



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Citizenship and National Security

SPEECH

Monday, 14 July 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Van Manen, Bert, MP

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Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (13:24): I thank the member for Cowan for this motion. Given the recent discussions and the recent revelations of Australians being actively involved in overseas conflicts with declared terrorist organisations, I think it is a very relevant matter that we bring to the fore for public debate.

The member's motion covers off on a number of issues and particularly, as I said, notes the increasing instances of Australian citizens taking up arms for foreign military and extremist causes. In particular of late, we have seen instances of Australian citizens fighting for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. I think it is quite right that the member for Cowan points out that these people potentially provide a significant threat to Australian safety on their return. We should hold these people to account for failing to obey the pledge of allegiance that they have taken in order to become Australian citizens in the first place, and we should question their ability to retain that citizenship.

The Attorney-General put it well several weeks ago when he spoke with some Islamic community leaders about national security. The Attorney-General said:

The Abbott Government is absolutely determined that the troubles in the Middle East will not have an impact on Australia's domestic population. We acknowledge that this is an important national security issue. We know that there are approximately 60 Australians currently engaged in war fighting in the Syrian, north-western Iraqi theatre. We know that there are approximately 150, including that 60 or so, who are actively involved as either participants or facilitators.

This motion addresses both of those issues—people not only fighting but also facilitating.

With recent changes recognising the Islamic State as a terrorist organisation, Australians should bear in mind that if they fight alongside or financially support a listed terrorist group they can face up to 25 years jail. The new listing of the Islamic State in the Criminal Code replaces the listing of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, in keeping with the group's recent expansion. The government has also moved to specifically list the Islamic State under this name, reflecting an expansion of the organisation's operating areas and its announcement as an Islamic caliphate. It does not represent a change in the Islamic State's leadership, membership or methods of operation. I think it is quite clear from their communications over the past few months that they have a determination not only to control the territory that they presently occupy but also to expand further into other Islamic areas of the Middle East and to have influence on a global scale as well.

ASIO have advised that the Islamic State movement is attracting a large number of foreign fighters, including Westerners, and is now one of the world's most deadly and active terrorist organisations. That is why I think this motion is very timely. It is due recognition, and a timely reminder, that there are people in the Australian community who wish to support these organisations. The question always is: what do they bring back with them to Australia once they have finished their active involvement in these communities?

We should also be aware that the government is looking at some legislation to deal with this in a broader manner, which I believe is being introduced to the Senate later this week by the Attorney-General. So the government is very aware of this issue. Again, for the general safety of our country, I think we should be very mindful of these people in our community. In the United States, we saw what happens when terrorists successfully infiltrate a country's security perimeter. September 11 is a very salient reminder of what can happen if we are not vigilant and diligent, and if we do not look to actively prosecute these people for breaking Australian laws. I commend the member for Cowan for his motion.

Debate adjourned.