



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2016-2017

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP	Question No.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (13:19): I am delighted to have the minister in the room with us today to answer questions. The global political economy is amidst a period of heightened volatility as major conflicts are causing upheaval the world over. As I speak today, there are about 10 major wars raging around the world, with the Syrian civil war alone causing over 1,000 deaths every single week.

Due to such conflicts and the persecutions, the violence and the human rights abuses they create, we have about—and the minister said it—65 million displaced people around the world today: 65 million people!—of which, according to UNHCR, over 15 million are refugees and 10 million are stateless. That is the largest number ever, even larger than post-World War II. This is a sad and miserable fact, and a symptom, if you like, of those major conflicts that are causing upheaval.

Now, Australia, as we know, is one of the few countries in the world that has a planned resettlement program that proactively goes out and selects the most vulnerable people in the world and resettles them here in Australia. No matter how much media noise or activist politics from the Left surround our immigration regime, the fact remains that Australia's record is something we should all be very proud of.

Australians are an open, tolerant and generous people. We know our history, and that all of us, except our Indigenous peoples—our first peoples—are relatively newcomers. That includes me, with a mix of convict blood and free settler blood. As a nation and as a people, we naturally want to help those who are more vulnerable than ourselves. But we are also a pragmatic lot; I have never heard any Australian suggest that we should invite all 21 million refugees to settle here in Australia, nor that we should invite all 65 million displaced people here to take refuge. While we want to do all that we can, there will always be a limit to the resources that we can commit to and how many people can emigrate.

A social compact has emerged over time, and it is a simple one that reflects a correlation between how well the government manages our borders and the people's appetite for new immigrants. This is where Labor got it so drastically wrong in losing control of our borders. They oversaw a humanitarian disaster that resulted from Australia's greatest public policy bungle, certainly in my lifetime, with 50,000 people arriving on 800 boats and over 1,200—at least, those we know about—who lost their lives at sea.

Restoring integrity in the system has fallen to the coalition government, and it has done so. It has restored integrity with a range of measures, and none more important than stopping the boats. Restoring control to our borders requires (1) Labor's mess to be fixed and, (2) building new capacity so that our humanitarian intake may increase. These two challenges are not mutually exclusive. Rather, that they are sequential and interdependent—one is a prerequisite for the other, if you like.

Only by fixing Labor's mess and stopping the boats can confidence and trust in the system be rebuilt, for the greater our control over our sovereign borders the greater our capacity as a nation to extend compassion to those in the world who are indeed the most needy. And it is within this context that I wish to ask the minister the following question: Minister, how has stopping the boats helped restore integrity to our humanitarian intake?