

Kroger backs detained Dubai duo

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Liberal senator Helen Kroger has made an impassioned plea for justice on behalf of two Australian businessmen detained in Dubai over corruption allegations.

The two men, Matthew Joyce and Marcus Lee, face bribery charges over a Dubai property deal involving listed developer Sunland in 2007.

A civil case canvassing the same issues and launched by Sunland in a Victorian court was thrown out in June by the judge, who found the Gold Coast developer had brought the case for its own ulterior motives.

Senator Kroger has added her voice to a campaign to free the Dubai duo, telling Parliament that Sunland had been previously caught up in an Australian corruption investigation.

Ms Kroger said Sunland founder Soheil Abedian, senior executives and the company were all named in a 2006 Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission report on the 2004 Gold Coast City council election.

"There were findings that Sunland improperly made a hidden donation directly to Quadrant Advertising disguised as [payment for] 'general marketing advice'," Senator Kroger told Parliament.

"When in reality it was a backhanded attempt to curry political favour for their Gold Coast property developments.

"The improper behaviour of companies like Sunland threatens the interests of all Australian companies doing business in the United Arab Emirates."

Mr Joyce and Mr Lee are due to face another hearing in Dubai today after the original case against them was replaced with new allegations

Senator Kroger also placed the plight of the pair within a larger context, noting both a series of "arbitrary arrests" of foreigners at Dubai airport in recent years and the proposed tie-up between Qantas and Emirates.

"As the UAE is a participant in the Arab League boycott of Israel, concerns exist for any Australians that may have the stamp of Israel in their passport," she said.

Senator Kroger called on the federal government to make further efforts to seek the release of the two men. The businessmen's release would "serve to allay concerns that may continue to exist over possible commercial endeavours in the UAE", she said.

The Australian Financial Review



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