) (14:22): As a servant to the people of Queensland and Australia, I refer the Minister representing the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Brandis, to revelations that Islamist activist Yassmin Abdel-Magied had her personal book tour of some of the world's most oppressive regimes paid for by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Can the minister confirm that this information is true—yes or no? If yes, how much money did taxpayers contribute towards the book tour? Further, does the minister agree with Ms Abdel-Magied's view that the Islamic political ideology is at its core feminist, considering the fact that the Islamist republics and kingdoms visited by Ms Abdel-Magied practise and encourage legalised child marriage, female genital mutilation, female subjugation and public beheading of women who are allegedly caught committing so-called adultery, a term that can be used for sex outside of marriage—yes or no? (*Time expired*)

**Senator BRANDIS** (Queensland—Attorney-General, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:23): Thank you, Senator Roberts, for your question. I did see that report in this morning's press. I can advise you that Yassmin Abdel-Magied visited a number of countries in the Middle East to promote Australia as an open, tolerant and multicultural society. Ms Abdel-Magied met youth representatives, journalists, scientists, entrepreneurs, women's groups, sporting groups, academics, students, business leaders, diplomats and government representatives. The visit also promoted female participation in male dominated industries such as the oil and gas sector, and featured targeted engagements with young women considering careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths. For example, Ms Abdel-Magied visited the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre in Dubai to promote the role of women and youth in science and technology.

The visit was funded from the public diplomacy budgets of DFAT's Middle East posts and cost an estimated \$11,485, comprising travel allowance and flights. There were no appearance fees.

The Australian government has always supported a wide range of initiatives that promote Australia as an open liberal democracy to an international audience. These initiatives build understanding, trust and influence to advance our national interests. DFAT supports speakers' tours by prominent Australians to promote understanding of contemporary Australia, including by media leaders and leaders from the Indigenous, diaspora, science and arts communities. For example, DFAT supported Ms Abdel-Magied to attend the ASEAN-Australia Emerging Leaders Program in Malaysia in 2012.

Senator, I note the observations you make, but that was the purpose of the visit and those are all the particulars of the visit of which I am advised by DFAT.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Roberts, a supplementary question.

**Senator ROBERTS** (Queensland) (14:25): Is the minister aware of any taxpayer funded book tours of any Christian or Jewish authors who may have visited Christian and Jewish countries to spread a message perhaps of love, peace and tolerance—yes or no? If you are not aware, is your policy a direct and targeted funding of one political ideology over the other Australian peace, freedom and love based ideologies and religions—yes or no?

**Senator BRANDIS** (Queensland—Attorney-General, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:26): I am aware of some that might answer the description that you have offered, Senator Roberts, though this is not a comprehensive list. But can I tell you that examples of similar public diplomacy visits include a funded visit by Mr Greg Sheridan of *The Australian* to Indonesia in March 2016; a visit by the Reverend John Henderson, the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Australia, to

the Holy See in November 2007; and, perhaps a little more broadly than the category you have identified, visits by Professor Ian Frazer, the creator of the HPV vaccine and 2006 Australian of the Year, to South-East Asia, and by Yassmin Abdel-Magied also to the ASEAN emerging leaders dialogue in Malaysia in 2010. So there are a wide variety of these visits, representing a wide variety of Australian points of view. (*Time expired*)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Roberts, a final supplementary question.

**Senator ROBERTS:** Why does the department pay for an individual's book tour? Secondly, what profit did Ms Abdel-Magied make from her tour on taxpayer funds?

**Senator BRANDIS** (Queensland—Attorney-General, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:27): Senator Roberts, with respect, I think it is a misdescription to describe this as a book tour. I have explained to you the nature of the engagements in which Ms Abdel-Magied participated and, as I told you, the cost to DFAT of \$11,485 for her visit to the Middle East was composed entirely of travel allowance and flights. There was no money paid to Ms Abdel-Magied for appearance fees. These were all outlays associated with the travel. I dare say there were accommodation costs in there as well, but there was no personal fee or profit element to her from the visit.