



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONDOLENCES

Malaysia: Missing Aircraft

SPEECH

Thursday, 27 March 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 27 March 2014
Page 3478
Questioner
Speaker Andrews, Karen, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (12:07): I rise today to express my sincere condolences to the family and friends of all 239 people whom we now believe perished on flight MH370. This has been a highly unusual and tragic situation in which the world waited anxiously for 17 days for some evidence as to what occurred on this flight. There are still many, many questions as to why and how the plane crashed so far away from its flight path—indeed, so far away from anywhere. The crash site in the southern Indian Ocean, 2,500 kilometres from Perth, has been identified by debris found in an international search effort led by Australia. I will return to our role in that search effort soon.

I want to endorse what our Prime Minister has said. We extend our nation's deepest sympathies to the families of those on board. They are in our hearts and our minds at this time. The unusual nature of this tragedy has, I think, made it particularly difficult for the loved ones of those on board. It is right that we do whatever we can to show thoughtfulness and compassion at this time. We have extended an invitation—and I know, as is the Australian way, we will be welcoming and understanding—to anyone wishing to make a vigil here to pay respects and mourn their loved ones.

Of course our hearts go out to the families of the Australians on board. Two Queensland couples who were friends travelling together—Rodney and Mary Burrows, and Catherine and Robert Lawton—were much-loved parents, grandparents, siblings and friends and, by all accounts, fantastic neighbours and members of their community. Also there was a young Sydney couple, Yuan Li and Naijun Gu, who it is reported had two young children living in China. There was also a Perth resident and New Zealand national, Paul Weeks. I know that some family members were present in the gallery yesterday when the Prime Minister moved this motion. I hope they know that Australians are thinking of them at this very sad time.

I think the nature of this tragedy makes us all think deeply and reassess. That a commercial flight could go missing for so long and under such unusual circumstances has certainly made the global community question some of the things we take for granted every day. While we still do not know the exact nature of what occurred on that flight—and I am not about to speculate on that at all today—it does remind us that we must remain vigilant to the threats and potential threats that exist in our world today.

I want to take a little time in this debate to recognise and thank the Australian Maritime Safety Authority and our Air Force and Navy personnel, who have been and continue to be part of the effort to locate the plane and retrieve the debris. This has not been an easy task, covering a vast area that is so far from the west coast of Australia and under weather conditions that were so bad that the efforts had to be called off for a time on Tuesday. Australia has taken on a leadership and coordination role, with other nations joining the effort, and I want to acknowledge the fine work of our service men and women and the Maritime Safety Authority. I note that the recovery efforts continue today, with military aircraft, civil aircraft and ships searching.

We must all recognise that the search and recovery effort is not without risk itself and that the personnel involved are working at the request of our government to help find debris that could provide answers so that the world can gain some understanding of what actually happened. We seek answers so that the families of those on board can have some closure and, most importantly, so that we can prevent something like this from happening in the future. That is what our brave defence and maritime safety personnel are focused on, and I take time during this debate to thank them for their efforts.

Once again, to the families of those on board MH370, both here and around the world, I express sympathy on behalf of the community I represent. Our thoughts are with you at this time.