



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Syria

SPEECH

Monday, 10 February 2020

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 10 February 2020 Page 102 Questioner Speaker Zappia, Tony, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (17:16): I join others in speaking in support of this motion moved by the member for Adelaide. There are an estimated 25 million to 30 million Kurdish people in the world. Most still live in the Middle East, in territories controlled by Iraq, Iran, Syria, Armenia and Turkey. These are 25 million to 30 million people who do not have an official homeland. They don't have a country to call their own, although an autonomous Kurdish region was established in 1991 with support from the USA, the UK and France.

The Iraqi constitution acknowledges Kurdish autonomy, yet for decades the Kurdish people have been pushed around, persecuted, attacked and killed; poison gas has been used against them, as have chemical weapons—and so, many of them have had to seek refuge in other countries. Those countries include Australia, where, I understand, today around 10,000 Kurdish people are successfully settled.

Yet, in the midst of being attacked on all sides, they always stood firm in the face of the rising threat from ISIS and Daesh. Kurdish people supported anti-ISIS forces, stood their ground and held back ISIS advancements. Now that ISIS has been contained, or repelled, the forces whom the Kurdish people fought alongside and supported have abandoned them. The likelihood of a Kurdish country is slipping away, and Kurdish people are once again being attacked. That comes after about three million of them voted not long ago in favour of independence in Iraq—that is, some 92 per cent of those who could vote voted that they wanted independence. For years, it seemed that they were on the road to independence, but, once again, that appears now to be slipping away from them.

Australian Kurdish people living here in Australia have family, friends and relatives back in their homelands. They fear for their wellbeing and they fear for their safety, and that is totally understandable to each and every one of us. I have spoken to several families in my own electorate who have family members back in their homelands. I empathise with them and I totally understand the fears and concerns that they have for the safety of family members and of friends. Their only option whilst here in Australia is to call on the Australian government for assistance, for help, and that is something that they have been doing and continue to do.

Today, in both President Joko Widodo's address and our own Prime Minister's address, we heard of a sharing of values by our two countries—values which talked about democracy, freedom, good neighbours, justice, opportunity and so on. These are all things that we as a nation stand for and, I believe, have fought to uphold over the years. Australia should now be upholding those same values for the Kurdish people, wherever they are, and, in particular, for those in their homelands. It's all about trying to protect their human rights—again, something that this country has a very proud record of doing.

These people should not be ignored simply because they don't have a country of their own and, therefore, diplomatic relationships with Kurdish people are not quite the same as diplomatic relationships with a country that has foreign affairs officers and the like. They are people who need support, and we should be respecting their needs here and now, particularly given their history of working alongside Australia in other areas of conflict. We've heard from all of the other speakers today about some of those areas of conflict where the Kurdish people have fought alongside Australians.

The Kurdish Lobby Australia has been trying to raise this issue now for some years. I'm aware of their efforts, and I'm also aware of their concerns about what is happening back home. In October, they issued a statement. It's a statement which calls for six specific actions that the Australian government could and should be taking. Time does not allow me to go through all of those actions today, but I'm sure that the Australian government and foreign affairs department of our country would be very familiar with the Kurdish statement that was put out in October. I call on the government to have a look at that statement, to look at what the Kurdish people are asking the Australian government to do and, where possible, to give them the support that they are calling for.

Debate adjourned.