

(Transcript)

## Public Forum: “Truth and Democracy: Casualties of War?”<sup>1</sup>

A discussion forum in response to public questions.

**Panel: Tony Abbott, Tanya Plibersek, Peter Macdonald and Donna Mulhearn**  
**Moderator: Genia McCaffery, Mayor of North Sydney**

### Welcome to Country - Susan Moylan-Coombs

Good evening, as introduced, my name is Susan Moylan-Coombs, and I'm the Aboriginal Project Officer for the northern Sydney Aboriginal Social Plan, which encompasses eleven councils in this region, one of them being North Sydney. So I'd like to thank the organisers for inviting me here tonight, and it's actually an acknowledgement of country that I do, because this is not my birth country. We're here tonight on the homelands of the Guringai people, and as you're probably aware, our tradition was oral tradition, so a lot of where the boundaries were, and still are for us, weren't actually documented, so there's a little contention about where those boundaries are. But some say that Guringai homelands extended from the north shore of Port Jackson, in the west bordered by Lane Cove river, in the east by the coast. Some say Pittwater, some say as far up as Tuggerah lakes. But the Guringai people were the traditional owners of this land, and I acknowledge country to remember those who have gone before us, because there are no known Guringai descendants who still live in the homelands. That's not to say that there's not a very vibrant aboriginal community who live here, but sadly for us, there are no elders from this place. I'd like to thank the organisers for inviting me here tonight, thank you. (Applause)

### Genia McCaffery:

Thank you, Susan. Well, welcome to this, I think exciting night: Truth and Democracy Forum. And I guess our aim tonight is to do something that is rare in Australian politics – that's a civilised and intelligent discussion of a complex issue that covers many different views and respects the democratic right of people to hold those different views. It's also about listening to each other, not grandstanding and not shouting others down, and I would emphasise this – tonight is about a civilised discussion. People will have different points of view, and we should listen to them.

The format will approximately follow the BBC's radio program Any Questions? And hopefully out of tonight some of our media might think about doing something similar. We will begin with a number of pre-submitted questions, which are printed on one of the sheets available on your seats. I will read out each question, and ask the four panel members in turn to give their own answer. I'll also give the panel members the opportunity to come back in reply to one of the later speakers. I will then briefly ask the submitter of the question for a few words of comment. The same procedure is done for each of the subsequent questions. If the panel all keep it short – say two minutes or so each per question – maybe I might just encourage them to stay to that two minutes - we'll be able to have a few brief questions from the floor at the end of the session, and we're aiming to close at about 9:30, so that afterwards we can stand around and talk about the issues that were raised tonight in an informal way. The session is being recorded, which is great, and there'll be a full transcript published on the [sydneypeace.com](http://sydneypeace.com) website.

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<sup>1</sup> Held on Monday 20 October 2003 at Fred Hutley Hall, North Sydney Council Chambers, 200 Miller Street, North Sydney Forum organised by North Shore Peace & Democracy on behalf of peace groups in Mosman, Manly, Pittwater, Pennant Hills and Ku-ring-gai, and supported by North Sydney Council

Now it's my pleasure to introduce our panel tonight: to my right, I have Tony Abbott, who is of course the Minister, the new Minister for Health and Ageing, and Federal Member for Warringah. (Applause) Tony is a former journalist and a manager of a concrete plant – that's an interesting one, Tony. And he was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1994. Prior to entering Parliament he was Executive Director of the Australians for Constitutional Monarchy. While most Ministers would find facing tonight's audience and questions a challenge - I know Tony won't find it a challenge – he'll be relieved that it isn't an audience of doctors and we're not here to discuss Medicare – or the New South Wales hospital system.

Our next panellist, Donna Mulhearn, also to my right (Applause) is a former journalist, who in January, I'm sure many of you know, responded to a call for human shields and spent February and March this year in Baghdad, staying throughout the bombing campaign. She's also been an aid worker in Africa, India and East Timor. She left her job as a media adviser in the New South Wales Government late last year to travel, write and teach contemplative spirituality. In a few weeks time she is heading back to Baghdad to work on setting up orphanages for street children.

Our next speaker, Tanya Plibersek, also a journalist (Applause) – the journalists are thick on the ground tonight, is of course Labor MP for the seat of Sydney. She was elected in 1998, and is best known for her roles in the movement for refugees and against the war. According to the Bulletin late last year: “as a leftist member of the party's left faction,” – which is interesting - “she currently sits well outside the inner circle of power” but she “manages to simultaneously break and yet conform to the mould of a successful Labor politician.” We are very grateful for Tanya for stepping for Carmen Lawrence, who unfortunately, her mother is gravely ill, and she was unable to join us tonight, so thank you, Tanya. (Applause)

Now, Peter Macdonald, to my left, is not a journalist, he's a doctor. He's ex Independent State MP, I'm sure many of you will know, for Manly. He's a past medical co-ordinator of refugee health programs with Médecins Sans Frontières in Iran and with Timor Aid in East Timor. Peter stood as an Independent against Tony Abbott in the last Federal election. He said of that campaign “we can provide a voice on issues that the major parties aren't dealing with ... people appreciate honesty” – and that's really, I guess sums up our hope for the discussion tonight.

So, our first question comes from Mike Hartnell ...

### **Q1: WMD and accountability - Question from Mike Hartnell:**

***Since it is now clear that WMD was only a pretext for the US to invade and occupy Iraq, what safeguards need to be in place to ensure that in future such a momentous decision is not left to one person or a small group? How can there be more accountability for such actions?***

#### **Tanya Plibersek:**

I think that one of the things that Australia's involvement in the attack on Iraq showed was that there was a grave failure of the United States and its allies to even try to engage the United Nations and the world community in their project, and I hope that if there's one significant change that comes about because of the continuing problems in Iraq, and the fact that the conflict there just continues and the United States is spending a lot more than it thought it would financially, and a lot more people, a lot more of their soldiers are dying than expected – if there's one thing that comes out of that, I hope it will be that they don't continue to march off unilaterally into adventures like they were going to have in Iraq.

There was a feeling, I think, before the war in Iraq, that there would be a domino effect, that Syria would be attacked next, and then North Korea. George Bush's speech about the axis of evil alarmed many of us, who thought that this was part of a line-up of countries that were going to face similar

treatment. I think that the fact that things haven't gone well in Iraq at all, perhaps will give the United States pause for thought, and certainly should give our government pause for thought. The most important thing, I believe, we can do is continue to work with and support the United Nations, and if you look at what happened in East Timor, and what happened in Cambodia, it shows that there can be a very positive role for the United Nations in bringing peace to countries that look like they are absolute disaster zones, so I hope that that's a lesson we'll learn from Iraq.

**Peter Macdonald:**

Could I just state at the outset that I'm representing no political party here, I'm representing my community and the views that I express are my own and those derived from my working and moving within my community.

But in response to the question, I want to be quite clear in my views on this. I think this war was nothing about WMDs, it was all about oil. I think that's one thing that has come through very clearly. (Applause) But let's just paint a picture about this WMD issue, and there's some recent reports that are emerging that are very troubling. I mean, David Kay report recently found no evidence of plans for a nuclear program, seven sites in Blair's dossier of September '02 that there was no evidence of suspicious activities, there was no sign of imported uranium, there were no traces of chemical weapons, biological weapons, etc invoked by Jack Straw. Also the British Joint Intelligence Committee, in their report of February the 10th of this year, found no evidence that Iraq was preparing chemical weapons to give to Al-Qaeda, that the collapse of Saddam's regime would in fact increase the risk of such weapons going to terrorists, that Al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiah presented a greater threat to the west than Iraq, and that threat would increase if there was military action against Iraq. But John Howard agreed to the very opposite, and took us into that war. This is the nuts of this question, as to how, in fact, can we in the future try and provide accountability measures which will prevent such actions.

And can I just list a few of them if I have the time. Firstly, the media: we need an unbiased, free, independent, thoughtful media (Applause) but as we know, peace doesn't sell newspapers, war sells newspapers. We need to find mechanisms for increasing the accountability within our parliamentary system, and that goes to the very heart of our democratic process, and how it works or how it doesn't work. And remember, governments of whatever persuasion love to operate in secret, love an inner circle, they like to centralise power, and our task as a community is to encourage decentralisation of that power, and we need to have powerful committee structures which, for instance, they have in the US Congress; less bipartisanship, and a strong house of review.

Just finally, seven years of the Howard government have seen significant shift in foreign policy, away from an Asian-Pacific focus to the role of a deputy sheriff tied to America's apron strings. This, combined with an administration that over seven years has been harsh, uncompromising, adversarial, and dishonest, has left us with few neighbours as friends. Maybe we need a Californian recall system, although we don't need Arnold Schwarzenegger (Laughter) Maybe we just need an effective opposition. Thank you. (Applause)

**Donna Mulhearn:**

I think we need to get Bush out, for a start. Very, very dangerous man, and his colleagues in his cabinet, very, very dangerous people. And we all know about the history of the people around him, who have been planning this war in Iraq for many, many years, and so this was just one of their many goals fulfilled that they had planned many years ago for their corporate motives. I think we need to help our friends in the United States to get Bush out, and I think they're really working hard over there, our progressive-thinking friends in the United States are going to have a real shot at it next year, and I think we need to support them in that. And, the media I would like to mention as well, is a major player in this: they're almost in partnership with the Bush administration in dumbing down the US people: it's keeping people in ignorance, and keeping facts – the fact that they think Iraq is something to do with September 11 is really disturbing, really very disturbing, especially for me, who had to face Iraqi people who'd had their limbs blown off, and lost their family members, and for somehow them to have the

accusation labelled that this is what you get back for September 11, just is the most unbelievably callous and offensive thing that anyone could say to someone sitting in a hospital bed who's just had their house blown to pieces. So, it's offensive, and it's unbelievable that Bush can get away with making that link, which makes me really question what the people are getting and having dished up to them. We know that it's mostly rubbish, and we are looking forward to the question about media coverage of the war, when we can talk more about that.

I think we really need to empower the UN. We now live in a situation in a world where one country thinks it can go and invade anyone it likes. That's the reality that we live with. Now, I don't know about you, but I think we need to do something about that very quickly, because I'm not very comfortable about that because we just don't know what's going to happen next. The UN needs to become a serious and credible organisation, and I know that's mostly because of the United States thumbing its nose at it, that it's not. But we need to insist that United States sign up to institutions such as the International Criminal Court, which – everyone used to say to me: “oh, so what's your alternative to getting rid of Saddam Hussein, and that's another talk in itself and we could talk for hours on that because there were many many alternatives, one of them being, if the US had signed on to the International Criminal Court we could have brought Saddam Hussein to answer for human rights abuses etc etc and made the democratic process go. But, who - other than a few tinpot dictatorships around the world, there was only one country that refused to sign, and that's the United States of America.

So, I think as far as accountability and world affairs go, it's all in the hands of those men in the White House, and that one woman in the White House. So, I think we need to work with our friends in the United States to get Bush out, and go from there. (Applause).

**Tony Abbott:**

Thank you, Genia. I don't exactly share the perspective of my fellow panellists this evening. I don't believe that the weapons of mass destruction were a pretext at all. If you go back to the period before the war in Iraq, all sorts of people who are not normally friends of the Howard government, or friends of the Bush administration or friends of the Blair government said that Iraq did have weapons of mass destruction. You have people like Richard Butler saying that they did have weapons of mass destruction. You have people like Andrew Wilkie saying that they did have weapons of mass destruction.

Now it's true that so far only the ingredients of weapons of mass destruction have been found, not actual weapons, but under any interpretation, the Saddam Hussein regime was a deeply evil regime. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Iraqis had been gravely persecuted, even unto death by the Saddam Hussein regime. He had poisoned his own people, he had invaded his neighbours, he had sponsored terrorism, both in Palestine and in other places, he had harboured Abu Nidal. While he may not have been Osama Bin Laden's principal lieutenant, certainly he was an agent for mayhem in the wider world, and I think that we are all much the better off for his passing from political power and influence.

As for the United Nations, well look, I think the United Nations is an important force in the world. I think that the United Nations has significant moral authority, it has significant legitimacy, but I do not believe that countries such as Australia should in the end be forced to subject themselves to the ultimate rule in these matters of the United Nations. There are many things which have been done by countries such as Australia, which have been good things which have not been sanctioned by the United Nations. For instance, the intervention by a number of powers, western powers, in Kosovo, in support of persecuted Muslims, was not sanctioned by the United Nations, and yet plainly it was a good thing. Supposing Australia's intervention in East Timor had not been sanctioned by the United Nations, would that have meant that it shouldn't have happened – I would argue no, it would not have meant that it shouldn't have happened. So look, by all means, let's have the support of the United Nations where possible. By all means, let's try to engage the United Nations in what we think and what

like-minded countries think are important international issues of justice and peace, but in the end countries like Australia must maintain their right to act in support of their fundamental national interests and their fundamental national values. I regret that the United Nations did not in the end sanction the campaign in Iraq, but certainly I think that there were any number of United Nations resolutions that justified what countries like Australia, Britain and America did in Iraq.

**Genia McCaffery:**

Thank you, Tony. Mike, would you like to respond to those answers.

**Mike Hartnell:**

Three of the four speakers seem to agree that weapons of mass destruction were a pretense for us invading Iraq and one of the speakers doesn't. I think that if we go into this we can see that we were all conned, basically. We were given false information and of course we as individuals have no way of verifying it for ourselves. We were told about weapons ready to use in forty five minutes. We were told about buying uranium from Niger. That was false, that was proven to be false before the war, and we didn't change our course of action. We should have at least stopped to think as a community then.

Like Donna, I went to Iraq in February, and I met a lot of beautiful, wonderful Iraqi people, just like everybody here in this room, and talking to a group of Iraqis would be like talking to you. They're lovely kind people with families and we bombed them. We bombed them under false pretences, in my view.

I'd like to say, constructively, that bring the United Nations into things is a terrific idea, and let's face it, you might say that you agree with the United Nations, but our coalition really talked down the United Nations, and Mr Bush was saying it was irrelevant, and Mr Howard was just toeing the line. That's what it appears to ordinary Australians, anyway. Peter, thank you very much for your really constructive suggestions. And to Donna, who is going back to the beautiful Iraqi people, let's give her all of our support, they really are lovely people. Thank you. (Applause).

**Genia:**

Thank you, Mike. And our second question comes from [Jim] Wilks

**Q2: What is terrorism? - Question from Jim Wilks**

**A US Army manual defines terrorism as: "the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to attain goals that are political, religious, or ideological in nature. This is done through intimidation, coercion, or instilling fear." Do you agree? How broadly can this definition be applied?**

**Peter Macdonald:**

That's a really good question. It's quite an intellectual one, it's probably more for an academic rather than an intellectual battler like me, but I do understand why it's important. I in fact thought the question might – the US Army manual defining America's foreign policy as "the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to attain goals ..." (Laughter), but it indeed it could well apply to the US invasion of Iraq in my view. I guess that I would just would alter the definition somewhat to include the word "lawful". So, probably: "systematic and unlawful use of violence by a person or group against a person or group or property with the intention of ... " blah blah blah "for the reasons of ... ".

The reason, it seems to me from the little bit of research I've done on this as to why it's important that we do have an accepted definition on terrorism, is that it allows us to come together with an understanding of what terrorism is, with a plan and a strategy to oppose it, and to deal with it. If we're to have [one], it's got to be an accurate and clear understanding of what it is, and not one that has been distorted by vested interests. Let me give you an example, in the case of the United States, that they in

fact have described the attack on the USS Cole in Aden, where seventeen of their military died, as an act of terrorism. That people would argue with, that in fact it wasn't a legitimate act of terrorism, and it was in fact an attack on a military target. So, the Americans, have chosen to define that as terrorism, and that is an example of where there is not common agreement on that. So, we can find that definitions are being developed that are politically motivated. The absence of an agreed meaning makes the drafting of anti-terrorism laws problematic.

I also wanted to talk about the concept of terrorism within states, and historically the terrorism within a state has been internal, in other words, Nazi Germany, what happened with Stalin in Russia, the Khmer Rouge and so on, where there's been arrest, imprisonment, torture and execution. Now, I think that we're seeing a form of external state terrorism in the form of the US foreign policy. The other thing I want to say is that it's been agreed that what one state might regard as a terrorist, another may state is a freedom fighter.

So, in terms of the definitions of terrorism, let me just ask you to consider a number of other points. There is little or no terrorism in the world's poorest 49 countries, and that seems to indicate to me that poverty is not at the root cause of terrorism. The terrorists that were involved in 9/11 were educated and middle class. Solving the problems of terrorism does not come from military action, but it will come through foreign policy change. That's all I've got to say on that, thank you. (Applause)

### **Tanya Plibersek:**

I think Peter makes a good [point], and it's been made many times: one person's freedom fighter is another person's terrorist. I guess it's not a difficult stretch of the imagination to ask ourselves what we would do if our own land were invaded by a superior military power. How would we resist? We would resist with anything at hand, and if they were political weapons and intellectual weapons we would use them, but if they were stones and Molotov cocktails I guess we would use them, too. Under international law you are allowed to resist if your land is invaded, but we all know that even the concept of invasion is controversial. Certainly, Australia has never admitted its own violent dispossession of aboriginal people in this country.

I guess the thing that the United States has done throughout its history is call people terrorists if they're not on their side and freedom fighters if they are. I mean I feel like I'm speaking about first principles here, but it was the United States that trained Augusto Pinochet's cadres to be part of the violent overthrow of a democratically-elected government. The Contras were the best friends of the United States and we all know that the scandal surrounding the funding of the Contras even against the democratic wishes of the elected members of the United States government. And the Mujahideen – I mean the list is a very long one. The trouble is for the United States, sometimes these people stop being controllable, and then you've really got a situation on your hands that, if you've been arming and training people, and then they, say, "go native", then you've got a real problem on your hands.

I don't see the difference between the actions of many of the groups the United States has trained and funded, like the Contras, if you compare the actions of the Contras and the Shining Path, I mean, they're both brutal, bloodthirsty, would do anything to advance their own political agenda. And it seems to me that our problem is not so much - whether we use the US Army definition of terrorist or not seems irrelevant because the United States picks and chooses – you know: "he may be a bastard but at least he's our bastard" – it picks and chooses it terrorist in the same way and that again means that we need to return to the international community to make some of these definitions about when people are legitimately resisting and when people are terrorists.

I want to finish by saying that there are very few circumstances where the violence is something that I can condone, but perhaps if I were alive during the Fascist takeover of Spain, perhaps I would have picked up a gun. And I'm sure there are many people who are pacifists in this room, but we need to consider as well that there are times when all peaceful means have been exhausted, and sometimes the people that are being called terrorists are people that are in those sorts of situations. The final thing I want to say is, I think that "the threat of violence to obtain goals that are political ..." blah blah blah –

I reckon the United States to sign a non-aggression pact with North Korea would have to fit that definition too, wouldn't it. (Applause).

**Tony Abbott:**

Well, I'm surprised to find myself in disagreement with the previous two commentators on this question, although I also say that I don't particularly like what I'm told is the US Army manual definition of terrorism. For me the simplest definition of terrorism is "politically motivated violence against civilians". For instance, I would regard the September the 11th atrocities as a paradigm, if horrific in their scale, examples of terrorism. I certainly wouldn't regard the Anglo-American-Australian action against Saddam Hussein as terrorism in any way, shape or form. I just think that it's completely different for one government to use military force to displace the government or to defeat the army of another country, and for groups to use indiscriminate violence against civilians. I just think that they're two completely different things, and this idea that the United States is in some way the world's great terrorist I find almost incomprehensible. Sure the United States makes many mistakes, sure there are occasions when the United States armed forces do things that they shouldn't do – we can go back to Viet Nam, I suppose, and find things like the My Lai massacre, which were in their own way atrocities. Of course they were, and they should never have happened, and the people responsible for them were rightly brought to trial.

But the fundamental difference between the United States and countries like it, and terrorist states and terrorist organisations, is that the United States at least recognise certain standards (Laughter) now sometimes its agents and its instrumentalities depart from them, but nevertheless in the United States you can change the government, in the United States you can sue the government, in the United States if people commit various atrocities against other people they are put on trial, and they are usually convicted and sentenced to long periods of punishment. So look, sure, I'm not an uncritical admirer of the United States, but I do believe that the United States is overwhelmingly a force for good in the world, and I think the world would be a poorer and sadder place without the United States. (Applause)

**Donna Mulhearn:**

I'm really glad I got to talk after that. The Australian government said I was naïve when I went to Iraq. I think I have a right now to question the naivety of the government, after that.

I'm going to use Tony Abbott's definition of terrorism, and take you through a description of what I experienced in Iraq, and let's just together decide whether we think it's terrorism: "politically motivated violence against civilians".

OK. Children, cowering, under their beds, screaming, because the bombs don't stop, twenty-four hours a day. Screaming because the sound of a bomb is like a gunshot going off in your head, times a thousand. Think about a small child when they hear a bang, alright, what it does to them. Imagine, children hearing that, twenty-four hours a day, and cowering, behind their parents and under their beds. Who has a right to make a child cower in fear? Tell me that's not terrorism. You tell me that's not terrorism. I'm a grown woman, and I was cowering in fear. Every breath I took, the next breath I took, that was going to be my last. Imagine the impact of that on children, I can tell you the impact that it had. They went to hospital sick with shock, physically ill, vomiting. That's the children.

The women, who were pregnant, soon to term, almost ready to give birth, miscarrying, losing their unborn babies, because of the shock, the physical shock, of just being present in the city that was taking the brunt of this wonderful country, the United States of America and its friends. Women losing babies. Tell me that's not terrorism. **[Tony Abbott: What about Saddam Hussein's terrorism?]** **Donna:** I'll come to that. Thank you. I'll come to that. That's a good question for John Howard and the Australian government for the last ten, twelve, fifteen, twenty years. Where were they then? (Applause)

**[Genia McCaffrey:** Can I? Excuse me. I said at the beginning of this debate, Tony Abbott is one against three different people who have different points of view. If we're going to have a civilised discussion, it's not about grandstanding and yelling and screaming. You might agree with some people and not with others. Give people the opportunity to speak, and don't condemn somebody who's prepared to come and put their point view, please.]

**Donna Mulhearn:**

Walking into a restaurant in an ordinary street in Baghdad one day, that had been bombed to pieces, I saw the limbs and the blood of people splattered all over the walls. They were have their dinner, in a restaurant, and their lives were cut short. Civilians. Tell me that's not terrorism. I met a little child in the hospital, I met many children in the hospital who had their limbs blown off or their bodies cut to pieces because of shrapnel, flying shrapnel and debris. Burns right across their bodies. And I met little Omar, who lost his parents and his sister in the bombing. And the nurses were afraid to tell him, because he had severe internal injuries, and they were scared that the shock would kill him. They told him they were in another hospital. This boy is now alone in the world. He has liberation, Saddam Hussein's not there, but he has nothing, nothing more. I often think about Omar, and think about when the nurses, or whoever, comes to tell him that he's alone in the world, that he's lost his family and his sister, that he has no family left. And when they explain the meaning of the word liberation, I wonder what they're going to say. And I think of little Omar and what his response might be, and I think he'll look around, outside the streets of Baghdad, where there's chaos, where there's still no power, still no water, where there's fear, where there's anarchy, where there's suspicion, where there's American troops bashing down the doors of ordinary families and going in and knocking people onto the ground with a gun to their head on an hourly basis. And I think he'll look around and he'll say: "liberation? Whatever, I just want my mum and dad back." I think that's what he'll say. Tell me that's not terrorism.

Thousands of orphans now wandering the streets of Baghdad. "Politically motivated violence against civilians"? I think I've just defined that. That's the war in Iraq. That's what I saw. Terror against civilians. Children screaming. A man coming up to me with blood all over the front of his shirt. I'd just walked through puddles, not of rainwater but of blood, to get to him. He raced up to me because I was western, I was white, and he wanted an answer. He looked at me with a face that is probably going to haunt me forever. He screamed, and he said: "if they wanted to get Saddam Hussein, why did they kill my baby girl? Why did they bomb my house? Why is our neighbourhood ruined?" That's a good question.

And I'd like to go back to Saddam Hussein, because John Howard had plenty of time to act, but it was only when it was politically convenient to do so that he did. And I think that's abhorrent and it's hypocrisy to the worst degree. Because there were some of us that were lobbying for the government to do something about Saddam Hussein, but they were ignored. And the Iraqis were trying to get here on leaky boats and they were refused entry, and now they're locked up in detention centres. So, war is the terrorism of the rich. (Applause).

**Jim Wilks:**

Well, thank you very much. I appreciate what has been said here tonight. The reason that I was concerned that this question be put is because I've heard so little discussion publicly about what terrorism really means, yet terrorism has become such a powerful word, and it's something that's reshaped the whole geopolitical landscape. I had the feeling that there was a certain Alice-in-Wonderland type feeling about it, that the words mean what the speaker meant them to mean, rather than their being any agreed definition, really, of what the significance was.

I guess, too, that these days when words are spun by political advisers, and that words and labels are used to both sanitise and demonise different things, that it is important that we have a look at the real meaning of some of these things before they fall into the hands of the spin doctors.

And lastly, I'd just like to say that part of the power of the word, and the reason why I thought it was important to see ideas about the expression of the meaning of it, is that if you can hang the label of "terrorist" on somebody, that these days makes them a legitimate target for a pre-emptive attack, and that's a very dangerous concept to have in world politics. So, it's been very instructive for me, and I've appreciated the remarks that have been made. It was very useful to hear an understanding of what the government thinks about the meaning of terrorists, and thank you to you all. (Applause).

**Genia McCaffery:**

Thank you, Jim. And our third question comes from Tina Jackson ...

**Q3: How do we restore democracy? - Question from Tina Jackson.**

**Many Australians feel profoundly dis-empowered and disillusioned by the process that led to Australia's involvement in the attack on Iraq. What prospects are there for the restoration of people's faith in democracy?**

**Tony Abbott:**

Well, I accept that there are many people who didn't support the government's position on the invasion of Iraq, but it's almost inevitable that any government decision on a very controversial topic will upset quite a lot of people. I mean, that's just the nature of our contrarian and adversarial, partisan democracy, that lots of things that the government does in the end don't meet with the immediate or even the long-term approval of citizens. But if people don't like what the government does, they have a remedy at the ballot box, and if you don't like what one lot of candidates say and do, or if you don't like what another lot of candidates say or do, well you can find candidates whose views you prefer at the ballot box at election time.

I think what this question is really driving at, though, is that you had a government that was enthusiastically in support of the campaign to liberate Iraq from Saddam Hussein, and you had an opposition which didn't quite know where it stood, and I think that's probably what is frustrating many people in this room, that if you supported the war you could vote for the government and rally round the government. If you didn't support the war, it was a bit [un]clear who you could rally round, and that's probably an issue that is best addressed by Tanya than by me. (Applause).

**Tanya Plibersek:**

Well. I was waiting for Tony to degenerate to the party political, and it didn't take long. The Labor Party opposed the war from April. We said that we would not be involved in action that did not have the support of the United Nations, and there were many of us within the Labor Party who had grave reservations even about something that had United Nations approval, because we know what the set-up of the Security Council's like. There was thousands of Labor Party members, clearly identified as Labor Party members, including most of our senior parliamentarians at the front of every anti-war march. I was there myself every single time. I have been, and my colleagues have been, absolutely consistent on this, so if Tony thinks he's going to point-score there, I don't think he can.

I think that the thing that really, really frustrates most of the people that I talk to is, they don't believe that they've been told the truth: they believe that they're treated as stupid, they believe that all politics is about the five-second grab on the nightly news, and any message that is more complex than that, their political representatives believe is too complex – and I don't think that's the case, but I do think that you need to have face-to-face democracy, if you really want to explain a complex issue and argue your

reasons for or against. I don't think the government took the Australian people into its confidence in making this decision at all, and the fact that the Joint Intelligence Committee report that Peter mentioned earlier was in the hands of the government months before we made a decision – we made a decision? – before the Australian government made a decision to go to war is an indication of that. That is a report in the hands of the Australian government that says: if we go to war with Iraq, the likelihood of terrorist attacks – it is likely that terrorist attacks will increase, not decrease. That's something that – nobody told us that. The Australian government didn't take the Australian people into its confidence there. And if you look at the long list of things where the Australian public were misled – I mean, the children overboard is the other classic example, there's no surprise or secret now that the Australian government were well aware before the last election that no asylum seekers were threatening to or proposing to throw their children off the boat. Everyone knows that now: the government knew it before the election, but they didn't want to take us into their confidence then.

What will restore Australia's faith in democracy? Well, tell us the truth: starting to tell the truth will start to restore Australians' faith in democracy. Trusting people with more than the five-second grab – actually laying out some arguments for or against an issue, and trusting people to use their brains enough to make a decision that's not based on a slogan, it's actually based on a bit of thoughtful analysis. You can't do that in the Telegraph – there's probably someone from the Telegraph here tonight – you can't do that in a lot of the media that we have at the moment. So, we do need to change the nature of how politics is covered. I'm really sick of seeing politics covered like sport. It's treated, you know, it's like watching a tennis match, back and forward, back and forward. It is not like that. We are making decisions about the future of our nation, and it's not about who's more macho, it is not about who's more aggressive. It's actually about the issues in front of us that we are making decisions about. So, I think that we need to change the way - we need to make demands to change the way that political life is covered in this country, as well.

And, I guess the final thing that I want to say, and this isn't a party political point at all, in fact it's the exact opposite, I think that people recognise sincerity in their political representatives, and they sure as hell recognise the opposite. So if you're arguing something – if you're out there in public arguing something that you feel half-hearted or ambivalent about, then you have lost the confidence of the Australian people straight away. And, there are times in politics where political parties take decisions that in their guts they don't feel, and I think the Australian public pick that up every time. And across the board I think that we would have a better democracy if people were prepared to take the hit and say the unpopular thing, and stick to their guns: that would at least have the respect of the people who disagree with them as well as the support of the people who agree with them. (Applause)

### **Donna Mulhearn:**

The day, the first day we arrived in Iraq we had a meeting with a fellow who was hosting us and helping us with the project, Doctor Al-Hashidi, charming man, wonderful Iraqi man, and he said to us with a smile: "They dismissed the largest demonstrations the world has ever seen, and they want to teach us democracy?" I have no faith in democracy, not at the moment anyway. This question says many Australians feel profoundly dis-empowered and disillusioned by the process that led to the war and Australia's involvement, and earlier this year, as the war was brewing, I felt profoundly dis-empowered and disillusioned to the point where I wanted to scream, like the rest of you, and I just hoped and prayed there could be a way that I could express my opposition to the war, and my beliefs on non-violence. And then I heard the call to join the human shields, and it was with a sense of relief that I heard that call, with a sense of relief that I had the opportunity to defy my government. And, so as soon as I heard the call I knew straight away that I was going to go – that I had to go, and I was very grateful for that opportunity.

So, what I would say to people who are feeling dis-empowered and disillusioned: bypass politics! Like, defy it. Go above it. Rise above it. Let it go. Just do what you have to do. Be the person that you need to be. Be a compassionate and caring person who lives a life based on values of justice and mercy and

compassion. Do it. Don't wait for our politicians to lead us in doing that: let's lead them. Let's live this way. Let's be people of honour, of truth, of values. And if they want to sit in Canberra and argue about and take us to wars, then we will defy them. And we won't allow them to live a way that goes against our values. So, I just look forward to the next opportunity I get to defy my government. I was called a traitor, when I was over in Iraq. "A traitor to who?" - I said, a traitor to John Howard, who I didn't even vote for? But, I ... No, to be labelled a traitor, Tony, is a very serious accusation, which was quite hurtful to me, because I'm a proud Australian, and as an Australian, I have the values of compassion, and justice, and looking out for the underdog, and having fairness and equality. So, if I didn't go to Iraq I feel like I would have been a traitor to those values, a traitor to myself. So, I would say to all of you who are looking for hope in this democracy is: look elsewhere, look to yourself, and just live, and be aware, and live side by side your neighbour. And when people try to tell us that our Auburn (?) Muslim brothers and sisters are different to us, and when Alan Jones and the Daily Telegraph try to divide us, just defy that and refuse to accept it. The Sydney community of Muslims is the most beautiful, wonderful, embracing community I think I've met, and they've embraced me and so many others since I've been back from Iraq, and I refuse to accept that they are in any way different to me, or that there is a divide, because there's not. So, rise above politics and live, be who you are, and that is a caring person, and just bypass them. Go around, and just get on with our lives, and let's lead them, let's show them the way.

**Peter Macdonald:**

I just invite you to look at the words that make up the question, and it says that many Australians feel profoundly dis-empowered and disillusioned by that process. I think also that many Australians are very frightened about what's happened. Very frightened at how our voices have not been heard, how we as a nation seem to have been conned, how we've been brought to a position where in fact, Australia, and I have no doubt in my mind that Australia is now a less safe place than it was a year ago, or two years ago. So many people are not only shaking their heads wondering how it all happened, but also there's a sense of fear in the community that this could all happen again. I don't have a great deal of faith in the democratic process in this country, in the sense that so many people also are easily hoodwinked, and if you look at some of the surveys that have been done, for instance one talked, the finding was that in excess of 70% of the population believed that they had been misled over the events that led us in to Iraq, into the war in Iraq. But they went on to so that they didn't regard that misleading as being intentional, and they would still vote for John Howard at the end of it. So I ask you, how can one really have faith in a lot of people who are part of our democratic process?

The other thing that, you would understand I hold strong views on, is the ills and ailments that exist within our political system, and I talked earlier about some of the remedies that I see as important to provide the necessary checks and balances. But, this goes to the very heart of the democratic process in this country. I was a candidate in the 2001 Federal election, and after preferences, I got something like 46% of the vote, I stand corrected, Tony if that wasn't just quite the figure, but around 46% of the vote. Those people who voted for me, under our political system are not represented. And that's why it's so important that we need to constantly question and examine the political system that we've got. We need to question whether we need the Tasmanian Hare-Clark system [The Hare-Clark electoral system is a Single Transferable Vote (STV) method of proportional representation used in multi-member electorates.] throughout the country, which would provide a much fairer way of representation in the lower house, and thankfully we do have an upper house which does, whether you like it or not, and whether John Howard wants to change it or not, does in fact represent the voting patterns of the people of this country.

The other important matter that this question raises is the question of what checks and balances could we seriously think of having introduced. I'm a strong believer in referenda. And the father of this, dare I say the father of this Council, North Sydney Council, Ted Mack, was one who talked a lot about mechanisms for opening up the democratic process and one of those was referenda. Switzerland is governed by referenda, so they do work. There are a lot of people in this hall, probably, who would

have liked to have been given the opportunity to express a view on this enormous decision that this government has taken, or did take. Tony says, you can't believe it in his heart surely, he says somewhat glibly: you've got a chance every two or three years at the ballot box. People want more out of the democratic process than that. But, the prospects for change are not good, because governments, and I say it, of both persuasions, are by nature totalitarian. They would rather tolerate the general public, unwillingly, every few years.

Just a final point, and that is that it raises this question of – and Tony made mention of how I think he believes in the supremacy or sovereignty of nation-states, but I think we're going to have to give some of that away at an international level, if we're really going to start dealing with these frightening scenarios that we've faced in the last six to twelve months. So, at an international level, we've got to strengthen the UN. We've got to create global institutions and global bodies that are able to provide some constraint against rogue states. I'm not now directing that at the US, but at all rogue states. This sort of question has to trigger those sorts of thoughts. Thank you. (Applause)

**Tina Jackson:**

Thank you to all the speakers, who I think have covered many of the issues. But I would like to, if I could, come back to Tony on the operation of democracy. The government made an executive decision to go to war, a decision in the face of the opposition of many people, the majority of people as expressed through the opinion polls of the time, and many people especially did not want to go to war without UN sanction, and many thousands took to the streets to oppose the war, and it was an opposition that wasn't heeded. Democracy failed us then, but the decision having been made, the government now has to be judged, and ongoing debate, as tonight, is an important part of that. But, taking up Tony's point, the next election under our current system is the major opportunity that we have to judge the government and restore faith in democracy. And to my mind, listening to everything that's been said tonight, the scorecard doesn't look very good. The war did depose Hussein, a laudable outcome as we all agree. But on the other side of the scoresheet, we have no weapons of mass destruction, a decimated Iraqi economy and infrastructure, and an enormous human cost, as Donna so vividly describes, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the risk of more terrorism. So, I think the price of the regime change has been too high. So, I would like to ask Tony, that as the democratic process plays out in the next election, are there any other factors that we should take into account in judging the government?

**Tony Abbott:**

Well, obviously the government will be judged on a whole lot of things, not just its attitude to the war in Iraq, although people are entitled if they wish to say: well I don't care what good things they may have done in other areas, what they did in Iraq is so horrific that I just can't vote for them under any circumstance. I mean, that is your democratic right. I mean, the interesting thing about Australia, indeed America, and indeed Britain, is that you can have meetings like this, and you can stand up and shout from every rooftop that the prime minister is a so-and-so, that the government is corrupt, that the country is hopeless, and that's the marvellous democratic right of Australian, American and British people. But, you don't have, or you didn't have any of that, in Iraq, and indeed in most of the countries of the Middle East. So, while I wouldn't for a second want to say that everything is rosy in post-war Iraq – obviously the Middle East remains a cauldron, and much that is dispiriting goes on in Iraq, obviously, obviously, it does. Obviously there is a long and difficult job of reconstruction ahead of the Iraqi people and the friends of the Iraqi people, but by the same token, I think it is good that Saddam Hussein is gone. I think the world is a much better place without him, and I think that the Australian government deserves credit for having the guts to do what was right but very very unpopular.

**Genia McCaffery:**

Thank you, Tony, Thank you, Tina. Now our fourth question comes from Andrew McNaughtan ...

#### **Q4: How did we contribute to the making of terrorism? Question from Andrew McNaughtan.**

**How have the past policies of developed western countries (particularly the US and UK) towards the Middle East played a role in fostering the problems we now face, such as the terrorism of Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda?**

##### **Donna Mulhearn:**

Can I just say, still on democracy, that I just think that this meeting is a great example of grassroots democracy, and we should be doing more of it, and I think it's great that Tony Abbott has come out tonight to face this question: I think he's very brave. (Applause)

OK, the rise of terrorism and groups such as Al Qaeda. I don't believe that terrorism's about religion. I spend a lot of time looking into the faiths of the world: the beautiful faith traditions, and I spend a lot of time exploring each of the traditions, and it's been a wonderful journey, and it's been very beautiful to discover the teachings of peace and justice that exist in all the religions. And so I don't believe that terrorism is about Arabs and Muslims wanting to hurt Christians, it's not about that at all. I believe that the root causes of terrorism are poverty, neglect, dispossession of land, and lack of dignity. Look at Palestine and Israel, look at that tit-for-tat, tit-for-tat. And as we speak, bulldozers are knocking down homes of Palestinians in the West Bank, and no doubt that will be responded to in kind, and both acts of violence I believe are terrorism. Although only one of them is called terrorism, and that is the Palestinians, but I believe that knocking down the family home is an act of terrorism.

I believe that our world leaders need to rise above the cycle of violence and respond with maturity and wisdom. I think it's time that we break the cycle, because George Bush calls his crusade, as he called it once, a war – the war on terrorism. We've already defined that war is terrorism, so that means we are in Terrorism on Terrorism. That means it's never going to end. When's it going to end? It's going to go on forever and ever, and our children and our children's children will suffer. Someone needs to rise above all of this, and say: I will be the one to break the cycle, and after September 11, things could have been different. If George Bush – and it would have been very, very difficult – could have just paused for a moment, and reflected, and asked the question: why did this happen? What is really behind this? Then I think maybe we could have saved ourselves two wars, and a lot of suffering. But it does take a lot of maturity and wisdom to do that, and – but someone needs to do it.

And I also believe that the policies that the US and UK have inflicted, which is the wording here, “towards the Middle East” – I'd like to expand that to developing countries, because I believe that there's been a real corporate colonialism towards the developing countries, and I've travelled a lot through developing countries, and I can't believe how Pepsi and Coca-Cola can find their way in there. Every little tiny village I've been in in remote Zambia has a Coca-Cola stand. Like, it's just unbelievable that the quest for the dollar, the quest for corporate dominance, I believe it is also so offensive to these people who are responding in this way. So, I believe it's about dignity, about dispossession of land, about poverty, and neglect. And I believe that if we actively respond to those issues, if George Bush said: alright, let's think about this, let's reflect, let's take some time, and let's go to look at the root causes of poverty and respond to those. So let's provide clean water for countries, let's have people not fight for their survival every day, and fight for their family home, then I think we'll see a break in the cycle of violence, and we'll see an end to terrorism. (Applause)

##### **Tony Abbott:**

I don't pretend for a second that the policies of countries like Britain and America, and indeed Australia for that matter, are always perfect: we're only too human, we often lack information. Sometimes we have insufficient appreciation of all the subtle nuances of different issues around the world. So I don't think our policies are always perfect by any means, but I think the idea that somehow, America, Britain and Australia are to blame for terrorism defies rationality. The roots of terrorism are not in poverty, the roots of terrorism are in hatred, and I don't believe that poor people for a second have a monopoly on hatred. It's interesting that the September the 11th terrorists were not poor people

at all, they were generally speaking middle class people who had had access to what by ordinary middle-eastern standards were very privileged upbringings, and yet they flew civilian jetliners into civilian towers, and why? They did that because they believed that western civilisation is a satanic perversion. Now, we might shrink from that, but that is what these people believed. They did not, in the end, attack the symbols of western power and prestige because of anything the west had done, but because of what they thought the west is. Now, funnily enough, many of the things we in this room might take great pride in are things that most enrage a certain type of Islamist fundamentalist. So, I think that is basically the problem.

Now I don't think that there is any easy answer to this. You do not stop someone from killing you by turning the other cheek, if that person is determined to kill you come what may. It may well be a heroic thing to do, to turn the other cheek, but it certainly isn't going to stop that person from killing you. I think we are in for a long and difficult struggle against this particular form of terrorism. I think that it could quite easily last just as long as the ant-terrorist struggle in Northern Ireland, it might last just as long as the cold war lasted, and what we need to do is, where we can, use our intelligence services, where we can, deepen our contact with the governments of countries where we think that terrorism might be active. But in the end whatever we do we have to, as a culture and as a civilisation, be our best selves. I think there is much to be proud of in western civilisation. I think that our traditions of freedom, of pluralism, of acceptance, of inclusivity, are our greatest boast, and I think these are what make western countries attractive to so many other people from all round the world, and I think that is what we have to be pre-eminently in coming months and years, if we are to minimise and eventually defeat the scourge of terrorism.

**Peter Macdonald:**

[First sentence missed while changing disk] ... subtle nuances and so on that you made reference to, but it does invite us to look at the history, and look at the link of the effects of that history, on the root causes of terrorism. The history of US and UK foreign policy in the Middle East is scattered with examples of meddling. We've been meddling for years, they've had vested interests, particularly with regards the oil, there's been constant bias in their foreign policies in that area, and mixed in with that bias is sheer indifference to the rights of certain peoples within that region. I just want to deal with the British first, and they've got a lot to answer for: but that really goes into the Palestine question. I mean it started with the Balfour Declaration after World War 1: they were the ones that before World War 2 talked about the partition of Palestine. It was the British really, as I recall as a youngster, who stood by in 1967, when there was the war, the Six Day War, which basically saw the annexation of vast amounts of Egypt and Syria and Jordan, and it's those occupied territories that now are the focus of all subsequent wars in that area. So, of course history teaches us some important lessons.

The Americans, as well, have blood on their hands, quite frankly. They've been propping up unpopular and undemocratic regimes for fifty years in the name of, frankly, oil security. And the use of US power in that area has been based on oil economics. We know some of the root causes of terrorism are lack of civil liberties, unresolved grievances, a feeling of disempowerment. And all of these are evident in the Middle East, and have to be dealt with in a complex way. Terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda see themselves as heroically oppressed, and they see powerful groups such as the United States as evil. And these are the things at the wellsprings of terrorism, and not poverty, as has been claimed. The use of United States power since 9/11 is based on their national security strategy, which has been stated by the Americans as being global hegemony. And this is simply fostering more hate and more resentment throughout the world. Frankly, the US administration's foreign policy in that region, taking into account Afghanistan and Iraq, is based on lawlessness and violence, in my view, and a pre-emptive strike, which we saw in Iraq, was described as the supreme crime as defined in Nuremberg. George Bush said: there is no telling how many wars it will take to secure freedom in the homeland. Unless the underlying grievances are dealt with, it will be an unending war. The sad thing is that Australia is complicit. (Applause)

**Tanya Plibersek:**

How have past policies fostered some of the problems? Well, I guess the first thing to say, and it carries on from what Peter said, is: the United States and Britain have a long history of meddling, that's true. They also have a long history of arming and training organisations that they then fall out with, and I thought was one of the great ironies of the discussion of the weapons that Saddam Hussein may or may not have had, and the fact that he had used them against his own people and he had used them against Iran. Well, he used them against Iran using satellite photos that showed Iranian troop positions that were provided to him by the United States. If we're talking about how past actions have contributed to what happened in Iraq, it's really very plain.

But I think it's interesting that we go from a question about terrorism and groups such as Al-Qaeda to talking about Iraq, because this is one of the points that has been confused again, again and again in this debate. There are no proven links between the government of Iraq and Al-Qaeda; the government of Saddam Hussein, brutal as it was, was basically a secular government, and his adoption of, you know, building relationships with Islamic fundamentalists came a lot later when he recognised that there was a significant external threat to the country, and though that having some allies in the region would be a good thing. Early on, it was clear that Saddam Hussein wouldn't be likely to share weapons with groups like Al-Qaeda, because they saw him as a secular traitor and would be as likely to use the weapons on him as anyone else.

Saudi Arabia, however, is a country that has proven links with terrorist organisations, including funding them and funding training schools in various countries. It is possibly the easiest proof that this war was not about terrorism, that you have a country virtually next door to Iraq that has traceable links, financial links with terrorist organisations, and we have very cordial relationships with Saudi Arabia. It's not about terrorism; it was never about terrorism.

I think that the debate about whether poverty in the world is related to terrorism is a very interesting one. I think what you can certainly say, that poor and dispossessed populations are fertile breeding ground for supporters of extremist organisations. I don't believe poverty causes people to become terrorists, because it's true that plenty of the money is coming from Saudi Arabia, and plenty of the people involved are very wealthy, and Osama Bin Laden is a pretty good example of someone who has money coming out of his ears, but is a racist and a bigot, and a religious bigot. And I think that at the end of the day, poverty sets an environment where it's very easy to recruit, because people have nothing to lose, but it's not the only cause of terrorism. That doesn't mean that we don't have to address poverty, because one of the questions later on is whether Australia has benefited or not from going to war with Iraq – obviously I think it hasn't, but our own benefit, our own national benefit is not the only question we should ask in, when we are talking about international relations, and, you know, peace and justice in the world, and whether poverty is a cause of terrorism or an environment for it at the end of the day doesn't matter, we've still got, you know, more than half of the world's population living in desperate circumstances and the majority living on less than a dollar a day, with not enough food to eat, no electricity, no clean water, and life expectancies that we wouldn't put up with in this country.

**Andrew McNaughtan:**

Thanks to everyone for their answers, and thanks to David and Sue for being the driving force behind putting this on tonight. Look, I asked this question – I'm the convenor of the Australia East Timor Association, and when I worked on Timor and understood the issue over many years, I began to understand how that issue was a by-product of decisions made in the capitals of power, particularly in Washington. You know, the problem arose there to a large extent, and it's prompted my thinking more and more about what's been going on in the Middle East and looking a bit into what's happened. On your seats you'll find a leaflet that talks about some of this. I mean, Osama Bin Laden worked for the United States, OK, when he was in the Mujahideen. The Mujahideen was the implement the United States used with the intention of dealing a blow to Soviet Russia, and they actually enticed the Russians

into Afghanistan, according to Brzezinski, Carter's Foreign Policy Advisor, got them in there as a great place to destroy them. The mechanism they used was the Mujahideen, backed by the CIA. Out of that has come Osama Bin Laden.

Saddam Hussein is another trusted American puppet. He was used to quell the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which was again the by-product of American meddling in Iran where they overthrew a popular government to impose the Shah to control the oil. That backfired in the Islamic Revolution, so they turned to Saddam, and asked him to attack Iran, which he did. Then they gave him biological and chemical weapons to do so, the very chemical and biological weapons that we now had to go to war in Iraq for – well we really went for the oil, but the pretext was the chemical and biological weapons the west and America had given Saddam to kill the Iranians, who were a new enemy. So, as far as I'm concerned it's a moral cesspit, and the whole thing is a farce, and it's a front for imperial policies that are the same old policies – and I think that's what I find disturbing.

Now, I really thank Peter for his answer, which I think the most got to the nub of the issue. Tony, I just want to say two things: if you say that all of this is coming from a mindless hate – well, you say that religious zealotry lies at the base of it. Now, as Donna said, the Islamic revolution preaches peace and compassion as well as Christianity does. I don't think it's really religious. It's hatred, but we really ought to ask why? And I think the sort of things I have mentioned then have a lot to do with it. I think the Islamic world sees the western world as materialistic and hypocritical, and I think that's coming closer to what's driving it.

Now I think if you want to stop a problem, you've first got to define the problem honestly, and then start dealing with what's going on. I'm not saying that, you know, that the west is terrible and the west deserves it. I'd just like to debunk, I think, another furphy that Tony brought up: he said: well, we're, you know, a wonderful people, we have a great society, they hate us for that. I don't think that's true. I think that there are many things in the west that are good, and the capacity to hold these discussions and so forth is a great aspect of western culture, but there's a big difference between what we do in our own countries, and what the spooks and the military and the intelligence services of our countries and particularly the United States do in other people's countries. And I think ... (Applause) And in essence I think what they want is a lot of what we've got. I don't think they hate us, I think they see us – a lot of the policy that's inflicted on them is hypocritical, because we speak with forked tongue, we do one thing for us, we take all the resources for us, and we screw them. And they know it, and that's what's really behind it. (Applause)

**Tony Abbott:**

Andrew, look, I think there is some truth in what you say, and certainly I think that we have all raised the ugly American into a caricature, and there's no doubt there are ugly Americans, ugly Britons, ugly Australians, ugly Frenchmen and so on, who don't do the image of the western world any good, and who do not live up to the best values of our civilisation. I'm sure in the end you're right, the people of Iraq, and I suspect the people of large swathes of the wider world would like the best aspects of what we have in a country like Australia: political freedom, social pluralism, economic progress. They would like those things, and I think that at our best, that is what we try, in our own way, to promote in these countries. Now, we don't always do it perfectly, no doubt that, we don't always do it perfectly, but I think in our own way, that is what we're trying to do.

And Donna, I mean I don't obviously share your perspectives on too much about Iraq, but the fact that a young Australian would go to Baghdad to try to run an orphanage is a magnificent thing, it really is, and sure, I am quite confident that the Australian government would be only too happy to try to support one way or another that kind of venture. We do it all the time, and I'm sure will continue to do it.

**Donna:** How much?

**Genia McCaffery:**

That's a very positive sign. No, no, no, Andrew, because otherwise what's going to end up happening is ... so our fifth question comes from John Valder ...

**Q5: What is our future?- Question from John Valder:**

**Have Australia's long term interests been served by our involvement in the war against Iraq? What is our future as a nation if we continue our current allegiance to the US agenda at the expense of broader international relationships?**

**Tanya Plibersek:**

Well, the first thing I'd like to say is that, we should work with the United States whenever our interests align, and there's no - I mean people like me who oppose the war often get called anti-US, and there's no truth in that, I'm not anti the United States, and I recognise that there are many things about it that are terrific, and Tony has pointed out some of them: that you have the right to speak out publicly and so on. You might not have the right to a roof over your head, but that's another matter. Wherever our interests align we should work together. What we shouldn't be doing is going out of our way to get ourselves involved in conflicts that we shouldn't support because they are just wrong: morally wrong, legally wrong, intellectually wrong.

We shouldn't - we've got the US-Australia Free Trade Agreement coming up now, which the government won't tell us even what's on the table for negotiating away. Well, I've got, you know, I'm a supporter of freer trade, I think it's a good thing for many developing countries to have access to new markets, but, I tell you what, I don't think that means opening the doors and letting, you know, having a fire sale. Everything's up for grabs: our Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme's up for grabs, our local content on television and in the film industry is up for grabs, our quarantine laws up for grabs. All of these things are intrinsic to the Australian way of life and they are things that are worth defending. So, where we can reach an agreement that has benefit for both of us, let's reach that agreement. Let's not give up our decision-making authority, our ability as an independent nation to make foreign policy decisions, just because we want to be friends with the United States. I think that friendship is entrenched, I don't think that they're going to walk away from us tomorrow if we don't destroy our Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme for the benefit of their pharmaceutical companies.

I also want to say that - have our long-term interests been served? No, I don't think they have. I think it's pretty clear that we are now involved in a war on terror that just didn't exist five years ago, we are a target - the British Joint Intelligence Committee says that we are a greater target than we were before. But at the end of the day, if I believed that all of this was for a noble cause - like East Timor, I think East Timor has in fact pissed off a lot of people who live to the north of us that we took a principled stand in East Timor, but it was the right thing to do, that we've done in the right way, it was done in a way that involved the international community, it was done in a way that was peaceful, it was done in a way that respected the wishes of the local people, and in fact was at the urging of the local people. Maybe that's not in our long-term best interests either, but it was the right thing to do, so our own interests are not the only factor we should consider when making these foreign policy decisions.  
(Applause)

**Tony Abbott:**

Well, look, I think it's in Australia's long-term interests to stand up for our values and to stand by our friends. Now, if you do that, it's not risk-free, obviously, and I don't pretend for a second that Australia is not subject to certain risks in a difficult world. But the interesting thing is that, if the Osama Bin Laden tapes are to be believed, Australia has been a potential target of Islamist terrorists at least since the East Timor operation, and as Tanya says, that was very much in our best traditions of lending a hand to oppressed peoples wherever we can, that we did what we did in East Timor. So, look, I think it was important that Australia stand up for freedom in Iraq, I think it was important that Australia play

its part in getting rid of a really evil dictator, just as it's important that we do our part to try to help reconstruct Iraq, just as it's important that we do what we can to try to ensure social stability, a degree of civil order, in the other countries where we can make a difference. So, I think that it is part of our obligation to our fellow human beings to do what we can, to lend a helping hand. I'm tempted to quote, Tanya, if I may ... [Tanya: you can quote me any time, Tony] Tony: Non, no, someone of even more eminence, the late great Ben Chifley, who spoke of "our light on the hill, not just to make someone premier or prime minister, not just to sixpence more in people's pockets, but to work for the betterment of mankind, not just here, but wherever we can lend a helping hand." That was what Ben Chifley said, and I believe that whether it be in East Timor, whether it be in Iraq, or Afghanistan, whether it be in the Solomon Islands or PNG, that's what Australia has been doing over the last few years.

### **Donna Mulhearn:**

I think Ben Chifley will be rolling in his grave. (Laughter) I think we're in trouble. I think Australia's long-term interests have not been served. I think - but I don't think we needed a British intelligence report to tell us that, I think it's common sense. Yeah, I think, talk about dumbing down, like we don't really need a report to tell us that, because when you have a hornet's nest in front of you and you give it a whack, you're gonna be stung. And I believe that we have been stung, and we're going to be stung. I think it's got a lot to do with authenticity and truth. And, to be friends with the United States - the United States, let's face it, is not known for its commitment to human rights. Let's face it, so, the fact that they tried to use as a motivation for this war is pretty laughable, and the Iraqi people didn't believe it for a minute, not for a minute did they believe that this was about liberation from a dictator. So, I think that now, I'm concerned that we're being put into the same category as the United States. That's a shame, because as Australians I think we do think differently and I think we are possibly more consistent on human rights, not that the current government, I believe, as I said before, had every opportunity in the world to respond to the brutality of Saddam Hussein but only did it when it was politically convenient to do so.

By the way, I'd just like to make a point on that as well, about Saddam Hussein's regime. I think it's a pretty good question to ask: why try to match the brutality of one regime by inflicting more suffering on a people using the same sorts of terrorism that they used. If a people have suffered, suffered terribly, and to be honest, the most suffering I saw in Iraq was due to international sanctions imposed on that country for twelve years, and it was terrible, by the United Nations, it was terrible. So they had to endure war with Iran, they had to endure the Gulf War, and the women especially used to say to me: for God's sake, we don't want another war. Whatever they thought of Saddam Hussein, whatever they thought about the regime, that was another matter. They would have preferred to do that themselves, to be honest, but they didn't want another war. So why inflict suffering on a people who have suffered so much. So it really doesn't cut it with me - I hear: he did this, he did that - the Iraqi people now are saying: well, we had one dictator, now we have a new one. I get e-mails from Baghdad every day, and it's really, not amusing but disturbing, the way Iraqis are describing the new regime, because they call it the regime. And the members of the Coalition forces are driving round in black Mercedes with dark windows, and they say: they're just like Saddam's people used to do. These black Mercedes are pulling up in front of people's houses and knocking down doors in the middle of the night and putting guns to heads, searching women, doing all sorts of inappropriate things. Just like Saddam's people used to do, so they're saying: what's the difference? We still have no basic human rights, we have no dignity, we have no freedom of expression, because if anyone expresses anything against the coalition - that's too polite a term - the invaders and occupiers, if anyone expresses anything against them, they are rounded up, interrogated, thrown into a prison, with no explanation to their families. Now that is happening today, so as far as I can observe, nothing's really changed in Iraq, except that there's no power or water, food, business, livelihood, and chaos on the streets and fear and suspicion. So, I think, it really doesn't cut it, the story about Saddam's brutality.

So, as far as Australia's interests go, I'm just disappointed that we have lost, I believe a reputation that we might have had in the international community. When I was in Iraq, the Iraqi people were very – as Mike said – so warm and embracing, and hospitable. They loved us with such a beautiful generosity and it was quite overwhelming. Especially the Australians, for some reason they loved Australians, I don't know why, but they just especially loved Aussies, and I've been warned that when I go back, everything has changed. Their opinion is different now and I'm really sad about that, I'm really sad, because Australian people haven't changed, I believe that we still have this consistency and concern for other people who are in a worse situation than ourselves, so I really believe that we have lost a lot, morally, in this whole fiasco.

**Peter Macdonald:**

Firstly, I think that, in response to this question I'd like to say that it's been a missed opportunity for this country to define itself in a way that is specially Australian. I think that what we have done, of course, is to tie ourselves to the consequences of US foreign policy in Iraq, which is linked in with pre-emptive strikes, with a war not peace approach, the failure to conciliate in any way, and frankly a bully - boy attitude. So Australia has missed a chance to take its own position. And in fact has led us down a very dangerous path, and one which is frankly a war-like, warring pathway.

I'd just like to give you a little ditty on peace, which was written by RH Long in 1917, the time of the World War 1 days, and he said this:

*“I haven't much faith in a peace that commences  
with hacking off limbs or in sniping from trenches.  
Yet some say 'tis peace that we're now fighting for:  
if this brings us peace, what on earth brings us war.”*

I think it's worth just pondering and thinking on that.

The invasion of Iraq in my view was a US response to 9/11, and as has been stated tonight by a number of us, that military action does not solve the problems of terrorism. On the other hand, it's actually played into the hands of the terrorists, and it's in fact, as many have said, it's become a recruitment drive for terrorism. And it's made the world a less safe place.

At the New York conference on terrorism last month the [UN] Secretary General, Kofi Annan said the following: “Military force against terrorist groups encourages more terrorism, and pre-emptive strikes brings us a lawless world.” This is the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan. He also said: “terrorism can only be defeated if we solve the political disputes and long-standing conflicts and grievances which generate support for it.”

I would like to state, perhaps it's once again, that the issue of pre-emptive strikes, I believe emerges as the most worrying outcome of all from this whole debate. (Applause) It, to me it seems to fundamentally challenge the principles on which world peace and stability have been based for the last fifty years. Cold war reality of a geopolitical balance, supported by deterrence, was probably not appreciated at the time, but it did seem to bring us peace and stability. US hegemony, on the other hand, has created a whole new world order, and we've become part of that, and frankly we didn't need to become part of it. I believe it calls for some good Australian wisdom and common sense. This country can define itself as a healer, a facilitator for the negotiation of compromise, and to be highly regarded on the world stage. My belief is we've missed that chance. (Applause)

**John Valder:**

First of all, I would like to thank each of the speakers for their responses. Donna, if I may say, particularly yours, because you're the only person in this room, or along with Mike Hartnell, who has actually been in Baghdad, in Iraq. The rest of us have formed our views from what we've read or heard, and they've been shaped probably around our preconceived political prejudices.

Now, Tony, I really feel I should be up there as a former Liberal Party President supporting you, but you probably know that I'm not able to on this subject, because I do disagree with you strongly, and I do propose to make one or two tough comments, but first I do wholeheartedly support Donna's comment about you having the courage to be here tonight. (Applause) I think that very few of your colleagues would have accepted the same challenge in the way that you have, and that is to your great credit. But having said that, as I said, **[Tony Abbott: You'll get stuck into the issue properly!]** I do want to make one or two comments, because I sense that our government has underestimated the strength of feeling on the issue, not just in this room tonight, or just in this country, but right around the world on this issue. OK, for the time being the Rugby World Cup is more important than what is happening in Iraq, and the Caulfield Cup, and the couple of fellows from the United States and China later in the week. But let's not underestimate the enormity of what's happened in Iraq.

Tony referred to September the 11th and what an atrocity it was, and it was – I hope I never live to see a single atrocity as dreadful as that one was, but I'm afraid the coalition of the willing has inflicted on Iraq a much greater atrocity. As Donna said, bombs raining down and missiles night and day all around the clock. I remember at one point during the war, and not at the end of the war, the United States proudly claiming that it had fired more than a million missiles into Iraq. Does that compare with September 11 – I'm afraid it doesn't. What I think we should all bear in mind is where this might end, and it might not end very pleasantly for the coalition of the willing. As we all know, there's a Presidential Election in the United States in almost exactly twelve months time. Now, politicians in the United States are rather fond of trying to indict Presidents of the opposite political party for whatever reason. People have been indicted; Presidents have been indicted for much lesser crimes than what we have just seen this last year in Iraq. I don't say this is going to happen, but in the twelve months running up to an election there must be quite a conceivable possibility of George Bush facing indictment for what he's done in Iraq, for the reason that he led the coalition of the willing, with our country, with the British government, in their ... on what, I think everybody agrees tonight, except perhaps Tony, was false premises.

It was all about weapons of mass destruction. Your prime minister, your foreign minister and countless others bellowed and trumpeted it from the rooftops, about these wicked weapons of mass destruction, and how Saddam Hussein was going to have the power to rain missiles onto the United States itself, and feed them to terrorists. Now, of course, these things were never checked out, despite Hans Blix and others, and of course in the end it's found that that premise is entirely false. I'm not going to subscribe to conspiracy theories as to what the other reasons for invading Iraq were, but that without any shadow of a doubt, weapons of mass destruction was first and foremost.

Now Saddam Hussein might have fallen, everybody says that's a good thing. I would like to go to Iraq myself with Donna, and in fact I said to my wife just at the weekend, "we really ought to think of going to Iraq, to see for ourselves, because I just wonder if the people of Iraq today find life more or less bearable than it was under Saddam Hussein." I don't know, but as Donna has said there's huge evidence to suggest that.

So what happens if George Bush does face an indictment, where does that leave the British Government and Tony Blair, and our government and our prime minister? Not in a very comfortable position – they may not be indicted, but I can see political parties in Britain and Australia perhaps raising the spectre of war crimes charges being levelled against them. (Applause) ... I appreciate your response to that. I'm not saying that is going to happen, but for the first time, we have a prime minister who has put this country at risk of being branded a war criminal. And that is why, Tony, I think your government is underestimating the enormity of what's happened in Iraq, and on false premises.

And it really does worry me, you or somebody mentioned, Donna was it, about human rights – couple that with what's happened in human rights in this country since the people overboard and all sorts of events right through to the present time, the two Australians held in Guantanamo Bay. There is a total disregard it seems by this government, really, for human rights. I understand there's citizens of forty-

two nations in Guantanamo Bay, and forty of those forty-two nations have all protested bitterly to the United States about that. Two haven't: Australia is one of them, I don't know who the other one is. (Audience members; China) Is it China? So here we have this situation, and Tony, I have to say to you, really as a friend, it is an appalling situation, and it's not too late for your government to make amends. Thank you very much. (Applause)

**Tony Abbott:**

Well, John, I'd love to make it up to you in some way, but I suspect that there's nothing that I could do or say, or that John Howard could do or say, that would satisfy you short of repudiating everything that's been done. And I don't do that. [Genia: please let him finish] I don't do that. I don't pretend for a second that what the Australian government and other governments did in Iraq was popular. I don't necessarily expect that it will be popular in the future, but I think it was right. I think it was a bitter necessity, and if in the end this government and indeed its members are judged critically, harshly, and condemned by a voting public, well, let that be our fate. That's the whole point of democracy. Governments are elected, they do what they think is right, and then they subject themselves to the verdict of the people at the ballot box. We have responsible government. As Edmund Burke said to the electors of Bristol all those years ago: "I owe you my judgement, not my obedience." I think the electors of Bristol actually turfed him out eventually, but the fact is he expressed well the fundamental principle at the heart of responsible government. This government is responsible to the Australian people, and the Australian people will pass judgement on it.

**Genia McCaffrey:**

Now our final question is from Lyn Macpherson ...

**Q6: How have we been served by the media? - Question from Lyn Macpherson**

**How has Australia been served by its media and how they have covered these issues?**

**Donna Mulhearn:**

I can talk for half an hour on this, because what I witnessed in Iraq and the reality that I experienced there was not reflected in the media in Australia. And, I sadly only realised this to the degree that it's true when I arrived back home, when I was really surprised. If anyone is interested in this topic, I encourage you to attend the Sydney Social Forum next Sunday at 11:30. I'll be doing a workshop, presenting my stories and images from Iraq, which will illustrate what I'm going to talk about in the next two minutes.

As I said, what you saw didn't reflect the reality. I have one piece of advice for you guys, and you probably know it already: question everything. Question everything that you see in the media, especially if it comes from the corporate mainstream media, and it seems like the broadcast media were particularly guilty. I'm really concerned that an image that was played over and over again, that our government used to legitimise the war on Iraq, was a set-up – was a manipulated media stunt. Now, when I got home, I didn't realise that this wasn't reported that way in Australia.

I'm talking about the US Marines pulling down the statue in the square. I know that area very well, because I spent a lot of time [there]. Our office was nearby, and it's an area that's always very busy, bustling, full of people, even during the war it was the one place that probably there was more crowds congregated than any other place. When CNN – I was in Jordan at that time – when CNN was reporting mass jubilation on the streets of Baghdad, I thought, hello, this sounds interesting, flicked, looked at their images and saw [al-] Firdos Square, and it was empty, and I thought: where is everybody? And yet it was reported as mass jubilation. And then, to try and get a bit of reality or a different perspective, I flicked, 'cos thankfully, because I was in Jordan I could flick to Al-Jazeera and

BBC World, and there I saw very different images. The CNN closed in tight on that shot of people throwing ropes over that statue. Those people were trucked in from Saddam City, most of them had come from the United States with Chalabi – they brought about 4,000 former, US former Iraqis with them, and there were a few hundred there who brought in this group and said go and pull the statue down. [photos of this] The media were notified beforehand, so talk about spontaneous jubilation, they were told to be there, it was like a press conference, and eye-witnesses there, including Neville Watson, a great man from Perth, who was in Iraq during the war, he watched it all unfold. And his comments are very interesting, if you ever hear his point of view, it's very enlightening, the fact that he watched this unfold as a very carefully stage-managed event. Yet the major US corporate networks did not perceive this, or did not want to perceive it, did not report the reality of the situation. Al-Jazeera and BBC were showing the rest of the Square, which was empty, which was very unusual, because it was usually full, and so ...

I remember seeing the image of a group of Iraqi women who were screaming and crying as if they were at a funeral, with the loud expressive mourning, and a female journalist asked them: "why are you mourning, why are you crying? Look at that over there". And they said: "well, look at that over there, I've lost my husband, and so we have no business, and my children are injured, and we still have no power at home, and I don't know what to do. What is my future now," they said, "it's uncertainty." And the fear and the pain in their faces just came through in their words and their images, and back to CNN: "mass jubilation in Baghdad." I was like – it was so devastating I was just throwing things at the TV, and screaming. I was so concerned about there's such blatant manipulation.

Anyway, that's just one example. There's another example I want to give on the war – and I have about ten, but just one other – is "precision bombing". Like, they thought they deserved a medal, because they hit the target they were supposed to hit. Like, great, congratulations were in order, and weren't our media commentators in a frenzy because they'd hit the right building. But, precision bombing, let me tell you about it. It's like your own personal earthquake, you know, even if the bomb is within five to ten kilometres around you, say if the gunshot your head, your ears feel like they're going to explode, we had bleeding from our ears because of the noise of the bombs, the windows shattered, if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, you'd have a piece of glass through your face. This is precision bombing, just the impact of it, the kids who were physically ill because of shock, the mothers who lost their unborn babies, so many people killed, maimed, injured for life, and these are injuries that are going to stay with them together. That's the story of precision bombing. It's not a pretty one, that yet our media commentators rarely questioned.

After saying that, I'd just like to support the media who did a good job. We really need to turn to independent media now more than ever. I encourage you as the story in Iraq unfolds, to seek out the independent media and the websites. So, a few very good ones: you need to log on, and find the great reporters, like the Robert Fisks, etc, and stick with them. Question everything, and find people you can trust and follow their stories, because some of them are very, very good. I felt the reporting of Paul McGeogh, from the Sydney Morning Herald, was very good – he really tried to go out of his way to visit the Iraqi people, in the hospitals and in ordinary houses, as well as report the military news of the day, so I believe he did a good job. And SBS as well, and we also have some great commentators, who are really up against so many right-wing commentaries at the moment: you know, the Margo Kingstons and all the rest, who I think are fantastic, and we really need to support them with letters to the editor, and ringing up talkback radio, etc.

When I go back to Iraq, when I was there I sent out e-mails and stories on my e-mail list, which was able to give people a first-hand view of what was happening in the war. I'm going to do that again when I return, so if you're interested in getting reports from the streets of Iraq, pass some pieces of paper around and write your e-mail addresses on them, and I'll put you on my list, my pilgrim list. You'll also hear about everything else I'm doing, but you might be interested in my observations on the politics of Iraq and the situation there.

I really feel the media has a lot to answer for. I was really disappointed with the coverage of our mainstream newspapers, like the Daily Telegraph, who were reporting: we've won the war, etc – I don't believe we've won, or anyone has won anything, and I believe that's an insult to the Iraqi people. I could go on for a long time, but ... (Applause)

**Tony Abbott:**

Look, I'm not going to engage in an orgy of media bashing, because I think the media are a mixed bag, and I think that the Australian media did its best, sometimes better than other times, to report the facts as it saw them, the facts in Iraq and around Iraq, the facts in Australia and other countries. The media allowed a riot of opinion to be heard. I think that it's often said that we get the media we deserve, and I think the media reflected, the media reflected the changing emotions and the changing opinions of the Australian people on the war in Iraq as the thing developed. So, look, I think they did their job. Inevitably some people did their job better than others, inevitably some people, different readers and consumers agreed with more than others. I don't think the media was any better or worse on this than it is on so many of the other great issues which it has to report.

**Tanya Plibersek:**

Well, I thought it was interesting to see Richard Alston's claims about ABC bias pretty thoroughly debunked. My one criticism of the ABC coverage of the war with Iraq was this practice that seems to be common to a number of media organisations now of embedding journalists with US soldiers. I understand that it is pretty hard to get around on your own as a journalist in a war zone, but I think that the – what happens to your objectivity when your life depends on the lives of the people that you're sharing a truck with. It must, it must have an effect, and that's something that I think we need to watch very carefully. I'm sure it provides better pictures for TV, but I don't know what it does for objectivity. In saying that I should say that I'm not making any comments about Geoff Thompson and his excellent reporting.

There are so many examples, Donna's example of the statue of Saddam Hussein being pulled down in the square, you really had to look very hard in the Australian media to see the stories of that being a set-up. I think it did come up on Lateline, but it certainly was not common, and there are a number of examples like that. The British, sorry, the US soldiers, the US Army PR unit, getting soldiers to write letters home talking about how welcoming the children were, how happy they were, and all the letters were exactly the same: "thank you for liberating us, mister." The PR spin, I mean, was extraordinary, and the US Army spends a lot of resources doing it. It's fascinating that if you look at every Murdoch publication around the world, I don't think a single one of them editorialised or opposed the war. They were all completely, I believe, uncritical in their reporting of the war. You could say they were, well, at best uncritical, at worst you could say they were campaigning for the war, and that's a terrific reminder of why we need a diverse press in Australia. I wouldn't want someone who's editorial influence to support the war in Iraq owning a couple of television stations in the same city as well.

But the alternative voices are there, and Donna mentioned a couple of them: Robert Fisk was one. I reckon that this is the greatest gift that the Internet has given us, you actually can look up the Guardian online, you can look up the New York Review of Books, you can look up Arabic English language newspapers, you can get some of that information from a variety of sources and make your own judgements from it. I also listen to News Radio in Australia, because they replay a lot of international news, not just the BBC World Service, but other English language world services, international news and I think that you get at least some diversity of opinion from that. There was a terrific show on yesterday about what's happening in hospitals in Iraq, and how desperately, desperately undersupplied they still are, they are just doing the barest sort of patch-up work on people and they have only the barest sort of supplies, they've got, you know, analgesics and that's about it, they don't have anything to treat any more complicated wounds.

I think that, just in closing, so, you know, as people have pointed out, it's a mixed bag. The one thing that I thought is a more general thing, that has started to worry me about the Australian media is that the only sort of fundamentalists in town are Islamic fundamentalists. I actually do believe that there are Islamic fundamentalists who are bigots and who are violent, who, you know, set out to be destructive. But I remember a spate of abortion clinic bombings done in the United States by Christian fundamentalists. I know that Jewish fundamentalists killed Yitzak Rabin, because he was, you know, too accommodating to the Palestinians. There are Hindu fundamentalists that set fire to mosques in India, and set fire to Christian missionaries. Fundamentalism is not anything confined to any religion, and Donna was saying earlier how lovely a lot of the Arabic community are in Australia, that's absolutely true. And I think that it, you know it seems like such an obvious thing to say, but I think it's worth repeating again and again, that fundamentalism is not confined to any religion, and - that's it. (Applause).

**Peter Macdonald:**

The previous speakers have pointed out that the media didn't serve us well, and I'm not going to deal with that particular argument, as I entirely agree. I also believe that the media generally doesn't serve us well. Just a comment on the way the media deals with Arab-Islamic matters, I spent six months in Iran in 1999, as the medical coordinator with MSF, and I learnt to respect and come to love the Iranian people a great deal. Now that's certainly not reflected in the media we see in the western world. These issues and these events should prompt us to ask why is it that the media doesn't serve us well, and the reality is, however, that the media tends to reflect some of our worst features, and the worst features and behaviour in the communities in which we live. And particularly those aspects of our community where we have chauvinistic, male-dominated, aggressive paradigm that many people live within. Most people seem to like contests, they like winners, they like aggression, that sort of stereotype, and media picks all that up, and also those aspects of people such as intolerance and racism. And the media beats all that up, tends to reflect it, and then this is what's produced in our media. So that's the diet that we're constantly fed, and nothing changed when it came to this particular war. And that's the thing that sells TV ad space, and it's the thing that sells newspapers.

That doesn't take into account another aspect of media, and that's media ownership, and that's not something we've particularly made reference to, but there are clearly political interests that would prevail amongst media owners, and that's another reason why we've got to move very cautiously on the whole question of cross-media ownership and the dominance of sectoral ownership in the media. (Applause) If it was a real pure world, I would expect the media in Australia to be offering us an apology for the way that they dealt with the issues surrounding the Iraq war. I mean, we've had it tonight, but the sort of media gung-ho, all-the-way-with-LBJ type of reports that we saw, and now we've have it listed tonight. All the lies and all the untruths that were told. So we've been betrayed by the media, and in my view, of course, as you would understand, I believe we've been betrayed by the government.

We have some exceptions, and I want to put in a good word here for the ABC, for example. (Applause) It's been a target, it's been a target, of this government for some time. It was a significant issue, if you remember, in the 2001 election, because of its honesty. I think that Tanya mentioned something like was it, 39 examples that were quoted by Richard Alston where the ABC had overstepped the mark. As far as I was concerned, I wish that had been 139 examples, because that's what we want from our media. So I would say, just as a little commercial, let's save the ABC. (Applause)

**Lyn Macpherson:**

This is a really, really complex issue. I just wanted to speak to the panel members, you know, some of you brought up some really important points, like Donna, you know, talking about the objective reporting and the media being used as a marketing tool rather than reporting the suffering, which is really, really important – we're not seeing that so we're not feeling it. And then Tanya talking about the

Internet as important avenue for research and Peter talking about media ownership. I mean, these are all really, really big issues, and I feel that it's such a complex issue and one that really needs to be discussed at length. So it probably will be one we discuss at the next forum.

But I just want to make a couple of points, and I live in a democracy in Australia, I'm proud to be an Australian, most of the time, but the media have a responsibility to reflect the views of all people, in a democracy, in a true democracy. They also are expected to provide an unbiased independent representation of facts and events and views. However, many Australians feel that our media, particularly mainstream media, have presented one-sided, politically fuelled versions of events and circumstances surrounding them. And many of us feel misled and betrayed by our media, who often seem to create views rather than report them. Those of us who have politically unpopular views are not being well represented and the public are ill-informed in developing and sustaining educated views and opinions.

Now, there is a description, this media, this type of system of biased politically-focused reporting is called propaganda, and those of us that are concerned about truth and democracy would be concerned about propaganda. (Applause)

### Closing remarks

#### **Genia McCaffery:**

Now, I said at the beginning that we were going to finish at 9:30. I think we've had some very stimulating debate tonight, heard lots of different points of view. I would like to thank you all for being such a reasonable, good audience, and fair, and thank you all for coming. And I'd like to introduce Sue Roffey, who is one of the organisers of this evening, to say a few words. (Applause)

#### **Sue Roffey:**

Some of us were standing in Mosman Market giving out information, because we didn't want the war on Iraq to happen, and somebody approached us and got into argument with one of our members and said: "Look", he said. "you know, never mind if it wasn't Saddam obliterated the World Towers on 9/11, we've got to hit someone! We've got to show that we're strong." And I thought, that's it for informed debate.

I want to say thank you this evening, first of all to the panel, who have given us a lot of food for thought. I think it's wonderful that they've all agreed to come, and I do agree that my respect for Tony Abbott - I disagree with most of what he says, as you probably realise, but I have to respect him for his democracy by being here. (Applause) I'd also like to thank North Sydney Council for their support of this, Genia for chairing this, Susan for giving welcome to country. (Applause)

I'd like to thank the team. I know it's a picture of David and me on the front of the Mosman Daily, we are one of a team - and if you want to see democracy at work you want to see this team work. Nobody said "you should be ...", everybody said "I can" and "I will". I'd also like to thank all of you for being here. I think the most important thing we have to say tonight is that we do desperately need, desperately need, informed debate. We actually do need to be and live the democracy that Tony says that we have the freedom to be. With that freedom comes responsibility. (Applause)

And if I want to say anything to this audience, thank you for being here, is to say: please, will you go away and will you please just keep talking, will you just please keep on asking the questions, will you please just have the courage. And, I know it's an old saying, but if you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito. Thank you. (Applause).