



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chifley  
Electorate: Learning Ground**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 20 August 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 20 August 2015  
**Page** 9121  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Husic, Ed, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr HUSIC** (Chifley) (10:41): The eleventh of July this year marked 20 years since the world witnessed one of the worst chapters of modern history. Back then, in a place few people outside of Bosnia-Herzegovina would know, over 8,000 men and boys were massacred and separated from wives, mothers and sisters—women eventually forced to endure depravity and bear years of pain and emotional scarring. All this occurred because people were singled out for their ethnicity and faith. The events of this place propelled Srebrenica into the memories of many for all the wrong reasons. What happened here was so heinous and on such a grand scale that it was labelled genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Court of Justice.

Last month, I was able to join Sydney's Bosnian and Herzegovinian community for a moving commemoration held at Sydney Town Hall. A hundred people gathered to mark a solemn respect for those who lost their lives 20 years previously. Amongst those present were many who lost family members or were in Srebrenica when the massacre occurred. I had the chance to meet with survivors like Dzevad Smajic. Dzevad lost both his parents and several other family members, and it was only in 2008 that his father's body was discovered in a mass grave beneath a hill near the town. He and his orphaned siblings are yet to find the body of their mother, who had gone missing and was presumed killed when she went out looking for food. It is hard to imagine having to bear the pain of a loss and then the emptiness that comes with being unable to lay kin to final rest. No-one should be forced to shoulder such pain.

Later that night the community held a commemoration ceremony at the Bosnian Centre in Bringelly hosted by survivor Mirsada Helac and Omer Ayan. We heard heartbreaking stories, including a touching letter read by Nihada Alemic to her grandmother, whose body is yet to be discovered. She read:

As much as I wish you were alive, I do not know if you would have lived knowing they killed your sons and your grandchildren.

These are the stories of only a few.

I presented the community with a message from opposition leader Bill Shorten, who concluded with comments made by Paddy Ashdown earlier that week:

We could have prevented this horror ... We chose not to ... We should therefore remember Srebrenica, not just to bear witness to those who suffered, but also as a warning to us all of what happens when we turn our back.

I would like to thank the Australian Bosnian-Herzegovinian community association for their continued efforts, in particular Secretary Safet Alispahic, and thank colleagues and friends Walt Secord and Jeremy Jones who attended the commemoration ceremony. My thanks also to the Bosnian ambassador, Bakir Sadovic, who was in Srebrenica at the time of the genocide, and to our Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition, Michael Danby, who represented Labor at the official commemorations in Srebrenica.

I cannot speak today without expressing one final note on this matter. I wish to register profound and deep disappointment that the Prime Minister of this country and its foreign minister were unable to pay a modest respect to those who suffered and continue to be marked by this terrible event. Despite repeated efforts to determine if a statement was issued to recognise the 20th anniversary, it appears none was made by the Prime Minister or the foreign minister. I simply cannot fathom why the Australian government was unable to issue words of comfort and respect to those 8,000 Bosnian Muslims who lost their lives in the space of a few days. But let them be judged for their actions—or, in this case, inaction. If they have issued such a statement, I will immediately issue my own apology for an oversight of that nature.

Finally, I wish to speak up for a group performing a vital service in our area, Mt Druitt Learning Ground. Learning Ground gives hope to those who are sometimes written off, or judged by others to have little prospect of an engaged and meaningful community contribution. Led by a team of community-minded people, the service has

delivered life skills and training for vulnerable youth in our area for the last 10 years, funded by small donations, philanthropic grants and modest federal government input. It costs a lot to help each family, but through their work they have helped take young people off a probable pathway to prison or a bleaker future.

Right now, the funding to Learning Ground is under threat. The Baird government has failed to extend support to the group, and this stands as a complete and utter disgrace and is a disservice to our area. The federal government, however, is considering an application to fund Learning Ground, and I, on behalf of those in need in our community, ask that this request be urgently met, because by doing so they will be helping hundreds of families to ensure that they can make a full, rich and proper contribution to our local area.