



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

STATEMENTS

Iraq

SPEECH

Thursday, 4 September 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Andrews, Karen, MP

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Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (11:17): I rise today to wholeheartedly support the Prime Minister's statement explaining the assistance Australia is providing to the people of Iraq, who are currently facing very grave danger from the brazen terrorists that call themselves Islamic State.

The Prime Minister was right to say that we should call this extremist group for what they are. They are not a state; they are not merely an alternative movement or a political voice. They are violent ideologues and they are terrorists of the worst order. The shocking images we have all seen over the past few weeks should be a wake-up call for the world. This brand of ideology does not share the common values that we do. Acts of beheading, crucifixion, the marching of unarmed people into mass graves to be executed represent a level of barbarism that is stomach churning.

The ISIL movement does not simply do evil; it boasts of evil, it is proud of evil and it advertises its evil in a way almost never before seen at any time in the modern world.

I know that, in this age of moral equivalence, some will argue that all war is barbaric. But the way these terrorists operate is far removed from the Geneva convention and its protocols—the recognised international law that regulates the conduct of armed conflict and seeks to limit its effects. The ideology behind the actions is abhorrent and centred on ethnic cleansing and genocide. The treatment of women, with thousands forced into sexual slavery, is reprehensible.

This is a level of evil that cannot be ignored. It is a conflict that cannot be put down to a regional skirmish or mere sectarian violence, particularly when this evil has recruited so many of its soldiers from around the world including from, sadly, Australia.

We have a moral responsibility to be united in our opposition to such evil. We have a moral responsibility to provide aid to those who are suffering and to assist those who are in the front lines fighting these terrorists. While we have not been asked to provide military or combat assistance at this time, our soldiers who are delivering aid certainly face grave danger. As a nation we all pray for their safety and we thank them for the duty they are carrying out in our name. I agree with the Prime Minister that doing nothing also involves serious risks and consequences.

I have to say I have been disappointed by the response of the Greens and others, who I feel once again let ideology get in the way of good sense and decency. The appalling attempt on Monday in the Senate to overturn convention and try to force a debate on the level of engagement our forces may have in this conflict was a cynical attempt at pointscoreing. What is more, as the defence minister, Senator Johnston, pointed out, were we to debate what operational activities the Australian Defence Force would undertake it would be completely counterproductive to protecting those lives. This has never been done before in our history. We are a country that has never shirked its responsibility. The Prime Minister has outlined the criteria against which any request for military action will be judged, but of course we all hope that it does not come to that.

I wanted to finish today with the words of Germany's Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who said:

Right now, we currently have the chance to rescue people's lives and to hinder further mass murder in Iraq. Right now, we have the chance to hinder [Islamic State terrorists] from creating another safe haven. We must take advantage of this chance.

I support the Prime Minister's decision to act. I believe it is in our own national security interest to do so but, most of all, I think it is our moral duty and obligation as international citizens.