



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

Sydney: Martin Place Siege

SPEECH

Wednesday, 11 February 2015

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Questioner
Speaker Hayes, Chris, MP

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Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (18:46): It was just a short two months ago that Sydney and our entire nation stood still, closely following the events that were unfolding in the Lindt Chocolate Cafe in Martin Place. It was a day of disbelief, almost a day that was surreal. We followed events as they occurred, minute by minute, on our TV sets. It started off as an ordinary day for most of us. However, for 17 people who walked into that cafe, probably following a daily ritual of having a cup of coffee and catching up with friends, on this day a horrific chain of events unfolded, while the rest of us looked on. While we hoped and prayed that the situation would end peacefully, sadly that was not to be. In those horrific circumstances, Katrina Dawson, a lawyer and young mother of three, together with Tori Johnson, the manager of the Lindt cafe, paid the ultimate price for one man's deranged belief and actions.

My thoughts are with their families but also with the surviving hostages and those helping them to get through this very difficult and challenging time in their lives. I cannot begin to imagine the effect that enduring such a traumatic ordeal would have on a person, but certainly I know it will be lasting for some time. They deserve to know that our community supports them and will always support them. Having said that, I hope there is some measure of solace that they can take in the outpouring of solidarity and unity across our nation in the support for them.

As a representative of the most multicultural electorate in this country, I am proud to say that we have not let this tragedy divide our communities. On the day of the siege in Martin Place, on 15 December last year, I was actually attending the school presentation of the Green Valley Islamic College, in my electorate. I got to see firsthand the impact that the siege was having on the school community. Together with the students, the teachers and the religious leaders from the mosque, we were all horrified that something like this could occur in our city, in our community. But—to an extent, more pertinent for them under these circumstances—they showed outrage that their religion could be hijacked by a person claiming to be acting on behalf of Islam. Understandably, we all had a deep concern for those trapped inside the cafe and that dreadful fear of what this could mean for the future peace and harmony of our country.

In the days and weeks that followed, we saw the compassion of our community very much on display. The floral tributes sprang up around Martin Place and across the country. Indeed, in my electorate, in Freedom Plaza—which I know you have visited, Mr Deputy Speaker Kelly—floral tributes spread there. These outpourings of solidarity and emotional tributes that followed the events on 15 and 16 December show a determination by our community to be above ignorance and above hatred. I am proud that our society has used this tragedy to reaffirm its commitment to peace and harmony.

In the aftermath of the Martin Place siege, as a community we are still coming to terms with the frightening reality that terror has the potential of striking with little or no warning. We are not isolated. In that, we clearly have lost some of our innocence. Through this terrifying event, I think we have learnt much about community solidarity.

Also, what was evident and has been evident since is the pride that we justifiably have in the professionalism of the men and women of our police and emergency services. The New South Wales police officers who attended the scene in Martin Place on that day certainly deserve nothing but praise for how they handled this very difficult and complex situation. I have often said that it takes a special type of person with a special kind of courage to wear the police uniform, and the events of December last year have demonstrated just how unpredictable and dangerous their job can be.

We will never forget those two innocent lives that were lost. We will never bring them back. We will never again see ourselves detached or immune from tragedies or humanitarian crises. We are not immune any longer. It is not a matter of tuning in and seeing things occur in other nations around the globe; we now know that we are very much able to find these in our own backyard. We must be prepared. We must be equipped.

But if there is a positive that can be drawn, it is that we have men and women in our community that are brave enough and certainly competent enough to respond to and deal with these tragedies. We can also take away from this incident our own ability to support each other and to come through the other side very much stronger, united and committed to peace and harmony.

I offer my sincere condolences to the families of Katrina Dawson and Tori Johnson. May they rest in peace and never be forgotten.