



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

**Ogaden Community Association
of Western Australia**

SPEECH

Wednesday, 26 February 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker	Keenan, Michael, MP	Question No.	

Mr KEENAN (Stirling—Minister for Justice) (09:33): I recently met with several members of the Ogaden Community Association of Western Australia, including the chairman, Asad Omar. The meeting served as an update concerning the human rights situation within their homeland. The Ogaden region in Ethiopia has been, and continues to be, subject to serious internal conflict. The Ogaden community representatives contacted me on this occasion as they are deeply concerned and, while they believe a number of atrocities have occurred in the Ogaden region, the region does not appear to receive an adequate amount of international scrutiny when compared to other conflict zones around the world.

The representatives raised very serious allegations of rape, torture, genocide and kidnapping, most of which have allegedly been committed by the Ethiopian military. Unfortunately, the allegations are hard to prove as international media and human rights groups have been refused access to the Ogaden region since 2007. However, I am aware that international organisations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Genocide Watch have been collecting large amounts of testimony which indicates that the claims of war crimes and crimes against humanity to have some veracity.

During the meeting, I was presented with a short video that contained satellite footage of a village in remote Ogaden which disappeared after the military swept through the region. Whilst it is impossible for me to authenticate this footage, if proven to be true it would be a significantly major deterioration in the situation in Ethiopia, and it would also provide evidence of a horrendous act.

The Ogaden community are also concerned with the level of assistance provided by developed nations including Australia through governmental and non-governmental financial assistance. They believe that aid from the developed world assists the authoritarian regime by providing it with financial injections. Following these concerns, I have raised the issue with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop. She was able to provide me with the assurance that Australia's aid money to Ethiopia is being used to assist those most in need.

Australia has raised the issue of human rights within the Ogaden region directly with the government of Ethiopia, including through representations made by Australia's ambassador there as recently as 15 January this year. Ethiopia is scheduled to appear before the United Nations Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review in May this year. This will provide another opportunity for Australia to raise human rights concerns directly with the Ethiopian government in the UN forum. I am pleased that the information that the Ogaden community has provided to the Minister for Foreign Affairs will now be used in informing Australia's participation in Ethiopia's review later on this year.

I congratulate the Ogaden community in Western Australia, who are a very important community within my electorate of Stirling, for their persistence and efforts. I appreciate the efforts that they are making to preserve and recognise human rights within the Ogaden region in Ethiopia.