



Speech by

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PARLIAMENTARY AMNESTY GROUP: WHITE RIBBON DAY

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (4.13 p.m.): I rise to support Amnesty International's stop violence against women campaign. I am very proud to be part of a parliament that has formed its own Amnesty International group. I was very proud to stamp my handprint on the stop violence against women banner today. Like other speakers, I cannot stress enough how important this campaign is for women around the world. Violence against women is the greatest human rights scandal of our time. Unfortunately, violence against women escalates during war periods, as we have seen in the war in Iraq and closer to home in the Solomon Islands, as former speakers have said.

During the conflict years in the Solomon Islands, women were the target of widespread gender based violence. Today, despite the end of a five-year conflict, women and girls remain at risk of violence, including domestic violence. As recently as 19 August 2004, an armed group of around 50 men harassed and reportedly tried to rape women in raids on villages along the Metapona River.

In very few of the cases of violence against women has the perpetrator been prosecuted. Why would a woman press charges when prison sentences for rape are reportedly rarely longer than two years to five years. During the conflicts violence against men was openly discussed but violence against women was marginalised and/or ignored. Women victims of violence have been outside the focus of attention during and after the conflict and today the Solomon Islands has no women members of parliament, no women ministers and only one woman as head of a government department.

Protection against violence towards women cannot be expected to succeed when such a discrimination against women exists. As we know, the Solomon Islands are not alone. In Australia, one in four women experience violence in their intimate relationships. One in eight women are subjected to violence from their partner while pregnant. Some 35 per cent of women in Australia experience violence from their partner after separation.

In north Queensland, under 14s are the highest risk sex victims. Who are the predators? It is men aged between 30 and 49. Some 81 per cent of these offenders are known to the victim. In the north and Mount Isa there were 158 rapes and 396 other sexual offences last year. One hundred and fifty-nine of these people were girls under 14. Guess what? More than 240 of these offenders were men.

These alarming figures represent only one-third of reported abuse cases. We need to show that women's self-organisation, together with the unity and support of the human rights movement, is the most effective way to overcome violence against women. Everyone—individuals, communities, governments and international bodies—has a responsibility to put a stop to violence and to redress the suffering it causes. To stop violence to women belongs to us—it is in our hands.