



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

Minorities in Iraq

SPEECH

Monday, 1 September 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Monday, 1 September 2014
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Questioner
Speaker Bowen, Chris, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (10:51): by leave—I move:

That the motion be amended to read—that this House:

- (1) condemns the actions of the Islamic State in Iraq which amounts to attempted genocide of minorities including the Assyrian, Chaldean, Mandaean and Yezidi people;
- (2) re-affirms the rights of the Christian and other minorities of Iraq to live in peace and freedom and calls for all steps to be taken to ensure that all members of the affected communities can live in freedom in Iraq;
- (3) calls on the Australian Government and the international community to provide humanitarian, financial and other forms of appropriate assistance to support those Christian and other minorities who have been internally displaced within Iraq;
- (4) notes the aspirations of the Assyrian and Chaldean people for the establishment of an autonomous region in the Ninevah plains and welcomes the in-principle agreement of the Iraqi Government to this request earlier this year; and
- (5) calls on the Australian Government through its seat on the United Nations Security Council and the international community to take appropriate steps to protect the rights of minorities in Iraq, including the Assyrian and Chaldean Christian people.

This House has considered resolutions on the plight of the Assyrian and Chaldean people of Iraq in the past. But yet again we are obliged to speak out on behalf of Iraq's Christian minorities. The Assyrian and Chaldean people have suffered so much in the past and now perhaps face their greatest ever threat—and this is a very substantial threat indeed.

This year and over the next four years Christians of Iraq will be remembering 100 years of attacks and they will be remembering when Australia's famous soldier Lieutenant General Savage rode to the rescue of Christian people—and now, 100 years later, Australia is being called on again to stand up for the Christians of the Middle East. As I said, this is perhaps the most serious threat ever faced. The scourge of the Islamic State seeks to eliminate Iraq's indigenous people.

Let me say this very, very clearly: the Islamic State is seeking to commit genocide. And I ask the House to send the strongest possible message that we will not stand for it. Even more importantly, it is important that the House says that once the scourge of ISIS has been dealt with, once the scourge of the Islamic State has been expelled from Iraq, let us not miss that opportunity to ensure ongoing protection for the Christians of Iraq—real protections for the Christians of Iraq—and let us move to ensure that the Christians of Iraq have a safe haven where they can live in peace and prosperity and they can live with reassurance. This has been agreed to by the former Iraqi government in principle, but we must keep moving forward.

Today the House must say, 'No, there is a fourth option: to continue to live in Iraq and to continue to practise their Christian faith without interference, in freedom, as they have the right to do.' Today the House must say, 'No, there is a fourth option: to continue to live in Iraq and continue to practise their Christian faith without interference and in freedom, as they have the right to do.'

The Assyrians and Chaldeans have faced, as I said, thousands of years of persecution. But, in just in the last 10 years or more, since the fall of Saddam Hussein, it is the Assyrians and Chaldeans who have suffered so much. By some reports, before the fall of Hussein, there were well over 1.4 million adherents to the Christian faith in Iraq. Now there are potentially somewhere between 250,000 and 500,000 left. Churches have been desecrated and destroyed. Murders and rapes have been committed. Towns like Mosul and Tikrit, the Nineveh Plains, home

to the Christians of Iraq, have been taken over or are under threat. The Christians of Iraq in Iraq need to know and those in Australia need to know, and those around the world need to know, that Australia stands with them—and that this House stands as one, across the divide, with them.

It is very important that this message go out from this House today as strongly as possible, as it has from many individual members and as it has from the Christian Iraqi community in Australia. I want to acknowledge the work of so many leaders, some of whom are represented in the gallery today and others who could not be with us. In no particular order, the Assyrian Universal Alliance, the Assyrian Australian National Federation, the Young Assyrians, Christian Faith and Freedom, the Australian Chaldean Federation, the Chaldean National Congress, the Chaldean Australian Society and the Batnaya Australia group are just some of the groups represented in the House today and other groups represented in the community. I want to acknowledge and thank Bill Shorten and Tanya Plibersek, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, for making time to meet with representatives of the various groups so that they could be properly briefed.

Today the House sends the strongest possible message, as we have done in the past, and may we never have to do it again in the future because the Christians of Iraq can live in freedom— *(Time expired)*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mitchell): Is the motion seconded?

Mr Thistlethwaite: I am pleased to second the motion and reserve my right to speak.