

Supporting Australian Victims of Overseas Terrorism

IN 2005 I was on holiday in Bali with my family at the time of the second bombing.

Along with a Newcastle doctor, Adam Frost, I spent a day at Sanglah Hospital trying to ensure Australian victims were evacuated. Since then, I've stayed in close touch with one of them, Paul Anicich, a former senior lawyer whose life has been permanently impacted by his injuries.

I vowed to Paul, and to the other Newcastle victims, that I would do what I could to ensure the victims of terrorism would get at least the same assistance as the victims of crime here in Australia. After all, they were not randomly targeted - they were targeted because they were Australian.

The best way to mark the 10th anniversary of the first Bali bombing - our September 11 - would be to offer this modicum of justice to the Australian next of kin and the Australian victims of terrorist acts overseas.

Unfortunately, the killing and maiming of innocent people has become the cowardly weapon of choice for terrorists. Australians holidaying or working in New York, Bali, Jakarta, London and in Mumbai have all found themselves facing the most terrible carnage.

In every instance, an inconsequential choice about where to have dinner or what bus or train to catch meant the difference between life and death.

The one feature in common is that all were targeted because of who they were, citizens of a free country where people can choose how to live and what faith to follow.

In that sense, all the terrorist attacks which Australians have suffered were not attacks on some of us. They were attacks on all of us.

For the bereaved, the attacks marked the start of much emptiness. For those injured, they marked the beginning of a life of physical and mental pain.

As a nation, we recognise the physical and emotional impacts of crime on victims, with the states and territories providing payments of up to \$80,000 for victims of crimes committed in Australia.

However, for Australian victims of terror overseas, there is no such assistance to help victims or their families back on their feet.

In 2009, before I was Leader of the Opposition, I introduced into parliament legislation that would allow Australian victims of terrorism to receive payments similar to those received by domestic victims of crime under various state victims of crime schemes.

My legislation envisaged a modest payment of \$75,000 to the Australian victims or next of kin of terrorist actions backdated to September 10, 2001, because I believed that the

Australian victims in New York, Bali, Jakarta, London, and Mumbai all deserved similar support.

Earlier this year the government adopted part of my bill and passed legislation that would provide compensation to the victims of any future terrorist actions, but it refused to provide any payments to the actual victims of terror from September 11 onwards. The government then voted down an amendment that would have provided the payment to the victims of past terrorist actions.

As we approach the 10th anniversary of first Bali bombing, I hope the Prime Minister will reconsider the government's position and make a retrospective declaration that will help the victims of these terrorist crimes. I have written to the Prime Minister asking for this declaration and offered the bipartisan support of the Coalition to make it happen.

The cost of the declaration, compared to many of the government's other spending announcements of recent weeks, would be modest: In the order of \$30 million. Knowing some of the families impacted by the 2005 Bali bombing and having met others who survived the 2002 Bali bombing, I know this commitment would make an important difference in the lives of the hundreds of Australians impacted by overseas terror.

If the government can find \$70 million to advertise its carbon tax, it can surely find \$30 million for the Australian victims of terrorism. The government should now reverse its decision to accept the form but not the substance of my Private Member's Bill and make a retrospective declaration now.

Compensation can never bring a victim back, or ease the pain of an injury that has never completely gone, but it can be a powerful statement to the Australian victims of terror that, as a nation, we continue to stand with them.

That is the best thing we can do as Australia prepares to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the 2002 Bali bombing.

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