



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

World Refugee Day

SPEECH

Monday, 20 June 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Morrison, Scott, MP

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Mr MORRISON (Cook) (19:37): I rise to also recognise World Refugee Day. In November last year I gave a speech to the Lowy Institute where I made a very simple point, and that is that we focus on the few at the great expense of the many. The many are the 99 per cent who will never see a resettlement outcome in another country in their lifetime. While some at this point will pause and reflect and think about the less than one per cent who may seek to come to Australia and claim asylum here, whether they come by boat or by any other method, the vast majority of refugees will never see that opportunity. They will never see a resettlement outcome. They will languish in camps for their entire lives or for generations, and one day they might be able to go home.

The Australian government and the Australian people run the most generous refugee resettlement program per capita of any country in the world. It is something that as a country we should be extraordinarily proud of, it is something that we should continue and it is something that we should uphold the integrity of. So we believe very strongly that it is important that we run a humanitarian program that has integrity; that is not held hostage to the people smugglers who would seek to undermine the integrity of that system; and that will enable the Australian people, through their government, to hand out what is probably the most precious gift on offer to a refugee—and that is resettlement, because, as the motion notes, less than one per cent will end up getting a resettlement outcome in a third country. We should continue this program and we should be proud of it, but we should hold steadfastly to protecting the integrity of that program so that at all times we are in a position to decide who will get that great life chance of resettlement in a country—in particular, in Australia.

The motion points to the fact that there are not queues. Well, there simply are queues. There were 47,000 people in the queue to be part of our offshore applied humanitarian program in Australia last year: 9,577 of them were Afghans and 7,532 of them were Iraqis. Of the Iraqis who applied offshore 1,688 were able to receive a visa, and of the Afghans who applied only 951 were. So one in 10 Afghans who applied offshore got that opportunity for a resettlement place in Australia, and over the same period more than nine out of 10 or thereabouts of those that had arrived by boat took that opportunity by presenting on our shores.

It is important that we have a program that has integrity. In the speech that I gave to the Lowy Institute last year, I called on an international focus to ensure that the UNHCR put its first priority on countries of first asylum—ensuring that the conditions in those camps in the countries of first asylum are of a standard that enables the vast majority who will live their lives in those camps, and often see their grandchildren live and be raised up in those camps, to be given at least some opportunity in life—and also that all of our efforts internationally are focused on ensuring that people can get home safely. That is what our soldiers are doing in Afghanistan today: to provide the opportunity for a safe country where people can go home and live their lives in peace and in freedom. That is our goal for the world's refugee problem: that people can go home safely.

There is a call in this motion for there to be a bipartisan position that recognises that it is possible to protect Australia's borders while also treating asylum seekers fairly, humanely and in accordance with international law. We had that arrangement. We had it in 2007, when there were just four people in our detention network who had arrived by boat, and this government departed from that. I am all for bipartisanship, but not at the expense of bad policy. I am all for bipartisanship that enables us to pursue policy that is in the best interests of this country, but when we have policies such as those pursued by this government—which have led to around 11,500 people taking that treacherous voyage to force claims on a country rather than enable those claims to be assessed along with the offshore applications that would enable an equal opportunity for those who are applying offshore—when we see over 6,500 people in detention, spending three times as long there as they were just two years ago, and when we see the costs balloon and the misery continue, you can draw only one conclusion: that this is failed policy.

So the coalition will continue our strong support for our refugee and humanitarian program, but we will stand up for the integrity of that program. We are concerned about its integrity under this government, and we want to see that restored. That is why we believe the more cost-effective, more humane and more effective and proven

solution is to reintroduce processing on Nauru and to reintroduce temporary protection visas, because that is what stopped the boats and, at the end of the day, supported the rights of refugees. (*Time expired*)