



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Syrian Refugees**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 9 February 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 9 February 2015  
**Page** 25  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Thistlethwaite, Matt, MP

**Source** House  
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**Responder**  
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**Mr THISTLETHWAITE** (Kingsford Smith) (11:20): I also wish to associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Sydney in respect of the condolence motion.

As I was saying earlier, at the moment up to five million Syrians are now refugees and over 10 million need humanitarian support. The suffering of people displaced by violence in Syria cannot be ignored by the world community, and that is why it is important that this parliament debate this issue and express a view regarding Australia's commitments to easing the suffering, particularly of those who have been displaced by this terrible ongoing conflict.

A humanitarian response and a longer-term political solution to the crisis must be supported by the international community, including Australia. We are a prosperous and generous nation. We are a wealthy nation, comparatively speaking, in terms of our real incomes, and we must do our best, our utmost, to play a part in this unfolding crisis.

As the motion states, the masses of Syrian refugees have put an enormous pressure on neighbouring countries, particularly Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, with Syrian refugees in Lebanon constituting an astounding one-third of that country's population. There are four million people who live in Lebanon, and an additional one million refugees from Syria have fled over the border and are now in camps on the outskirts of Lebanon. Can you imagine a million people over a series of months coming into Sydney and having to be clothed, fed, sheltered and provided with basic health care? In light of this the government must substantially increase Australia's contribution to the United Nations and relief organisations delivering humanitarian assistance to people affected by violence in Syria. This should include increased support to UN agencies operating in neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. It includes food, schooling and health facilities. Australia can play a role in providing this humanitarian assistance.

In December 2013, the UN issued its largest appeal in relation to a single crisis, stating that \$6.5 billion was vital to adequately support Syrians inside and out of the conflict-ravaged nation. To date Australia has offered \$35 million. It is not enough. When the Labor government was in office, we dedicated \$100 million. That amount of funding has been cut. Based on the size of our economy and Oxfam's calculations, if we were to pay our fair share, if we were to uphold the fair go, our contributions should be in the vicinity of \$117 million. The Abbott government must recommit to receiving more refugees from an expanded quota from Syria also.