



Speech by

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STATE MEMBER FOR KURWONGBAH

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**ADOPTION OF CHILDREN (HAGUE CONVENTION ON INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION) AMENDMENT
BILL**

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (4.18 p.m.): I rise to support the Bill. I believe that the background information of the adoption of this convention has been covered very well by previous speakers and it is not my intention to reiterate that information or the purpose of this Bill. Before I make my contribution to the debate today, I want to take issue with some matters raised by the One Nation members. If they had listened to the contributions of other speakers in the debate or had read the Minister's second-reading speech, or even the Act itself, I can most certainly say that they would not be trotting out their conspiracy theories. Treaties do not become a law of this State unless we as a Parliament pass them into law. That is what we are doing here today.

Members opposite have a privilege not enjoyed by the rest of the people of Queensland. Members are here making a direct contribution to this debate. Members opposite are representing the people of their electorates and will make a judgment as to whether they support this Bill or not. I find it difficult to accept the complaint by members opposite that there has been no consultation and that this is being forced upon them. If members had read the Minister's second-reading speech, or even listened to the shadow Minister, they would have learnt that there have been 10 years of input and consideration into this convention before it was ratified by Australia. Rest assured that Australia has been very involved in the formulation of the convention.

This Bill was introduced into the House on 27 August 1998—some seven months ago. Members opposite have had seven months to acquaint themselves with and be consulted about the contents of the Bill. In relation to the interpretation of those opposite of the report of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee, may I say that it is a misrepresentation of what the committee said. The question raised by the committee was not one of giving away sovereignty. What we raised was our opportunity to scrutinise legislation and determine whether the Act meets the fundamental legislative principles of our State.

I come now to the contribution I want to make to this debate. I want to highlight the plight of hundreds of thousands of children around the world. As we are speaking here this afternoon, there are children in all quarters of the world who are being denied a childhood and who are being abused and mistreated and need us to speak up for them. They do not need the diatribe coming out of the mouths of the One Nation members of this House. They need the whole international community to join together to give them a childhood and to give them quality of life.

There is an excellent site on the Internet by the Human Rights Watch. If members are interested and want to study human rights developments in relation to children's rights, the Internet address is www.hrw.org. What that Human Rights Watch World Report of 1999 shows us is that throughout the world an unknown number of children—most likely in the millions—are being mistreated, are being subjected to slavery or practices similar to slavery, are being subjected to work as bonded labourers and are involved in wars. Children are being locked up or simply put out on the street in some countries.

The issues that have required research and action for change in 1998 have related to the treatment of children in orphanages. The three main countries that have caused concern for the

international community are Romania, China and Russia. Research has found that in these orphanages many children are placed in grossly substandard facilities and are provided with inhumane care and many are left to die. It was found that in Romania in 1990 doctors, forbidden to acquire medical information from outside the country, carried out a practice of giving small blood transfusions to children to strengthen them. Sadly, large numbers of children contracted HIV as a result. In addition, children suffered from inadequate food, housing, clothing and medical care. They also suffered from lack of stimulation of education and neglect. Disabled children suffered even grimmer conditions and treatment, with many of them being malnourished and diseased.

In relation to the use of children as soldiers, it is estimated that there are 300,000 children around the world serving as soldiers. Many of these children are killed in combat or are forced to kill others. Many have committed atrocities of their own volition or under the threat of death. These children were often maimed physically and psychologically and were denied education and a normal life. Most faced overwhelming difficulties at a war's end in becoming normal, productive members of their community. It sends shivers down the spine to think of children in these circumstances.

In relation to child labour, I would like to read a story from a pamphlet from one of the international aid organisations, Plan International, which has projects which we should all individually support. These projects assist children who are suffering dreadfully in their own countries. This story concerns Virudhunagar, a town in the Sivakasi region of Tamil Nadu, South India. The pamphlet states—

"Large, closed buildings, with security fences and security guards loom along the dusty roads. In these factories 80,000 children toil their day away; making and packing matches, making and packing gunpowder for firecrackers. Gangly young boys push and pull and shove to get their heavy and deadly cargo of fire crackers along the rutted tracks. In a smaller factory, just out of town, a skinny young girl sidles up to visitors showing her hands; murmuring in Tamil. Her hands are sore and cramped. They are covered in glue which looks like it will never wear off. Most of the day she is hunched over matches and boxes using her hands, fast and dexterously, from dawn until dusk and earning a meagre 75 cents a day for her relentless work.

These children of Sivakasi are some of the millions of child labourers in India. The International Labour Organisation estimates there are 250 million child labourers and slaves worldwide."

We cannot stand silently by. We must speak up and we must make every effort to promote the human rights of these children. I would hope that members of this House would not hesitate to do so. Whilst I know that, as parents, we would love to go and bring them home with us, this is not possible. It is probably not in their best interests in the long run. We must work together to enhance their lives and put their welfare first.

Finally, I want to stress that whether or not we as an Assembly here this afternoon ratify the convention, we are still obligated under the Commonwealth regulations to meet certain criteria to ensure the safety of children at all times. I recommend that we ratify this treaty, that we enhance the rights of children and that we stop trafficking in slavery and other atrocities which are happening to children throughout the world.
