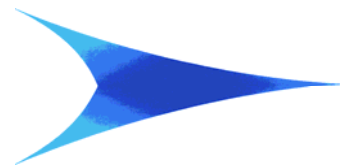


The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community



MEDIA RELEASE

Egyptian Aussies to Reclaim Citizenship

Felicity Morayef in Alexandria, Egypt, and her two daughters Heba and Suzy are counting the days until Sunday 1 July 2007. That's when they will become eligible to apply to resume their Australian citizenship under the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007*.

Born in Melbourne in 1941, Felicity grew up in Australia and in the UK, earning a degree from Oxford University before becoming a teacher of English as a second language. She taught in Belize (then British Honduras) and what is now the Czech Republic in the 1960s. In 1968, she took up a teaching job in Alexandria in Egypt.

It was there she met her husband Abdalla, an Egyptian. The relationship blossomed, and Felicity and Abdalla married in 1978. Felicity converted to Islam at that time.

"Converting to Islam made sense for me for personal reasons of faith, and it was part of my commitment to my life in Egypt", she says".

Felicity pursued her teaching career, becoming headmistress of a junior school. A daughter Fatma ("Heba") was born in Egypt in 1980, and a second daughter Soraya ("Suzy") in 1982. Felicity registered both girls as Australian citizens by descent with the Australian consular authorities while they were infants.



Felicity Morayef with daughters Heba and Suzy.

In 1992, Felicity took the decision to become an Egyptian citizen. The decision was motivated by the fact that she had two daughters, and she was concerned as to the impact of Egyptian personal status law on her rights to keep her children and her own status should her husband pass away.

She had no idea that on becoming a naturalized Egyptian, she would automatically forfeit her Australian citizenship under Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948*.

She was also completely unaware that her two daughters, minors at the time, would lose their Australian citizenship simultaneously under Section 23 of the 1948 Act.

It was not until eight years later, in 2000, that Felicity learned that she had lost her Australian citizenship in 1992. She went to renew her Australian passport in Cairo, and Australian consular officials, on seeing that her certificate of employment stated that she was an Egyptian national, twigged to the fact that she had lost her Australian citizenship.

"I was absolutely devastated", she says. "It had simply never occurred to me that naturalising in Egypt would mean loss of Australian citizenship. I would never have taken Egyptian citizenship had I been aware. It was deeply psychologically upsetting, and I felt like my whole foundation, part of my identity, had been taken away. I felt orphaned, and ostracised by Australia."

Her daughter Heba was in London at the time and attempted to renew her Australian passport, only to be told that she had lost her Australian citizenship in 1992 under Section 23 of the 1948 Act due to her mother's Egyptian naturalisation. She was similarly shocked.

"Australia is half of my identity", says Heba. "Suzy and I were brought up bilingual. Our mother was Australian, and we were always aware we were different from the other kids in Egypt, because our mother has blonde hair, which stands out like a sore toe in Egypt!"

Heba and Suzy studied at the American University in Cairo, with Heba obtaining a degree in political science. Turning 27 this Friday, she has since finished a masters in public international law in the UK specialising in human rights and now works for Amnesty International in London. Her sister Suzy works in communications and journalism in Cairo and is planning her wedding.

Heba hopes to submit her application to resume her Australian citizenship in London with the Australian High Commission next week. "There will be a big sense of relief when those papers are filed," she says. "And I will be very, very glad when I finally get my Australian citizenship certificate in the mail a few months down the track."

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About the Southern Cross Group

The Southern Cross Group is an international non-profit volunteer-run advocacy and support organisation for the Australian diaspora. Since its formation in early 2000, the SCG has established a consistent track record of intelligent and timely submissions to Government on a host of Australian expatriate issues. The Group is best known for its work in reforming Australian citizenship law. It has also been active on the issue of expatriate disenfranchisement in the Australian electoral process, and was the driving force behind the establishment of a broad-based dedicated Australian Senate Committee Inquiry into Australian expatriates held in 2003-2005.

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