



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**  
**Immigration Detention**  
**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 23 March 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 23 March 2011  
**Page** 2961  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Zappia, Tony, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr ZAPPIA** (Makin) (4.36 pm)—I suggest that the real rolling crisis is with respect to the position of the Leader of the Opposition and how much longer he will be in that position. This matter of public importance before the House today is all about diverting attention from the divisions within the coalition and onto other matters. When it comes to the opposition we can be certain that they will never allow the facts to get in the way of political opportunism and that they will distort the facts in order to create concern and fear and raise emotions amongst people. We just heard that in the contribution by the member for Solomon. Quite frankly, her contribution is not worth responding to, but I will respond to one critical factual matter. As a member of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration I visited Darwin and visited the detention facilities there. The practice of using a motel in Darwin to house refugees and asylum seekers was a practice that was begun by the Howard government. To suggest this practice was started by this government is quite clearly distorting the facts.

As I said, the coalition never let the facts stand in the way of their political strategy. This matter of public importance debate today is just like the issue of climate change because time and time again we are seeing the coalition distort the facts. In fact, they are doing it quite deliberately to create fear and concern amongst members of the broader Australian community. I wonder what the member for Pearce, the member for McMillan and other coalition members in this place whom I know do not share the kinds of emotions and concerns that I have heard from other members of the coalition today feel when their colleagues bring into this place this kind of debate and use the kind of language that has been used as part of this debate. It is clear to me that when it comes to immigration, refugee policy and climate change the coalition is very clearly divided. To some extent it gives me some comfort to know that, even amongst their ranks, there are people who are level-headed and consider this matter in a measured way.

We are dealing here with the lives of real people, people who in most cases have undergone trauma, persecution, danger, loss and serious suffering. This is a critical international humanitarian issue and we should not play politics with it. As a country that prides itself on freedom, equality, democracy and civil rights, this whole issue with all the complexities associated with it must, for the sake of the people we are dealing with, be handled in a considered and rational policy setting—not with the simplistic, distorted rhetoric that the opposition come into the House with.

The opposition come into this House and criticise the government. I believe the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship quite adequately addressed this point, but I want to reiterate some home truths here. They come into the House and are very critical of the government but they do so without putting forward any rational, credible policy alternatives. You would think that, as the alternative government, they would at least do that. They have no position for which there is any credible level of support by any of the mainstream agencies, government departments or overseas governments with which we have to work in managing this issue. If they are going to come into the House and criticise the government, they should at least offer a better proposal that has been endorsed by the very agencies, governments and countries we have to work with. Do not come in here and simply criticise.

Let me go to some of the facts relating to asylum seekers. I heard members opposite being critical of the government. They claimed the government facts were incorrect. I will get back to some of those claims if time permits. I will go to the facts that were prepared by the Parliamentary Library—not by the Labor Party or by the minister, but by the Parliamentary Library. These are the facts. Fact 1: Australia has had a long history of accepting refugees for resettlement. Since 1945 some 700,000 refugees and displaced persons have found their new home in Australia.

Fact 2: when the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established in 1951, there were approximately 1.5 million refugees internationally. So not long after World War II there were 1.5 million refugees internationally. As at the end of 2009 there were an estimated 43 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, including 15.2 million refugees, 983,000 asylum seekers and 27 million internally displaced persons.

So we went from 1.5 million not long after World War II to 43 million and that does not include the additional 25 million people who have been displaced due to natural disasters of the types we have seen in recent times.

Fact 3: the majority of asylum seekers still arrive in Australia by air. Even with the recent surge, boat arrivals are still less than half of Australia's onshore asylum seekers. Fact 4: Australia is not being swamped by refugees. That is what the opposition would have people believe. They are doing their best to portray that myth. For over 10 years, and even during the time of the Howard government, about 13,000 refugees per annum resettled in this country and that includes all the boat arrivals. So the number of people who have resettled in this country in the last decade or so has been around 13,000 per annum in total. That has not changed and is not about to change. Around the globe right now there are 377,000 people seeking refuge in other countries a year. That is the number of applications that are processed to the knowledge of the UNHCR. In fact, Europe gets over a quarter of a million claims every year and has done so for the last three years, the USA gets about 50,000 claims a year and Canada gets about 33,000 claims. So that puts Australia's 6,500 claims into context.

I want to make two quick points. One is to rebut what the member for Stirling said when he was critical of the minister's use of facts. He was referring to the rates of Manus Island and Nauru asylum seekers who were ultimately given asylum. He said the figure was about 70 per cent. My hearing of the minister's comment was that it was Australia and New Zealand he was referring to when he was referring to the 90 per cent plus. I want to make that point absolutely clear. I think most members of this House would agree that there is little difference between Australia and New Zealand.

The second point I want to make is this: the same kind of fear campaign that I am hearing here today was run before Christmas in respect of the Inverbrackie detention centre that has been set up near Adelaide. Inverbrackie has been established and, contrary to all the fear that was being promoted by members of this House, people have settled into that community and settled in very well. I will quote from the *Southern Cross*, the online Catholic paper issued only recently. It said:

... Mount Barker and Adelaide Hills parishes say they have been inundated with the generosity of parishioners and locals wanting to donate goods to Inverbrackie residents.

The article goes on to say:

Pam Ronan said that the Catholic R-12 College in Mount Barker was keen to welcome the refugee children into the school community.

Patricia Brady said:

People have responded so generously and it is not just from the Catholic community but from all of the community.

That is the kind of reaction that people are getting in the Mount Barker area to the people coming into Inverbrackie, not the fear and concern that was being suggested before Christmas by people in this very House. The *Sunday Mail* report just before Christmas in Adelaide confirmed again the same kinds of feelings.

This motion is all about diverting attention from the Leader of the Opposition. (*Time expired*)

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)**—Order! The discussion has now concluded.