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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Bali Bombing: 10th Anniversary

SPEECH

Tuesday, 30 October 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker O'Dwyer, Kelly, MP

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Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (16:52): On Friday, 12 October, we commemorated with great sadness one of the darkest days in Australian history—a specific moment in time when the people of Australia were attacked, albeit in a foreign land, and when the people of Australia realised that we are not immune from extremism and some of the more horrific aspects of human nature. On 12 October 2002, Australia lost its innocence in what was and to this day still is the worst terrorist attack in our short history. Eighty-eight Australians were slain in the most random and brutal way. What was meant to be a joyous and cheerful time in people's lives as they shared vacation time with family and friends in the tropical oasis of Bali turned into a nightmare as three bombs went off in a coordinated and sinister attack throughout Kuta and at the United States consulate in Denpasar. In these attacks, 202 innocent people lost their lives, including, as I have mentioned, 88 Australians in a deliberate plan to cause as much damage as possible, a single backpack-laden suicide bomber entered Paddy's nightclub and, without warning, detonated the explosive. This in turn had people flooding into the street to try and avoid the chaos and confusion. As they ran for what they thought was safety, a second, larger car bomb was detonated outside the Sari Club across the road. The devastation was endless and the destruction was horrific. We remember in this place those that lost their lives. We grieve with their families and we honour those who came to their aid. The pain and mental anguish of those who survived is immense and enduring.

In my electorate of Higgins, I have been in contact with Laurence Kerr, a survivor of the Bali bombing. Today I am going to read to you a letter that he has given me permission to table in the parliament about his feelings as a Bali bombing survivor:

My name is Laurie Kerr and I am a survivor, not a victim, of the Bali Bombings. At 11.09pm on October the 12th 2002 we were at the Sari Club having been in Bali for less than 12 hours. Life and the World changed forever. I had travelled to Bali with a group of 19 mates from The Kingsley Football Club in Western Australia on a end of season trip. Only 13 returned. I was 44 years old and had a life time of experiences and memories. 5 young men had yet to see their 21st birthday.

I was the lucky one. I had survived and life was to go on.

Fast forward to today. I was reading The Australian Newspaper on January 4 2011—

which is when he sent this letter to me—

when I was taken by a big headline BOOM IN BALI.

The article was about a major increase in tourism since 2006 and quoted TIME.COM as the source and went on to say that it was on track to achieve record numbers by the end of last year.

The article credited the increase in tourism to the book "Eat,Pray,Love" published in 2006 and the movie of the same name starring Julia Roberts. The article made me feel glad for the people of Bali that rely so heavily on tourism for their very survival . Not only had they survived, they had prospered since the terrorists acts of 2002 and 2004. Even if only using tourism as a benchmark.

SURVIVE, SURVIVORS. My mind was full of thoughts for my fellow survivors . How had they fared ...? How would I know? Who should know?

There are a finite number of survivors from the bombings of October 12 2002 of which I am but one and this is by no means intended to be a one man survey. As a result of the bombing I received burns to 20% of my body. I suffer with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, chronic depression , I lost my own business that I had run successfully for 10 years, my life savings are gone and I have only managed to work 4 out of the 8 years and not consecutively.

I am eligible for a disability pension but have chosen to be a part of the New Start program that gives [me] the opportunity to seek work.

In 2004 there was a Senate enquiry into BALI 2002-Security Threats to Australians in South East Asia.

One of the recommendations read as follows - the Commonwealth government prepare a green paper on the establishment of a national compensation scheme for victims of terrorism related crimes that fall within the Commonwealth jurisdiction; and

- the national council of Attorneys-General develop a proposal for the harmonization of state laws dealing with compensation for victims of crimes so as to provide for circumstances such as terrorist attack.

The government did not accept the recommendation of lump sum assistance preferring to opt for case by case as they had done after 2002 bombings.

The government response also stated that it would "continue to monitor the needs of those affected by the tragedy and to provide ongoing assistance such as emergency financial assistance"

If there has been any MONITORING I have not been aware of it.

If there was emergency financial assistance available I was never told.

Since the bombings, for which the government paid the associated medical bills, I have also benefitted via the Bali Med scheme which continues to pay any medical bills that are directly linked to the bombing and also covers pharmaceutical bills that are for treatment associated with the bombings. That is the extent of my government assistance.

Of the finite number of my fellow survivors there are those fortunate ones who have made a full recovery physically and mentally and resumed normal lives. Then there are those like myself who for many a different reason have not. So the questions remain; HOW are they ...? WHO would know? And Who should?

The terrorist acts of the 2002 Bali Bombings were unprecedented in Australian history and came with lifetime consequences.

With the benefit of hindsight or indeed some MONITORING, was the Government's method of assistance the best option for its citizens?

Being a SURVIVOR makes it worth while to ask the QUESTIONS

I am proud to say that I supported a piece of legislation brought forward by the Leader of the Opposition that does go to this question about compensation for victims of terror. Instead of simply being prospective, it is important for us in this place to also look back at those who have suffered from some of the most horrific incidences of terrorism that have occurred throughout the world, and I think that Bali is a very good example of that.

I think we in this place have a duty to provide a small gesture to them and their surviving families, and I think a small amount of compensation is that appropriate gesture to help people get back on their feet. That is why we in the coalition have committed to support Australians who are victims of terrorist attacks overseas. A \$75,000 payment brings them into line with the level of assistance provided to domestic victims of violent crime. We know that no amount of money can ever fully compensate for what these people have endured, but we hope that this gesture allows those in need to find some solace as they cope with the very significant changes in their lives that they never expected, as they need to continue to rebuild their lives.

It is said that every cloud has a silver lining, and it often takes the worst in human nature to bring out the best in human behaviour. This was true in the case of the Bali bombings and those that responded. From the first emergency workers on the scene to the doctors who treated the many burns victims to the psychologists and counsellors who continue to this day to work with those affected, we saw the best in the Australian spirit and in the human spirit on show. The first people to arrive at the Sari Club risked their very lives to bring the injured and wounded to safety. Within 26 hours, the first patients arrived at the Royal Darwin Hospital. Sixty-one patients arrived at Darwin, and 48 were then taken throughout Australia to receive specialised services. We honour and

thank those that worked so hard to save the lives of others—not just the Australians that responded but the Indonesians that responded as well. They came together in the spirit of solidarity.

We remember those that lost their lives, and we forever stay vigilant to rid the world of violent extremism. Together Australia stands with Indonesia against violent extremism, and we hope never to have to stand in this place and move such a condolence motion as this again.