



Speech by

Mr D. BRISKEY

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

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BORDER STORIES EXHIBITION

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (12.05 p.m.): Last week I had the pleasure of attending Border Stories, a public exhibition which sought to make the community more aware of the plight of refugees. The exhibition, which ran until 3 November, was put together by Medecins Sans Frontiers—Doctors Without Borders. As members will be aware, Doctors Without Borders is an international agency which delivers emergency aid to victims of armed conflict, epidemics and natural and man-made disasters and to others who lack health care due to social or geographical isolation.

It was founded in 1971 by a small group of French doctors who believed that all people have the right to medical care regardless of race, religion, creed or political affiliation and that the needs of these people supersede respect for national borders. It was the first non-governmental organisation to provide emergency medical assistance and publicly bear witness to the plight of the populations they serve.

Doctors Without Borders field teams are confronted with the problems facing refugees and displaced persons every day of the year. The Border Stories exhibition used a number of items, each being a personal possession of a refugee, to tell the story of the problems they face. From the story about Jacob, a 25 year old Sudanese refugee in Kenya who first fled war in Sudan when he was 11, to Abdul, a 59 year old internally displaced Afghan who had to leave his village due to drought, Border Stories delivered the human face of an issue which is debated by many but understood by few in the community.

In 1987, Jacob's village in the south of Sudan was attacked by government forces. Jacob could not find his family and for two months he walked with other refugees towards Ethiopia. They were continually attacked and many died from a shortage of food. When Jacob reached the refugee camp at the border he stayed with a group of orphans until war broke out in Ethiopia and he had to go back to Sudan. After four months without much food and still fearing attacks, Jacob arrived in Kenya in 1992. Three years later, Kenya was the victim of attacks and Jacob was again forced to flee for protection to Dadeeb, where he now lives. Throughout his ordeal Jacob continued to carry with him a Bible which had been given to him at his first refugee camp in Ethiopia. He still carries it with him today. It is hard for any of us to imagine what Jacob experienced as an 11 year old, fleeing his home for protection and never seeing his family. Among the 35 million men, women and children who currently have refugee status, however, Jacob's story is a common one.

Refugees by definition have undergone extreme hardship, 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 on which refugees have travelled to arrive in countries such as Australia has been anything but safe.

Refugees bring with them enormous hopes, aspirations, ambitions, 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 opportunities to participate in the work force, to enhance their resettlement and to 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 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 again.

The Queensland government acknowledges that refugees are important to society and communities in Queensland. Their contribution to society is valuable, and policies and practices which 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 which enables all TPV refugees to have access to all Queensland government services, the same as permanent protection visa holders. The TPV position ensures that all refugees have an equal start to successfully settle in Queensland.

I know a number of members took the opportunity to see the Border Stories exhibition. For those who did not have the opportunity, I urge them to take the time to familiarise themselves with the work of Doctors Without Borders by visiting the website at www.doctorswithoutborders.org.
