



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
CONDOLENCES
Ukraine Air Disaster
SPEECH

Tuesday, 26 August 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Abetz, Sen Eric

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Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (15:35): by leave—I move:

That the Senate records its deep regret at the deaths on 18 July 2014 AEST of 298 passengers and crew on Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, and tenders its profound sympathy to their families in their bereavement.

On behalf of the government, I offer sincere condolences to all the affected families and communities, both here in Australia and overseas. Today this parliament expresses its sympathy to its own and the world community who suffered such senseless loss at the hands of criminals. When a civilian airliner is shot down out of the sky on a routine commercial route with a loss of 298 innocent lives, our repulsion of this act of naked barbarism is absolute. There is, and there was, no justification for this act. The initial denials and the blame transfer that was mounted immediately after that dastardly event on 18 July brought no credit whatsoever to those involved and cruelly exacerbated the pain and anguish suffered by those bereaved. As a nation, we have especially grieved for those 38 people on that aircraft who called Australia home. Whether Australian citizens or residents or students studying here, their lives were extinguished in this act of senseless terrorist violence.

We have also joined with the Dutch and Malaysian communities and the other affected international communities to share in their sense of loss. While today we express our sympathies, let us not mince words—this airliner was not a legitimate target in any sense. Nor were any of those on board—they were innocent people travelling for work, for business, as holidaymakers or as members of the crew. They were entitled to safe passage across this airspace—safe passage that was outrageously and savagely violated. Anyone tempted to even fleetingly think otherwise about the unspeakable nature of this act needs only to look at the anguish on the faces of those left in its wake.

Each of those people whose lives were prematurely ended that day is equally valued. We all felt the pain of those who lost loved ones. We were especially inspired, however, by the courage and strength shown in the aftermath by Rin and Anthony Maslin from Perth, whose three beautiful children died together with their grandfather as they came home from a happy holiday abroad. And to see members of the grieving families come forward with our nation's leaders to add a sprig of wattle to the wonderful wreath of our national flower at the national memorial service at St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne was unforgettable. All of these families showed in their terrible loss a strength of character and a determination in allowing us as a nation to share in their private grief.

On behalf of the Australian people, I extend my deep gratitude to the members of the Australian Defence Force, the Australian Federal Police, seconded state police and forensic officers, the officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and other Commonwealth government agencies, and the Prime Minister's special envoy, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, for the dedicated efforts to secure the site and to work with our international partners, including especially the government of the Netherlands, to locate the remains of those on board and repatriate them.

The shooting down of this aircraft was an act of unspeakable evil—let us make no bones about that—but, as we think of those on board that plane, let us not allow the manner of their deaths to overshadow their lives. The achievements of the 298 passengers and crew on Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 were undoubtedly many, their potential unfathomable, their future robbed from them and from us, especially the young.

Today the Senate pauses to reflect on the contribution they each made to our nation and our world, and on the lives they lived, and to give thanks for them. We will seek justice for the deceased, but today we pause to reflect and give thanks for their lives and to express solidarity with the bereaved. We assure them of our thoughts and prayers as they face the future, and we will be with them as they face that future.