



Out and proud ... Anthony Mindel carries the Aleph Melbourne banner ahead of members from Arab & Gay who marched with the Jewish contingent. Photo: Michael Barnett

## Arabs join Jewish gays in Pride March

MELISSA SINGER

AMID the sea of rainbow-coloured balloons and banners at Sunday's 11th annual Melbourne gay and lesbian Pride March, a group of Jews and Arabs joined forces in a historic inter-faith encounter.

Arab & Gay, a newly-formed group, joined around six members of Aleph Melbourne – a social and support group for Jewish gay and bisexual men – for the march through the streets of St Kilda.

Aleph coordinator Michael Barnett said the Arab & Gay members, who are Muslims and Christians of Egyptian and Lebanese descent, approached the Aleph contingent on the day about marching together.

Barnett said the show of solidarity was evidence that Arabs and Jews, regardless of their sexuality, can “coexist happily”.

Barnett, who is also secretary of the Australian Gay Multicultural Council, said it was probably harder for gay Arab men than their

Jewish counterparts to gain acceptance in their own community.

“It might be a lot harder for [Arabs] to be visible in their own community,” Barnett told the *AJN*.

In a similar vein to the Torah's proscription in Leviticus 18, the Koran (26:165-66) refers to homosexuality as a “transgression”.

This was the ninth year Aleph Melbourne participated in the march. Other ethnic groups represented included the Greek, Italian, Aboriginal and Asian communities.

Barnett said maintaining a multicultural presence at the march was “essential”.

“We need to show ... gay and lesbian people exist everywhere. They don't need to be discriminated against, they need to be accepted.”

Established in 1995, Aleph Melbourne has more than 50 members. In 1999, a controversial motion on whether to allow Aleph to join the Jewish Community Council of Victoria was rejected.

## Funding for suicide bombers at centre of AWB debate

PETER KOHN

POSSIBLE Australian involvement in Iraqi financing of Palestinian suicide bombers was at the centre of a highly-charged and acrimonious debate in Federal Parliament this week, in which the Labor Opposition demanded that Prime Minister John Howard “apologise” to Israeli families of suicide-bombing victims.

Hitting back, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer described the link made by Labor between AWB kickbacks to the Iraqi regime and funding for suicide bombers as a “disgraceful and disgusting slur”.

“The American Government is probably the only government that has been as supportive of Israel as this government has been,” Downer said.

The accusations against the government stem from the Opposition's contention that

monies deposited by AWB, formerly known as the Australian Wheat Board, in a Jordanian bank account were then used to purchase weapons for Iraqi soldiers and to fund families of Palestinian suicide bombers.

In a statement on Tuesday, Michael Danby, the member for Melbourne Ports, said: “We know what happened to the money – it went into the Rafidain Bank in Jordan, a bank controlled by Iraq. This is the same bank from which the Iraqi ambassador to Jordan drew the cheques for the Arab Liberation Front – an Iraq-backed Palestinian terrorist group – to pay to the families of suicide bombers.”

Labor's shadow foreign minister Kevin Rudd demanded: “Please satisfy the Australian people that not one Australian dollar went to fund the Palestinian suicide-bombers, that not one Australian dollar went to fund Hamas and its suicide bombing operations in Israel.”

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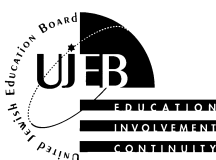
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