



Speech by

Kate Jones

MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE

Hansard Thursday, 15 November 2007

PARLIAMENTARY AMNESTY GROUP: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION, PAKISTAN

Ms JONES (Ashgrove—ALP) (6.56 pm): As a member of Amnesty International, I am very proud to speak in support of this motion. At the outset, I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of The Gap branch of Amnesty International, who work tirelessly to support the human rights of people around the world.

However, I, like many of the other members speaking tonight, am very saddened and distressed that this motion is before the House. As I stated in the motion, today is the International Day of Action on Pakistan. Like all members of this parliament, I am deeply concerned about the events that have been unfolding in Pakistan recently, particularly the current state of emergency declared by President Musharraf. This decision of the Pakistan president contravenes international human rights standards enshrined in international law and even in the country's own constitution.

On 3 November, General Musharraf suspended the constitution. He also banned independent media, sacked much of the judiciary, jailed many secular politicians and sent his troops into the streets where they have bludgeoned protesting lawyers, human rights activists and innocent civilians. Worryingly, the impunity with which the Pakistan authorities have been operating for the past six years threatens to become entrenched with the amendment that General Musharraf passed on 11 November to the Army Act 1952. The amendment to this act gives military courts the power to try civilians suspected of a range of alleged offences, including terrorist activities, treason or sedition, and for cases dating back as far as 2003.

The rule of law and human rights cannot be ignored under the pretext of the war on terror or a state of emergency. General Musharraf blamed militant violence in the country for imposing emergency rule. In speaking here in this parliament as part of a Western democracy, I think there is an important lesson to be learned by all of us from the current situation in Pakistan. In that regard, I agree wholeheartedly with the comments that were made by the member for Ipswich. We must remain mindful and vigilant and must never allow the war on terror and the rise of extremists to lead to the erosion of democracy, an independent judiciary and a free and open media, either in Pakistan or here at home. I urge Pakistan to return urgently to constitutional rule and democracy. I support this motion and I encourage all members of the parliament to support this motion.