



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Prime Minister

SPEECH

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SPEECH

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Speaker Fawcett, Sen David	Question No.

Senator FAWCETT (South Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (16:08): It is an interesting time to be talking about leadership. If you want to look at successful leadership then look at the leadership shown by this government around issues such as border protection. Let us look at the key things around border protection, from a humanitarian perspective, under the previous government: deaths at sea and children in detention. When the Howard government left office there were no children in detention. When the Rudd and Gillard governments came to office and implemented their policies we saw an almost open-door approach that has resulted in over 1,000 people dying. The poor quality of leadership—the lack of leadership—led to people dying and to 1,900 children in detention in July 2013. Do not forget that figure: over 1,900 children in detention, because of a lack of leadership from those on the opposite side.

Under this government we have seen—using the same Defence Force, the same departments and the same coast watch—determined and consistent leadership that has provided the kind of policy direction, consistency and support to those men and women who are serving on Operation Sovereign Borders to regain control of our borders. It has not been easy, but it has been done, and it has been done safely. And, most importantly, it has been done effectively. Because the same people were in the departments and the same equipment was available, the difference has been leadership. Commitment as well as a consistency and a certainty of purpose has driven that outcome. And that outcome means not only that there have been cost savings as a result of shutting down detention centres and not having to fly people on charter flights. We also heard the Assistant Minister for Immigration today talk about the fact that, unlike the \$12 billion cost blow-out under the Labor Party, there have been savings in the hundreds of millions of dollars as we have been closing centres and not having to send flights.

But, importantly, the fact that we have been able to close down those detention centres and regain control of our borders has meant that we have had the capacity to show leadership on a world stage as the crisis in Syria has unfolded. People in this Senate will know that I spoke a couple of weeks ago about the Intelligence and Security Committee delegation I was part of, to the US, the UK and France, where we heard brief after brief about the dangers of the situation developing there with the millions of displaced people, both internally and externally, in refugee camps—about the very real humanitarian threat to those people as well as the issue of people increasingly starting to move in an uncontrolled manner into Europe. As that has accelerated in the past couple of weeks, on the world stage what we have seen from this government is true leadership. Not only is it about replacing our existing refugee intake but an additional 12,000 places have been made available by this government. That is leadership. If you compare that figure with that of other nations, it is more than the US's. The UK is taking a slightly numerically greater number, but that is over a number of years. If you look at the funding that is being applied, Australia is not only one of the most generous nations in actual dollar terms but, most importantly, unlike some countries that have pledged large amounts but have then not actually paid the money, Australia has made sensible and targeted commitments and followed through. That leadership is making a difference for the people in those camps—in Jordan, in Turkey—and for the people who are living in Lebanon, including those who are not necessarily in camps.

We are also seeing leadership in that it is not just a knee-jerk reaction, saying 'Come one, come all.' It is about looking at the fact that there are people involved in a conflict that is based on sectarian issues. There is a large Sunni population and a Shiah population who have been in conflict with each other for many years, and sometimes it flares to the surface. But look at the people who have been consistently oppressed. If you look at the numbers of the Jewish population, the Christian population and the Druze population in that part of the world, they have decreased dramatically over the last decade. Even if one day there is a peace of some sort that is resolved in that part of the world, with whatever happens with Daesh or whatever happens with the Assad regime, even if they can somehow with their supporters in Russia and Iran or in Saudi Arabia or other countries reach some kind of long-term peace, the issue for these persecuted minorities is that they will still not have a place.

It is a documented fact that Christians are now the most persecuted religious group in the world. There are a number of studies that demonstrate this fact. It is leadership from this government that says we recognise that

everyone, regardless of their creed, is suffering right now, in the short term. But in the medium to long term, who has no options in that part of the world? Who has no medium- or long-term future in that part of the world? It is leadership from this government that has secured our borders, given us the capacity to take additional people, made the Australian public trusting of a government who can secure their borders and enabled us to reach out to bring in the most persecuted, the most needy, and not only give them a safe haven in the short term but also provide the leadership to give them a meaningful settlement program that will give them a future. It is a leadership that brings communities in Australia, the diaspora of the Orthodox churches and others, together to provide the support for these people so that when they come here they can settle in this nation and build a new life for themselves and their children.

Long-term leadership is about statesmanship. It is not just about the next election. It is about having an eye on the next generation. There are a number of steps that this government has taken which show true long-term leadership. *(Time expired)*