



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**ASSISTING THE VICTIMS OF
OVERSEAS TERRORISM BILL 2010**

First Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 21 February 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Abbott, Tony, MP

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Question No.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (10.50 am)—I present the Assisting the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Bill 2010. This bill is an important acknowledgement of the debt that this country owes to people who have been injured or killed in the course of terrorist incidents overseas. We should never forget the high price that Australia has paid due to the efforts and depredations of Islamist terrorists. Since September 11 in 2001, some 300 Australians have been killed or injured in terrorist incidents overseas. We lost Australians in the World Trade Centre. We lost Australians, too many Australians, in Bali—not once but twice. We lost Australians in London and we lost Australians in Jakarta. Some 300 Australians have been killed or injured because they were Australians.

Let us never forget that those bombs went off because the perpetrators of those outrages believe that our way of life is a satanic excrescence—that is what they believe. People who died or were injured in those terrorist incidents were targeted precisely because of the way of life, the values and the civilisation of which they were a part. Australians have been targeted precisely because they are Australians. Australia has been targeted precisely because we are a part of the Western civilisation and the value system which those terrorists hate. It is very important to remember that Australians overseas were killed or injured precisely because they were Australians.

After each terrorist incident I just mentioned the Australian government was there to help. Centrelink assistance was rendered and medical expenses were paid. I want to congratulate governments of both persuasions for the efforts they made to help Australians and to continue to help Australians who were injured and the families of those who were killed in terrorist incidents overseas. But we have to acknowledge that these people suffered for their country in a way not entirely different from the sufferings that our soldiers have faced in the struggle against terrorism. They were not random victims; they were victims because of the way of life in this country and they were chosen as targets because of the way of life of the civilisation in which they participate.

We should not underestimate the ongoing suffering of those people. The member for Paterson and I have some familiarity with the Newcastle victims of the second Bali bombing. Many of them have had to give

up their jobs and all of them will suffer permanently because of what they endured at the hands of Islamist terrorism. We cannot think that our duty to them as a nation ends simply because they were given Centrelink assistance to come back to this country and simply because their relatives were given Centrelink assistance to do what they could to help. We cannot think that our duty to them has ended just because their medical expenses were paid for the immediate injuries they suffered. There is a lifetime of pain for those people, physical and psychological, and it needs to be acknowledged, recognised and in some way made up for by the wider Australian community. I want to particularly thank Paul Anicich, one of the Newcastle victims of the second Bali bombing and a former senior partner in the Sparke Helmore law firm, for his continuing campaign on behalf of all the Australian victims of overseas terrorism.

My bill proposes that the national government establish a scheme to compensate the Australian victims of overseas terrorist acts that is analogous with the victims of crimes schemes that have long operated in the Australian states and territories. If an Australian is a victim of a criminal act in this country, he or she will invariably receive some compensation, some monetary benefit, from the state and territory governments. It is not lavish; it is not going to enable people to live in luxury for the rest of their lives—far from it. Nevertheless, it is an important acknowledgement by our community of the unjustified and the completely abhorrent pain and suffering that the victim of crime has suffered. So I am proposing the establishment of a federal scheme analogous to the state schemes purely for Australian victims of overseas terrorist acts. This is a modest, responsible but necessary measure on behalf of those people by the national parliament.

This is not the first time I have introduced this bill into the parliament. I first introduced this bill into the parliament in late 2009, when circumstances were quite different. The former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, in answer to questions from the member for Paterson, indicated that the government was taking this issue seriously, but I regret to say that no action had been taken by the government at the time of the last election. Since the election, I and the member for Paterson have indicated that we have in no way dropped our concern

for the victims of international terrorism, hence the reintroduction of this bill.

I recently received a letter from the Attorney-General, and I thank the Attorney for his letter. I acknowledge the Attorney's sincere concern for the Australian victims of overseas terrorism, but it is not enough to be just concerned. We need some tangible acknowledgement of the predicament which our fellow Australians find themselves in, and that is what my bill proposes to do.

I accept there are some issues with oppositions proposing measures of this kind. The government in a different context has talked about the constitutional questions surrounding opposition members introducing bills which involve expenditure. In consultation with the clerks, I have been very careful to ensure that those rules are not in any way infringed by this bill. I would welcome this bill being taken over by the government. If the government has another more efficacious way of helping the Australian victims of terrorist incidents overseas, I would be grateful to hear what it is.

One thing I will not do is give up the campaign that I and the member for Paterson have been engaged in since 2005 to ensure that we do the right thing by our fellow Australians who were hurt permanently, simply because they were Australians, at the hands of people who hate our way of life. We must stand by our fellow Australians in trouble. They were targeted because they were Australian. They deserve this modest measure of recognition, help and acknowledgement. I commend this bill to the House.

Bill read a first time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—In accordance with standing order 41(c), the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.