



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Breast Cancer

SPEECH

Thursday, 13 October 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Ms VAMVAKINO

Source House
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(Calwell) (NaN.NaN pm)

Ms VAMVAKINO (Calwell) (11:22): Yesterday I was pleased to launch the Women Die Waiting campaign, a campaign initiated and supported by AngliCORD and aimed at raising awareness about the lack of adequate breast cancer screening and treatment for women living in the Gaza Strip. Gaza is one of the most densely populated places in the world and its residents, the Palestinian people, live under the Israeli blockade that severely restricts their freedom of movement. A woman with breast cancer has to obtain a permit in order to leave the Gaza Strip and receive medical treatment abroad. Obtaining a permit is almost impossible and many women die waiting. Women in Palestine have only a 40 per cent chance of surviving five years after being diagnosed with breast cancer—half that of Australian women. Lack of access to diagnosis and treatment, as well as delays caused by the security obstacles for women seeking care outside Gaza, contributes to the higher mortality rate for women living there. Attending the breakfast yesterday were parliamentarians, faith leaders and cancer awareness advocates, who came together to help shine the spotlight on the women of Gaza, who do not have the same access to screening, treatment and support that we have here in Australia.

Breast cancer is the leading cause of death amongst women and is prevalent at a rate of one in nine women. It is common knowledge that early detection of breast cancer leads to greater chances of survival. That is why we put so much effort into raising awareness and supporting preventative measures that have, in Australia at least, increased survival rates significantly. In addition, we have here in this country some of the best medical services in the world, so women diagnosed with breast cancer can expect immediate attention and the very best of care. With all the advances in research and treatment, women should not die waiting for access to breast cancer screening or treatment—but in Gaza they do.

I have participated in many events in my electorate aimed at spreading the breast cancer message and today I also want to acknowledge that October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Many activities take place, in particular the iconic practice of illuminating public places in pink and, of course, Pink Ribbon Day.

I had the privilege to launch this campaign to fight breast cancer among women in Gaza on 27 September in my electorate. AngliCORD has been involved in helping people in the developing world for over two decades. In Palestine, AngliCORD's partner, the Anglican Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City, continues to provide emergency medical treatment for people living in this poverty-stricken and war-torn region. It also provides the only mammogram screening service for women in Gaza and advocates strongly for the plight of those women who are diagnosed with breast cancer.

I believe strongly that, in the case of the women of Gaza, the political endgame that dictates the trajectory for Palestine should never be extended at the cost of humanity and human life, which in this instance renders treatable cancers fatal. Women should not be a part of the collateral damage in Palestine. So I proudly join AngliCORD in launching the Women Die Waiting campaign here in parliament.

I also note that at this time in the UN General Assembly the Palestinians are seeking recognition of a Palestinian state by the international community. I urge the Australian government to support recognition of a Palestinian state, in the same way we supported the creation of the state of Israel. There are many Australians who feel the same way. For the benefit of the House, I would like to make reference to a statement calling on the Australian government to vote yes at the United Nations to a Palestinian state. It was signed by many prominent Australians, including former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. The statement highlighted that:

Australia has consistently supported a two state solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict;

Israel is an independent and sovereign state while Palestinians remain stateless;

18 years of negotiations since the Oslo accords have produced no agreement while Israel has continued to build illegal settlements on Palestinian land and has subjected Palestinians to military occupation;

Palestinians, like other human beings, have the right to their own state and their own nationality. Institutions

such as the UN, the World Bank and the IMF have affirmed their readiness for statehood;

Negotiations on final status issues, namely final borders with agreed land swaps, security, settlements, refugees, water and Jerusalem should resume as soon as possible between Israel and the Palestinians including both Fatah and Hamas, but the issue of statehood should not be subject to negotiation.

One hundred and thirty member states of the United Nations have so far committed to recognising a Palestinian state. If Australia's longstanding commitment to a two-state solution is genuine and meaningful it is time for us to join those 130 member states. As a member active on this issue in this place for so many years, it would be a great privilege for to stand here at some point soon and hopefully thank the Australian government for recognising the Palestinian state.