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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Yousafzai, Miss Malala**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 11 February 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** O'Dwyer, Kelly, MP

**Source** House  
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**Ms O'DWYER** (Higgins) (18:45): I rise today to speak in support of this excellent motion proposed by my good friend and colleague the member for Casey. I join with my colleagues opposite in universal acclamation for the commitment that we are expressing in this House today to girls' education and the tribute to Malala Yousafzai.

On 9 October 2012, in the Swat Valley in Pakistan, three cowardly Taliban terrorists boarded Malala's school bus, sought her out by name and deliberately shot her point blank in the head and in the neck in an attempt to kill her and silence her forever. Happily for the world, they were not successful. Their violent act of misogyny left Malala in a critical condition, unresponsive for three days as doctors fought to save her life. In less than five weeks, Malala went from an intensive care unit in Pakistan, showing no signs of consciousness, to walking, writing and reading again in a hospital in Birmingham, Britain. Only in the last weeks has she been discharged from hospital. As an advocate for girls' education in her native Swat Valley, Malala's life had been at risk from the Taliban for a number of years for simply wanting to have an education like her brothers. Her father said of her that she:

... got influenced by what was going on and gradually she joined me in our struggle against extremism.

She was then 11 years of age.

The Taliban has had a long history of trying to prevent girls from attending schools through violence, even going to the extent of physically destroying schools, with some estimating that the Taliban destroyed over 150 schools in Pakistan in 2008 alone. As they sought to impose their austere interpretation of sharia law, the Pakistani Taliban threatened girls, their families and their teachers, despite the fact that at the time there was a pledge by the Pakistani government to safeguard girls' education and their schools from such extremists. The Taliban's efforts to disrupt and prevent girls' education continue to this day. Amazingly, given the violent threats they have been faced with, there are brave girls throughout Pakistan willing to risk their welfare so that they can attend school and improve their chances in life for themselves and for their families.

In 2009, Malala began blogging for the BBC's online Urdu news service under a pseudonym, describing the Taliban's repression of girls' education. Malala wrote, 'I was afraid going to school because the Taliban had issued an edict banning all girls from attending schools,' before describing how a number of her friends had moved out of the Swat Valley to Peshawar, Lahore and Rawalpindi to be able to continue their education in a safer environment. For those that stayed, the very real and present Taliban threats of reprisals on families meant that many did not send their daughters to school. In late 2009, Malala took up a position as chair of the District Child Assembly of Swat, leading discussions between young people as to what they wanted their future in the Swat Valley to look like. Over the next few years, Malala continued to agitate for girls' education in her blogs, on television and radio and in social media. When in October 2011 she was nominated by Desmond Tutu for the International Children's Peace Prize, and in December of 2011 she received Pakistan's National Youth Peace Prize, the risk to Malala and her family was brought into the open, with death threats published in newspapers and slipped under the family's door. Yet, despite this, Malala continued to campaign for girls' education, describing it as 'our basic right'.

I commend those in Pakistan and throughout the world who have joined with her. The newly formed Malala Fund will help girls just like Malala. One of the instigators of this fund, Alyse Nelson, said:

We stand with Malala and girls around the globe who are boldly speaking out as advocates for education and equality. When girls move forward, they take their communities forward too.

This is so true. Malala has said when speaking of her recovery:

... because of these prayers God has given me this new life ... and this is a second life. And I want to serve. I want to serve the people. I want every girl, every child, to be educated.

Malala Yousafzai is a brave young woman, a true feminist, a warrior against the evils of real misogyny. She is an inspiration to me and an example to us all. On 8 March, which is International Women's Day, we must focus on the issues facing women right around the world. This is one of the critical issues facing our sisters throughout the world: to have an education, to have a right to education and to have that education in a safe environment. Malala, you are a true inspiration.