

# The international language of justice

*Emeritus Professor Hal Wootten, who was the Foundation Dean of Law at UNSW, spent three months in Palestine last year. He writes that, as a result, links have been made with a law school in the troubled area.*

Visiting An-Najah University in the West Bank city of Nablus last year, I heard talk of a new dean of Palestine's largest law school, who wanted to "open his faculty to the world". Dr Akram Daoud's ambition was brave in a school financed by fees paid by students from a poor society and isolated by geographical, security and linguistic factors.

Many current law teachers studied when the Soviet Union was the main provider of scholarships. As the world has developed, it is English, not Russian or Arabic, that must underpin the changes necessary if Palestine is to develop the legal structure of a modern, sovereign, democratic state.

One challenge is the development of an integrated body of law out of the five layers history has bequeathed it: Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Israeli Army and, recently, Palestinian. In every field English offers the best access to modern scholarship and practice. Dr Daoud is determined that his graduates will have the opportunity to study in English-speaking countries and is keen to develop the burgeoning relationship with Australia.

That relationship started last year, when UNSW's Professor David Dixon, another dean keen to link his faculty to the world, encouraged me to visit law schools and explore possible contacts during a private trip to the region.

I was struck by the fact that while international donors, including Australia, had contributed to capacity-building in the judiciary and legislative drafting, little was being done to help law schools produce graduates with the professional skills and values needed.

A major obstacle was the lack of funding for Palestinian graduates and teachers to visit and study in Australia.

I lobbied the Australian government to extend AusAID programs to Palestine, stressing that the need to support capacity building there is a matter on which the international community is in agreement, and is something Israel is urging it to provide.

The government was receptive and extended Palestine AusAID's Australian Leadership Award Scheme, which is designed to support short-term visits for professional development, and it is studying problems in extending the Postgraduate Scholarships Scheme.

Professor Dixon invited Dr Daoud to visit UNSW to experience a modern English-speaking law school and discuss avenues for cooperation.

Dr Daoud showed particular interest in UNSW's postgraduate programs, its interactive teaching methods and the work of its centres, including the Kingsford Legal Centre. He invited the Director of the Human Rights

Centre, Andrea Durbach, to visit Nablus and discuss the development of his faculty's UNESCO Chair of Human Rights and Democracy.

He also sat in on some classes, discussed law teaching and postgraduate possibilities with staff, and explored the manifold issues in running a modern law school with Professor Dixon and the Head of School. Staff have established a working group to consider ways of building the relationship. One possibility is that UNSW students may assist potential postgraduate students from Palestine to develop their English by building relationships over the internet.

Professor Dixon sees Dr Daoud's visit in the wider international context. "When the international community is focused on a two-state solution for Palestine, it is pleasing that UNSW can contribute a capacity-building relationship with the Palestinian law schools to complement the cooperative relations we have with the highly developed law schools of Israel."

Dr Daoud, who studied in France, feels for his students. "Because Palestinian students have always lived in Palestine, they have only known problems, always conflict. So they need to get another point of view, to know there is something different in the world." •



Law links: (l-r) Professor David Dixon with Dr Akram Daoud and Professor Hal Wootten.