



Speech by

**RONAN LEE**

**MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPIILLY**

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### REFUGEES

**Mr LEE** (Indooroopilly—ALP) (12.07 a.m.): 2001 years ago, a family of Middle Eastern refugees fled persecution in their own country and lived for a time in Egypt. Very little is known of the time that Jesus and his family spent in Egypt, but I know this: they were not subject to mandatory detention, they were not locked up, and they were not forced to suffer the uncertainty of life on a temporary protection visa.

The appalling way that the federal government treats refugees ought to be condemned as a cold-hearted sham. The Howard government has created two classes of refugee: one with a future of permanent residency, access to services and income support; and the other with an uncertain future, limited income support, no family reunion rights, and no Jobsearch assistance. I have students in my electorate who fall into this category; unaccompanied minors 15, 16 and 17 years old who fled persecution in their homelands and are now living in a new country with little support and a very uncertain future—in fact, potentially three years in this country with an uncertain future. The Howard government not only financially impoverishes these young men; it spiritually impoverishes them too by making them live with uncertainties for years.

We have a moral obligation to welcome asylum seekers and to allow them to live with their families in peace and certainty. It is them today, but there is a real potential that it could be us tomorrow. I have a group of mainly temporary protection visa holders who play soccer in my electorate every Saturday at 3.30 p.m. at Wests Community and Sporting Club in Chelmer. The stories of the Hazara soccer group have convinced me that the federal government is wrong on this issue. If honourable members are not convinced by my words today, they are very welcome to join all of the boys and myself and to listen to their stories. I am absolutely convinced that if they listen to those boys, they will know exactly how wrong the federal government is on this issue.

Australia is a country that has been built upon Aborigines and an influx of refugees and migrants. The Howard government has no right to treat refugees in such an inhumane manner. The Howard government has no right to lock people up before determining the length of time that they can have in a country that is free from warfare and political disrepute. These people deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

It is no wonder that there are riots at detention centres. These people have come to Australia hoping for a life free of violence and hatred, and they are locked up in detention centres that make prisons look like resorts. I am by no means condoning the violence that detention centres throughout Australia have been experiencing, but I understand very personally why such violence is occurring. The federal government's attitude to asylum seekers is a sham.

Time expired.

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