



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MUMBAI TERRORIST ATTACKS
SPEECH

Thursday, 26 November 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Page 13085
Questioner
Speaker Bishop, Julie, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (4.32 pm)—On indulgence: it is a sombre duty to respond to this statement on the anniversary of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai. Terrorist attacks rock a nation to its core, and India continues to struggle with the aftermath of the attacks which began on this day 12 months ago. Today, our thoughts and sympathies are particularly with the families of the two Australians killed, Brett Taylor and Douglas Markell. The grief of their families will be felt keenly today. Our sympathies also go out to the Indian citizens and the other international guests of India who were killed. More than 170 people died and more than 300 were wounded in the 10 attacks that occurred between 26 and 29 November 2008.

The first attack, in a public transport terminal at 9.30 at night, was a cowardly act of opening fire with AK-47s on a crowd of unarmed commuters. Fifty-two innocent civilians were murdered and 109 were wounded while in the act of travelling home to be with their families. It is hard to think of a more heinous act than opening fire on a crowd of unarmed people, but such is the character of these terrorists, who lay false claim to religious justification for their acts. This attack was followed by attacks on cafes and bomb blasts in taxis. However, the images that gripped the world were the attacks on the two international hotels. These were emblematic targets for the extremists, as they apparently represented the ideology to which they were fundamentally opposed. One can only imagine the fear and the chaos in the Taj Mahal Palace and the Oberoi-Trident hotels as the heavily armed terrorists went from room to room searching for hostages and executing people.

Presumably unknown to the attackers, there was a trade delegation from the European Parliament staying at the Taj Mahal hotel. They barricaded themselves in their rooms or escaped during the early stages of the attack. Thankfully, none were injured or killed as no doubt they would have been prime targets for the terrorists. Another emblematic target for these cowards was Nariman House, which accommodated a Jewish outreach centre and other activities. The guns were turned on the residents, with six killed and no mercy shown to the pregnant wife of the rabbi.

While it is impossible to understand the types of beliefs that have infected the minds of the terrorists, we have some understanding of their goals—from the one terrorist captured alive, who confirmed he was a member of a radical Islamist organisation in Pakistan. The attacks are aimed squarely at the psyche of the citizens of free and open societies. They seek to destroy the confidence of people going about their daily lives. The fact that terrorists strike without warning and murder people indiscriminately is deliberately calculated to strike fear in the hearts of all citizens, to paralyse the target society. What is the ideology that so offends these people that they are driven to seek to destroy it using bombs and weapons? It is an ideology of an open and free society. They abhor our freedom—principally our freedom of thought and our religious freedom.

The impacts on society as a whole can be devastating, but it is the impacts on individuals that are most raw. One report from India today is about a 29-year-old man who is still coming to terms with physical and mental scars from the attacks. He reports a fear of crowds and that people with strange faces now cause him anxiety and he has essentially retreated from society. The buildings can be repaired and the blood washed away, but the emotional damage to individuals can take many years to repair, and some will never truly be healed. We support the efforts of the governments of India and Pakistan in pursuing and taking action against these terrorists. It is a sad reminder of the extremists at work.