




Speech By
Melissa McMahon

MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

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ADJOURNMENT

Afghanistan

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (6.21 pm): I rise to place on record my concern about the current situation in Afghanistan and the impact it is having on the population in the rapidly deteriorating country, the Afghan community here in Australia and the Australian veteran community. The images and news coming out of Afghanistan over the past fortnight have been heartbreaking to watch. We must remember that this is not a country or population that sought such conflict nor chooses such devastation. No civilian population deserves to have war, civil or otherwise, in its midst. I have a small but thriving Afghan community in my electorate and we have discussed the fears that they hold for their family members and loved ones who have endured so much over the past two decades but remain. From veterans I am speaking to, there is a range of mixed emotions, from despair, anger, frustration and shame. I do not intend to weigh into the debate about Australia's presence in Afghanistan or the reasons behind it but just know that when a member of the Defence Force steps up to deploy they give their mission their all, regardless of the political reasons behind it. Theirs is not to reason why, if I may appropriate Tennyson.

What has disheartened veterans is the treatment of the interpreters and other support staff whom our troops relied on so heavily. Commitments were made. Assurances were given. I have worked with interpreters on deployment. For many of my missions they are the key to success in any community engagement. Their knowledge, understanding and forbearance were integral to achieving successful outcomes. Living and working with them in close conditions for months on end breeds trust and for many veterans to see those assurances forgotten or abandoned is particularly galling. However, let us not see this painted as a recent event, that we have only had two weeks to get these allies out of a country in which their mere presence has been a threat to them personally as well as to their families and local communities. The veteran community has been calling on the government to evacuate these people for months and even years, so to see the mad scramble for evacuation—to know that those who had visas were still left behind—shows how poorly this was handled at the highest levels.

Our soldiers care. They are good global citizens and many of them are using their own networks and funds to assist their mates. Our soldiers do not abandon their mates and, despite the lacklustre support from the federal government, they will continue to support their mates. There are, rightly, grave concerns held for the future of the advancement of women and education more broadly within the new regime. I understand that this is a delicate issue diplomatically, but as Australians we cannot resile from protesting any backward step for women and vulnerable people in any country.