



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMETARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Sri Lanka

PROCEDURAL TEXT

Wednesday, 6 July 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Speaker

Source House
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Responder
Question No.

Sri Lanka

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Mr RANDALL (Canning) (19:30): I am compelled to respond and make some observations in relation to the Channel 4 video which was shown on *Four Corners* last Monday night in relation to the final days and hours of the Sri Lankan civil war. I do so because in my role as the Deputy Chair of the Sri Lankan Group and my general interest in Sri Lanka there are some issues that need to be put on the record. I say at the outset that the images and action shown on that *Four Corners* program were horrific, brutal and degrading and if they are, in fact, genuine they cannot be tolerated and must be dealt with.

I visited Sri Lanka in the last few weeks. There is a process in Sri Lanka to deal with these issues and they are being dealt with by the Sri Lankan government through the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, which has full judicial powers. This is a commission based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, post apartheid South Africa. In the meantime the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon commissioned a report from an expert panel, which has three experts on it—a South African, an American and an Indonesian. The panel has already reported, basically, on the issues raised on the Channel 4 video. The annoyance that has come from the Tamil diaspora, generally overseas, is the fact that there has been no action on this panel because the Sri Lankan government has rejected the report as fundamentally flawed because the facts have not been proven.

Further to that, in the Sri Lankan *Daily News* on Wednesday, 22 June this year, Professor GL Peiris, who is the external affairs minister, and somebody we met, pointed out that not only has the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission invited international organisations such as the Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to provide information about these videos to facilitate the commission's inquiry but, he said:

No organization has accepted this invitation extended by the Commission.

These organizations are pointing fingers at the government and the Security Forces without making representations to the independent body set up in Sri Lanka probing such matters.

As has been pointed out by the Secretary-General, unless Sri Lanka does respond, he has two choices and one would be to launch an investigation with the agreement of the Sri Lankan government. If that does not work the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, would have to get the United Nations to provide a resolution. None of that has happened.

The fact is Sri Lanka is a democratic nation emerging from a 28- to 30-year-old civil war. It was a brutal civil war where atrocities were committed on both sides. We know that the LTTE, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, were one of the most ruthless killing machines that has ever been known. We visited the north, areas like Pannala, Vavuniya and Jaffna, and we met people on the ground. I went to Manik Farm, for example, with my colleagues where we met over 200,000 people who were refugees. There are now only 1,700. They are free to leave. In fact, a bus pulls up outside the camp and people are free to leave at any time they choose. We discussed this with the people in their homes. They cannot return to their villages because they are still mined. Many of them do not have a village to return to because it was shelled and demolished during the civil war. In fact, the people I spoke to at Manik Farm quite often do not have a place to go to because, as I said, it has been ruined.

I congratulate the Australian government for providing 5,000 houses already. The Indian government has promised 50,000 but has not built one, so it was a very shallow promise. I say to those who want to criticise this democratically elected government in its efforts to provide reconciliation and reconstruction: you need to get across the facts before you slur a democratically elected government like the sovereign state of Sri Lanka.