



Speech by

Mr D. BRISKEY

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

Hansard 19 September 2002

AUSTCARE REFUGEE WEEK

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (7.05 p.m.): The week of 7 October to 13 October is Austcare Refugee Week—a week dedicated to the recognition of the contribution that refugees make to our society. I would like to take a few minutes to talk about the great contribution that refugees have made to our country, whilst acknowledging the extraordinarily difficult circumstances that they have experienced.

Refugees by definition have undergone extreme hardship. They have lost the protection of their own country and cannot return for fear of persecution. After experiencing myriad dangers and traumas, they have had to make the decision to leave their homes. They have often endured risky flights to safety and some have also spent time in a refugee camp. Indeed, the path that refugees have travelled to arrive in countries such as Australia has been anything but safe.

There are more than 21 million refugees in the world today. Australia accepts approximately 12,000 refugees each year as part of its humanitarian program. On a global scale, this is not a large number, but Australia accepts the moral and social obligation to provide assistance and settlement services to refugees and, indeed, recognises that it is, in fact, in Australia's own interest to do so.

I think that it has been long acknowledged that refugees bring with them enormous hopes, aspirations, ambition, skills and knowledge. It is up to us to provide the opportunities to refugees to use their skills and talents. It is important that we give refugees the opportunities to participate in the work force and to enhance their resettlement and that we assist them to participate in society in a positive way. Refugees are very motivated people. They want to work and build a better life for themselves and their children. We owe it to them to provide support and access programs to facilitate this participation process. As a group, refugees are a remarkable people who, through their circumstances, have had to use enormous perseverance and ingenuity. They have survived experiences that would shock many of us and have proved their determination, resilience and resourcefulness time and time again.

Here in Queensland, the government acknowledges that refugees are important to society and communities in Queensland. Their contribution to society is valuable, and policies and practices that do not recognise and do not support the potential contribution of refugees to Australian society are damaging to the principles of multiculturalism and do not promote an inclusive, harmonious society. The Queensland government has demonstrated its commitment to refugees through developing such mechanisms as a position on the temporary protection visa that enables all TPV refugees to have the same access to all Queensland government services as people on permanent protection visas. The TPV provision ensures that all refugees have an equal start to successfully settle in Queensland.

Time expired.
