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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MIGRATION AMENDMENT (DETENTION
ARRANGEMENTS) BILL 2005

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Wednesday, 22 June 2005

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Plibersek, Tanya, MP

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Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney) (12.51 pm)—One of the enduring features of the temporary protection visa regime in Australia is the government's effort to keep secret the stories of the people who are affected by it. One after another, these stories come to light and we hear not only Labor members but also government members saying: 'The temporary visa protection system is terrific except for the people in my electorate who are making such a fantastic contribution'—picking fruit in the Riverina or working in the abattoir at Young—'These people should not be affected by this regime, because they are a special case. They are terrific people and should be able to become Australian residents and eventually Australian citizens.' There is an irrational belief that the refugees we know are okay—it is all the other refugees who are a terrible threat to the Australian fabric and way of life.

Discussing temporary protection visas, I am reminded of the film *Molly and Mubarak*, which was shown in Parliament House in November 2003. It is a beautiful film by Tom Zubricki about a young Afghan boy, his friendship with a girl of a similar age at Young, their developing friendship and his virtual adoption by her family. It was a moving film and was very light-hearted in parts. It was certainly no great threat to Australian democracy. You might remember that the government tried to ban the screening of that film in Parliament House. The reason I was given for this was that the film is critical of the government's policy, selectively quotes the Prime Minister and promotes the theme of widespread resistance to government policy. That was the reason given to shut down debate in this country on temporary protection visas. The film's director, Tom Zubricki, said of *Molly and Mubarak*: 'It is a film which I think makes you rethink your position on people who have been accused of being illegals and queue jumpers. It presents them in a different light and that is why it is probably politically contentious. It can be seen as subversive, because it humanises these people who have been demonised and vilified.'

We should remember that temporary protection visa holders have been found to be genuine refugees. There is no debate about whether they deserve Australia's protection as genuine refugees. That is not the question. The question is: what sort of protection will we give them? Up until now, we have given them extremely substandard protection. We have said that they can never be reunited with their families. They cannot leave the country to visit their family in a third country. In 20 or 30 years time, will they be permitted to meet their family in Singapore and see what has happened to children who have grown up or parents who are almost at the end of their lives? No. This is the regime to which we have subjected refugees who have come to Australia.

The member for Mitchell is talking about taking away ministerial discretion in this area. The point of his government's legislation is to give ministerial discretion where it has not previously existed. I do not know how you can possibly interpret our efforts as being aimed at taking away ministerial discretion. Our efforts are aimed at offering certainty to people who deserve it. These people have invoked their right to protection under international laws. They have come here during the government's watch, as one of the earlier speakers said, and have been granted asylum by the government. We want to say to these people: 'We will give you some certainty. You need not look forward to a lifetime of having the threat hanging over your head that, any day, you may be returned to your country of origin.' Most of the temporary protection visa holders are from Iraq and Afghanistan. Of the almost 9,000 temporary protection visa holders, over 3,500 are from Afghanistan and over 4,500 are from Iraq. I do not see the situation in those countries being safe any time soon. The constant threat that they will be sent home makes it impossible for them to settle into Australian society. (*Time expired*)