

A football club in Robertson—and I'm a strong supporter of women's sport and women's participation in sport, as we all are—was given two grants. One of these was \$488,000 for women's change rooms and upgrades. It scored 55—below Sport Australia's funding threshold of 74 out of 100. Now we learn of another slush fund. This government secretly spent \$150 million, supposedly for female change rooms, but only \$20 million was spent on women's sporting facilities. The other \$120 million was splashed on swimming pools, almost entirely in coalition-held marginal seats. Our sporting community deserves better.

### **Horsham Regional Livestock Exchange**

**Dr WEBSTER** (Mallee) (16:43): Sale days at livestock exchanges are fabulous occasions for regional farming communities. They aren't just opportunities to buy and sell stock, they are a chance for people to come together, to see old friends, to build new relationships and to break down the isolation some farmers experience. That's why I was proud to turn the first sod for the Horsham Regional Livestock Exchange project to modernise their facilities and construct a massive roof over the entire saleyard. The new roof will cover over 23,000 square metres, which equates to 88 tennis courts or 18 Olympic-size swimming pools. This upgrade will provide a safe and comfortable environment for buyers and sellers and will improve conditions for the animals. The exchange is also installing 100 kilowatts of solar power and a rainwater storage system, which will ensure the ongoing sustainability of the exchange.

Horsham Rural City Council received \$1.5 million via the Building Better Regions Fund to reach this project's total cost of \$3.7 million. This kind of project is exactly what the government had in mind when the Building Better Regions Fund was established. We know that these upgrades will create jobs, drive economic growth and increase output for the region. Throughout its 20-year history, the Horsham Regional Livestock Exchange has seen 10 million sheep and lambs pass through its gates. *(Time expired)*

### **Parliament**

**Ms MURPHY** (Dunkley) (16:44): This parliament is the cauldron of Australia's democratic national conversation, and those of us privileged to be elected to sit here are its custodians. I'm proud to be a parliamentarian, and I'm proud to represent the people of Dunkley. But, like the people in my community, I am deeply concerned about the loss of trust in our democratic processes and governments. Less than half of all Australians are satisfied with the way democracy works. Trust in government has had a 20-year slide from 48 per cent to 26 per cent.

I was elected on a promise to be a parliamentarian that works to address this decline in trust, and I intend to keep that promise. We must have better behaviour and processes for accountability in the parliament, starting with reforming question time. We must have better integrity in the political system, starting with a federal ICAC and a return to upholding the principles of the Westminster system of responsibility. I also believe that all elected parliamentarians should have to undertake ethics training, sign up to a parliamentary code of conduct and engage in ongoing education and training.

We must strengthen our democracy. We need to start with an Indigenous voice to parliament, respecting the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Four-year terms is also an important reform. And, of course, we must look to becoming an Australian republic, where our citizens can look to an Australian as our head of state. These aren't the only things we need to do, but I'm putting them forward as practical examples of how we can bridge the divide. *(Time expired)*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Rob Mitchell)**: In accordance with standing order 143, the time for members' statements has concluded.

### **PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

#### **Syria**

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Adelaide) (16:46): I move:

That the House:

- (1) notes with great concern:
  - (a) Turkey's military operation targeting Kurds in northern Syria;
  - (b) Turkey's actions which are causing further destabilisation in the region, worsening the humanitarian disaster in Syria, and risk undermining progress against ISIS;
  - (c) evidence that innocent civilians are being killed and injured by Turkey's military operations and forces associated with Turkey in Syria;
  - (d) reports of possible war crimes being committed by forces associated with Turkey; and

(e) reports of Turkish intentions to resettle refugees from Turkey into northern Syria outside of UN-sponsored mechanisms;

(2) recognises that the Kurdish forces in Syria have:

- (a) been instrumental in fighting Daesh as an ally of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh/ISIS; and
- (b) lost over 10,000 fighters in the fight against Daesh in Syria; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) urge Turkey to cease its unilateral military operations in Syria; and
- (b) support international efforts to hold Turkey to account for its actions.

It was of great concern late last year when we saw the fallout in October 2019 from the US forces moving out of Syria. There have been deep concerns about the fallout from back then, October 2019, around the Turkish military operation which targeted Kurds in northern Syria following the decision, as I said, by the Trump administration to withdraw US forces from the area. I suppose what we can say is that most governments around the world have called on Turkey to permanently cease unilateral action which is having devastating consequences in the region.

We know that Turkey's operation risks further destabilising the region and undermining further progress against terrorism—Daesh, ISIS and those forces that had total control of that area. We know that the Kurds were our allies in this war against the forces of evil—Daesh, ISIS et cetera—and fought shoulder to shoulder with Western forces to ensure that that part of the area, once again, became safe. Unfortunately, though, for those Kurds, I feel that we have let them down in the Western world.

The most important priorities right now are halting that fighting, the protection of the civilian population and the unrestricted access of humanitarian actions to the population of that region. These are important factors that should be taken into account, and I think our government should call on all parties to investigate reports that we have heard of, and which are very concerning, of human rights violations in the region, including violations of international humanitarian law.

We know that more than 30,000 civilian Kurds and other minorities in the region have been internally displaced as a direct result of the Turkish aggression in that area. I note with concern that the Turkish military actions have included the indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, which has been raised in international circles—in the UN and many other places. It's of great concern that there have been reports that the Turkish-backed militias in that area are committing crimes against humanity, including but not limited to killing many, many Kurdish civilians, and we want to make sure that the resurgence of Islamic State does not take place again—that this is not the right way of going about it.

We also need to recognise what vital allies the Kurds were to the West and the role they played in securing the ousting of ISIS and others. The Kurdish forces played a vital role in the defeat and capture of Islamic State terrorists. The Turkish military action in north-eastern Syria has jeopardised that hard-fought and very fragile victory over Islamic State, and there are reports that 12,000 captured Islamic State terrorists and supporters have been freed as a direct consequence of this Turkish invasion.

We have heard Erdogan, the leader of Turkey, say the reasons why this action was taking place. I have to say it brought back memories of 1974, when the exact same excuse was used to invade northern Cyprus, where 40,000 troops still are today, having not left since 1974. This action and the excuses that are being used are exactly the same as in 1974, so this should be of great concern to the leaders of the world. We want stability in that region. We want to ensure that there is peace in that region. But I cannot see it, with the meddling of Turkey in places like the eastern Aegean, Libya and, of course, this horrific event which is taking place at the moment.

We have to speak out. I urge the Australian government to talk to Turkey and to ask them to cease their unilateral military operations in Syria. I urge us to support international efforts to hold Turkey to account for its actions in this region. We want a stable world. We want a world with peace. But we know that, at the current point of time, this is not happening, with people meddling in politics in that entire region. We want to make sure that the Kurdish people are safe and we need to support them as the good Western allies that they were.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Rob Mitchell):** Is the motion seconded?

**Dr Mulino:** I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

**Dr GILLESPIE (Lyne) (16:52):** Never in my history have I been so shocked by the blatant aggression and transgression of borders by a country I had grown to know and love. I spent several weeks in Turkey when I was a young man working in the United Kingdom, on the NHS. It's a rich, vibrant culture. I was so shocked when I saw Turkish forces invade another country's territory. Everyone knows the recent horrors of the Middle East. Now there is the spectre of ISIS being let loose again on that area and the cradle of civilisation being torn asunder by

conflict, with hundreds of thousands, millions, of people displaced, many murdered, and the evil Daesh/ISIS cult holding sway.

Who stood up to them? The Kurds. The Kurds were one of the most feared opponents of ISIS. They allied with the West and they freed that part of the world from ISIS. If we don't speak up loudly against Turkey doing what they've done, we potentially will be accused, as history goes by, of appeasement. We know what happens when you appease nations who do bad things: they go a little bit further. It is with great sorrow that I'm standing here saying this, but I do call on Australia to speak up—I think we have already; I'll have to check with DFAT. But, in principle, we shouldn't let this lie.

The issue is that borders are where countries are defined. If you disrespect borders and you allow aggression in a pre-emptive sense, which is their whole rationale, then the whole international order breaks down. It is really critical that we look after the Kurds. The Kurds have now allied with the Syrians, who were at one stage their enemies. It is such a complex dynamic in the Middle East. But the principle that applies around the whole world is that borders must be respected. The second principle is: we shouldn't appease things.

I am sure our government has already spoken against what has happened, but this motion brings up a very important issue: we must vociferously speak to Turkey, not just once but continually, and make sure they get the message. Most Australians whom I talk to think the Kurds have got a very raw deal. They got rid of people who were truly evil and now they've got another invasion in their area. I support the concept and the motion that the member has raised. As I said, if we don't follow the principles of not allowing appeasement and respecting borders there will be just continual conflict.

**Mr GOSLING (Solomon) (16:55):** I rise to speak about a topic and a country which may, at present, seem remote from our national priorities. I speak of the ongoing Syrian war. The motion is of great importance, but I'd like to first cast our minds back to the bigger picture and the history of how we got here before getting to the motion itself. The context is incredibly important when discussing the decades old and centuries old geopolitical and other rivalries in the Middle East. There was a time, honourable members right recall, when the Arab Spring swept across North Africa and the Middle East. A positive mood dominated the views of Western foreign policymakers and thinkers. The Tunisian revolution was seen by a great many as ground zero of a tsunami of democratisation across the Middle East. Those protests soon spread to Oman, Yemen, Egypt, Syria and Morocco. We all remember the shock after Mubarak resigned in Egypt and Yemen's president fell. We recall the historic fall of Tripoli to the rebels and Gaddafi's regime crumbling.

Tragically, this was only the beginning of the events and we are still living with the consequences each and every day. We remember terribly well that history didn't end in 2011. We remember the protesters shot, tortured and killed in Damascus. We remember the Coptic Christians attacked with tanks in Egypt. We remember the brave, peaceful protesters across the whole region at that time who took such great risks for ideals that all of us in in this room would share at enormous risk to their own safety, their own health and often their own lives. We remember, too, that the Gillard Labor government joined in offering international support to the Libyan transitional government, but, despite an international coalition's military and political efforts, the country's civil war has raged on and off for nearly 10 years. As of today, Libya is still torn apart by infighting between rival warring factions, backed militarily by competing great powers. The scale of human tragedy in Yemen is almost beyond belief, as is the fact that some democratic governments, like ours, have sold arms for use in Yemen in contravention of international norms.

But one of the most bitter and costly civil wars to have devoured the region since the heady days of the Arab Spring is, of course, in Syria. Syria matters strategically, but let's just look at the human element. The basic fact before us is that the Kurds have been reliable, outstanding and fearsome allies of coalition forces since the 1990s. They have been allies not only to the US but also to Australia. In 1991, following widespread violence in Iraq, 75 ADF personnel were deployed to Kurdistan in northern Iraq under Operation Habitat. This was part of an international operation to defend four million Kurds fleeing their homes in the Gulf War and to provide humanitarian aid. The ADF's medical teams treated over 3,000 people for a range of diseases and illnesses. While the information is necessarily classified for now, we can reasonably expect that our brave pilots and men and women in uniform in Operation Opera in the Middle East often relied either directly or indirectly on the ground support—the reconnaissance and intelligence support—of their Kurdish mates on the ground. This is one of the reasons I am particularly concerned.

This is a very important motion: it signals that we are deeply concerned about the fallout from the October 2019 Turkish military operation, which followed the decision by the Trump administration to withdraw US forces from the area. It is an operation which targeted the Kurds, which risks destabilising the region and which risks further progress against Daesh. This motion also tells the Kurds, who are both US allies and our allies, that we don't forget or abandon our longstanding partnership and friendship. There are also longer-term risks to Australia's

national interest from this unfortunate series of events, which we should reflect on. One risk is the effect on the morale and trust of other local allies in the Western and ADF soldiers deployed in the Middle East region. Another is the potential knock-on effect across the Indo-Pacific region.

**Mr LEESER** (Berowra) (17:00): I rise to speak on this motion on Syria. The Kurdish people know all too well what is meant by the phrase 'in the firing line'. For decades, they have lived across the borders of a very tense and dangerous part of the world with no homeland of their own. They've been caught in the crossfire of other people's conflicts, but they've also been an easy target of hostility themselves. Despite being the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East, numbering about 35 million, the Kurds have no nation-state and have straddled the borders of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Iran and Armenia for many years. After World War I, the Treaty of Sevres made provision for a Kurdish state, but, when the boundaries of Turkey were created in 1923 at the Treaty of Lausanne, no Kurdish state was created. The Kurds have instead been a minority group spread across multiple countries. The interests of Kurds have frequently been sacrificed for the desires of governments that don't have them as a priority. Throughout the 1980s, Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq systemically targeted the Kurdish people. The Anfal campaign included bombings, firing squads, the raping of women, and chemical warfare against the Kurds. We don't know exactly how many people were killed during the years of Anfal, but the numbers are estimated to have been as high as 182,000, including women and children. Thousands of schools, hospitals and mosques were destroyed, and about 90 per cent of Kurdish villages in the region were wiped out.

From the earliest days of the Islamic State, Kurds have been caught in the midst of violence. In 2013, ISIS attacked Kurdish areas of northern Syria. It wasn't long before Kurdish fighters were at the forefront of the international coalition's fight against ISIS. The Kurds have done more than their fair share of fighting and dying for a cause we also believe in. In the fight against ISIS, Kurdish fighters, under the name of the Syrian Democratic Forces, have been steadfast allies. They have been central to the fight, and Australia will never forget their courage and sacrifice.

Their service continues as the Kurdish forces continue to assist the international community by providing security and support for internally displaced persons camps. The Kurds are continuing to keep the international community safe. Thousands of ISIS fighters are now under Kurdish guard. While the territorial defeat of ISIS brought desperately needed peace to Syria and its neighbours, that stability was interrupted by Turkish military operations crossing the border into the Kurdish controlled area of northern Syria late last year. The Turkish invasion of Syria has reignited conflict, caused civilian deaths and displaced tens of thousands of people. Thousands of Kurds are living as internally displaced people in the midst of a cold winter. They continue to experience untold levels of suffering, as civilians are raped and killed and people are displaced. I also want to acknowledge that 15 February will mark 21 years of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan being held in a Turkish jail.

Turkey's actions will have significant consequences for the security of the region and the ability of the international coalition to ensure ISIS doesn't regain a foothold. Turkey has legitimate domestic security concerns, but taking military action across borders will not solve those concerns. Australians are deeply troubled by these events. Turkey's actions will increase the displacement of people, compromise the ability of international agencies to provide humanitarian support, and cause more unnecessary suffering. As our foreign minister and Prime Minister have indicated, Turkey alone is responsible for the decisions it's made conducting this incursion. Turkey alone is accountable for the actions of its military forces and the militias it's employing. Turkey alone is responsible for the humanitarian suffering it's causing and its military operations. And Turkey is fully accountable for the detention, custody and escapes of ISIS fighters. If Turkey embarks on a program of changing the demography of these occupied Syrian territories through mass relocations of ethnic groups, or worse, Turkey will be fully accountable for that as well.

Australia calls on all parties to exercise restraint and prioritise stability at this time. When the incursions first occurred last year, I said in the House that Australia has a good and perhaps unique relationship with a Western secular Muslim democratic Turkey, formed on the principles of Kemal Ataturk, whom so many Turks and Australians admire for his bravery at Gallipoli and his conception of modern Turkey. I repeat that sentiment again today. Turkey is a nation with a proud and strong history to draw from. President Erdogan and his regime should remember that legacy and ensure his nation does not again choose to be on the wrong side of history.

I urge all parties in the region to act with restraint, to prioritise stability and humanitarian care and to prevent the needless re-escalation of conflict. Australia's priorities are to stop ISIS resurging and focus on avoiding a humanitarian crisis. It's also important that the Kurds aren't forgotten again by the international community. I want to finish by thanking the Kurdish people for their extraordinary service and recognise the role of many of the leaders of the Kurdish Australian community and the wonderful role they play in this nation. We should do all we can to protect the Kurdish people, to whom we are indebted.

**Mr CHAMPION** (Spence) (17:06): It's a great privilege to speak on this very important motion brought by the member for Adelaide, who I know is very passionate about, if you like, voicing the interests and concerns of his local constituents of Kurdish background, as am I, and the member for Makin. Many of those people have come to our state fleeing the persecution that speakers in this place have spoken about so eloquently.

Local Kurdish people are great Australians. They are often business people. They're community leaders. They're very friendly. We're happy to have them. But we wish that the Kurdish people could live in peace, preferably with some government of their own, whether that be some autonomous region or a nation of their own. There was a time in this parliament when you could not go a day without talking about ISIS in some way. That has now largely vanished from our national consciousness with the defeat of the regime. But we have to recognise that the ISIS regime was not defeated by ground troops from Western nations but, rather, local militia fighters like the Kurds. They are the people who defeated the extremist regime that occupied vast parts of Iraq and Syria. Their bravery should have been respected and celebrated.

Instead, what we have seen is the most dangerous of actions—and we now see this pretty regularly—unilateral actions by leaders, seemingly with a very narrow regard to nation interest. We saw it in the first instance with President Trump's withdrawal of US troops from this region. The flipside of that withdrawal was the Turkish intervention. This intervention was first flagged at the United Nations in leaders week, with President Erdogan proposing a 'safe zone' for refugees in Syria. We now know that was simply another way of masking a military intervention in this part of the world to basically push the Kurds from this region and perhaps replace them with other people. The United Nations is not involved and international observers are not involved and the whole thing is shrouded in the fog of war. We now that when that happens, tragically, extrajudicial killings occur, civilians are targeted and people are subject to ethnic cleansing. That is what happens in these circumstances.

What we should call upon the Turkish government to do is restrain itself. The previous speaker very eloquently mapped out the fact that this will be solely their responsibility if it goes wrong. What we do need is for this government to restrain itself, for the use of armed forces to be halted, for international observers to be allowed in, for the United Nations to play a role in the resettlement of any refugees and for international law to be paramount. Sadly, what we see more and more in the world is unilateral actions by countries, and these actions will lead to tragic consequences, not just for the people who are on end of the gun, if you like, but also for the nations committing these acts themselves. Turkey has a long history of responsible government, of being a responsible international citizen, and we can only hope that that tradition prevails against what have been very serious and alarming actions by the current Turkish government.

**Mr TIM WILSON** (Goldstein) (17:11): An injustice somewhere is an injustice everywhere. That fundamental principle guides so many of the discussions that we believe in our common humanity about the ideals that we share for ourselves, but also the safety and the security for so many other people across this world. The reality is that that is not being fully realised for the Kurds as a result of the situation in Syria, along the border with Turkey, because, as many speakers in this debate have already raised, the Kurds have no homeland. It's a contest that dates back for a very long period of time and is compounded by significant military events that have occurred in the past. The member for Berowra rightly recalled the challenges faced by the Kurds and the attacks they received under the regime of Saddam Hussein and Iraq—a deliberate attempt to inflict pain, suffering and murder on the Kurds, against a group of people who are our country's natural allies.

The tragedy of the Kurds isn't one that sits in isolation; it sits across a backdrop of many equivalent ethno-religious targeted attacks on minorities in that part of the world, and, drawing on my own family's experience, including targeted against the Armenians in the past. One of the things that we learn at every point where there are forms of genocide or deliberate or malicious attacks or murder based on ethno-religious identity, we say, 'Never again,' yet, they keep going. I say that particularly because of the disturbing situation and the decision of the United States to withdraw. Of course, they are not the ones who are responsible for this attack, but we cannot ignore the contribution of their withdrawal to the situation that Turkey has taken advantage of. The Morrison government and Australia rightly make it clear the Syrian Democratic Forces have been steadfast and reliable partners for our country and, of course, the international coalition, against the fight of our common enemy, Islamic State. That is the basis on which, among many others, we should be supporting them and their purpose and their right to live freely from persecution without violence. The Syrian Democratic Forces have suffered significant casualties during their counterterrorism operations, and Australia has greatly acknowledged and will continue to acknowledge their courage and their sacrifices against Islamic State.

As the member for Berowra rightly outlined, Turkey has legitimate security concerns, but it's not the basis on which to cross borders; it is to confront the challenges that they face within their territory. Instead, by crossing over, it has created issues of stability, safety and security—and, ultimately, Turkey is responsible for the conduct in which they have engaged. By crossing the border into Syria, the Turkish military forces and Turkish-supported

militia forces have operated under Turkish government orders and committed terrible crimes. This incursion is having a significant humanitarian impact and the full brunt of it is being borne by the Kurds. It is causing additional civilian suffering and massive population displacement and, of course, it is inhibiting the capacity of many humanitarian organisations to provide their support to those who need it. We don't know the full consequence of the Turkish incursion so far, but they own every part of their incursion—and its humanitarian impact, and as a nation we should never turn a blind eye to that.

Our best interests, like that of all other countries, are in having safety, stability and security for all peoples. Culture and traditions inform the boundaries that nations take, and our interests are in being allied to those who are allied to us. And that is what the Kurds have done. So, in their time of suffering and need, it's incumbent on us to stand up and speak out with one voice, in their favour, against the behaviour that has led to their suffering. I know that many members of the Kurdish community in Australia suffer too because they do not know the impact it has had on their fellow countrymen and countrywomen and their nation. In that, we can only offer our steadfast support.

**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.