



27 May 2015

The Hon. Barnaby Joyce

Minister for Agriculture

Re: A fair Senate inquiry or one tainted by anti-Islamic Prejudice?

I am deeply saddened as many Australian Muslims are that the Australian Senate & the Government have thrown caution and rationality to the wind by approving an inquiry into halal certification that is rooted in prejudice & paranoia. It is most disingenuous Sir, to dress it up as a broadly based inquiry into various certification schemes not just halal certification when in fact the others are at best incidental--conveniently attached to mask the real purpose. The approval of the inquiry marks the culmination of a long running campaign by anti-halal, anti-Muslim groups against halal certification. The initiative to have this inquiry has been campaigned for initiated by and pushed through the Senate by Senator Cory Bernardi, , some of his cross bench colleagues, Q Society, Australian Independence Party and other openly anti-Muslim anti-halal groups. The support of the Liberal & National parties made it possible to pass the senate. Whatever justifications you may make for this inquiry the origins, purpose and intent of this inquiry are obvious and nothing you can do or say will change its anti-Muslim character.

It is the view of many Muslims that those who have pushed this agenda are doing a great disservice to Australia and its international reputation. This inquiry is unnecessary and potentially damaging to Australian multiculturalism, to international trade, to Australian business, to Australian Muslims and to halal consumers worldwide. Halal trade is a highly lucrative and dynamic international trade. It depends, like trade in other products, on a great deal of goodwill, which through the aggressive and high profile attacks by these groups has now been trashed. Acting in this way is a monumental folly that can not be easily undone. It is most unfortunate that the government did nothing to combat these damaging campaigns including the approval of the Senate inquiry.

Halal certification is an issue that least requires a Senate inquiry of the kind that has been established. What it required was a departmental or an independent investigation, free from the political overtones of the current Senate inquiry. And I must stress I have been very much in favour of such an investigation. In fact I have written to you, your department and your predecessor of the need for reform and development of halal certification. In a number of articles and in my book on the subject

<http://www.amazon.com/Accessing-Global-Halal-Market-Abdullahi/dp/1479217778> I identify many of the problems of halal certification and propose that urgent attention be given to reforming its structure, performance and management. The purpose of doing this is to make halal certification more efficient and more responsive to the needs of business and halal consumers worldwide. It is indeed an approach that envisages Australia to assume a leadership role in the global halal market. This is markedly different from the kind of changes which anti-halal groups are calling for. Whereas anti- Halal groups call for abolishing halal certification I call for strengthening it. Whereas they misrepresent and misinform people about halal I offer an authentic understanding of it which can enable business take maximum advantage of the opportunities which this market offers.

There is one basic truth about halal food; it is overwhelmingly about products that **Humanity** (Muslims and non-Muslims) consumes everyday. Halal therefore is not peculiar to Muslims even if the term may make it seem to be. What is peculiar to us Muslims (Jews & others) is that we do not consume products like pork and alcohol etc. To say that a particular food is halal is to say that Islam places no barriers on consuming it. That in fact is the fundamental definition of halal: that everything is halal except A,B ,C (a small number of specified products such as pork that are prohibited). The purpose of halal certification is not in fact about halal itself but about validating the absence of haram in the composition of the products that are sold or offered for consumption. What must be pointed out is that there should be no objection to halal at all, because to do so is to object to the very products that we all consume on a daily basis including water, bread, fruit vegetables and rice etc. The “NO to Halal” “No to Islam” campaign” does not make any sense at all, except for the fact that it is anti-Muslim campaign. Another important fact is that halal certification is a modern development barely 50 years old. It has been necessitated largely by modern methods of food production and globalisation. Importantly halal certification is not solely about meeting religiously based standards, it is also increasingly about marketing and market access. I shall make a submission to the Senate inquiry for what it is worth about these matters even though I consider its formation and membership (if known anti-Muslim senators are part of it) as being tainted by prejudice.

I presume you can not undo the establishment of the Senate inquiry. However what you can do is not to rely solely on this inquiry but to conduct your own departmental or independent investigation and to carry out any reforms that may be necessary. It is my conviction that a Senate inquiry is not the appropriate form of inquiry in this instance. There is in my view nothing of substance that a Senate inquiry of this kind can find, reveal or recommend which an ordinary independent or expert investigation can not; so, why a Senate inquiry in the first place? I am particularly concerned about the participation in the Senate Committee of individual senators whose bias against halal certification is well known such as Senators Cory Bernardi and Lambie or the influence they may have over the inquiry. The question is how can such an inquiry be fair or objective? How can people appearing before it have confidence in it? I repeat Sir, you could have investigated any issues of concern about halal certification without the need for a tainted inquiry of this kind. I want to place my views on record and hope that you would not mind me forwarding this letter as part of my submission to the inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Abdul Ayan

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Mobile:
