



Speech by

John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard Thursday, 4 December 2008

MOTION: PARLIAMENTARY AMNESTY GROUP

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (5.20 pm): I second the motion. Greek historian Herodotus remarked in the first book of his most famous work, *The Histories*—

In peace, children inter their parents; war violates the order of nature and causes parents to inter their children.

When he wrote these words in the fifth century BC, Herodotus was probably reflecting on the futility of war and the loss of future generations at the bloody hands of war. As thousands of children are recruited and trained by armed forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo, only to be injured, maimed or killed in the ongoing conflict, Herodotus' words are just as true today as they were over 2,000 years ago.

For every child drafted into an armed force in North Kivu, the likelihood that they will die as a result of this conflict increases exponentially. With every child who dies as a result of this conflict, the chances increase that a future leader, a future vessel of peace in sub-Saharan Africa, will die too.

One could list the myriad treaties, agreements, conventions and charters that stipulate children should not be used in armed conflict. However, in many ways, it is completely unnecessary. Each of us knows the sanctity of childhood with its innate innocence and intrinsic potential. Each of us knows that that intangible gift has no place on the battlefield. So too do we know that a child who is deprived of freedom and liberty is a child deprived of that same gift, that same childhood. Not only are children in North Kivu trained for and placed in armed conflict but they are forced to do so against their will and the will of their families.

When one reads the firsthand accounts of child soldiers in Amnesty International's report, *North Kivu: No end to war on women and children*, one cannot help but be disgusted and horrified by the appalling methods of recruitment, training and warfare to which children as young as 12 are subjected. Even if we could never fully appreciate the treatment of these defenceless children, it is hard not to think of our own children and our own nieces and nephews, grandsons and granddaughters as a way of putting this conflict, and its terrifying realities, into perspective. There are some things that are beyond ideology, beyond partisan politics, beyond language and beyond custom. These are the things that our basic humanness rejects. The exploitation of children, the sexual abuse of women and girls, the systematic killing of innocent civilians all fall into this category, yet are all being indiscriminately undertaken in the current conflict in North Kivu.

At Christmas time, as we remember the birth of the son of God, let us remember all of God's children all over the world. While some children will be rejoicing at the playful cracking of bonbons, others will be hearing the all too familiar sound of gunfire and grenades. As we enjoy the company of our families, let us pray for those mothers and fathers as well as sons and daughters who will be weeping for their loved ones who have been killed or abducted during this dreadful conflict.