

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE — WHITE RIBBON DAY

### *Statement*

**HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (Agricultural)** [9.45 pm]: I rise to make a statement tonight about an issue in society that is certainly causing me a great deal of concern. Contributions were made last night from Hon Linda Savage and Hon Alison Xamon about White Ribbon Day, which is on 25 November, I believe, and under the auspices of the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Under that particular banner, the issue of violence in our society is certainly something that we need to address and address with some speed. Even in today's newspaper I took note of a number of articles that really lend some sort of credibility to the need for us all to address these particular issues. There is an article headed "Wirra backs anti-violence campaign" by Colleen Egan, which I will talk about shortly. Mr Paul Murray had an article in *The West Australian* entitled "Action needed on boozy suburban teen parties" and there is a further article in the opinion column written by Amanda Banks entitled "Community still too quiet on brutality in the home". Those sorts of stories, and also a story I witnessed on television news tonight that will no doubt be in *The West Australian* tomorrow, add further weight to the issue that this is a problem that we need to address and address with some speed.

Certainly, the trend is quite disturbing and I suppose when we give consideration to the various types of violence we see in our society today that perhaps either did not exist or certainly did not exist to the extent that they exist today, it gives me great cause for concern. In fact, I think the statistics in relation to the increasing levels of violence in our society are quite alarming. We give consideration perhaps to violence in sport and racial, ethnic and religious violence—perhaps not quite so much in Australia as in other countries, but it is certainly on the increase. We had a particularly nasty incident in the Northbridge area earlier this year when a young footballer from the Swan Districts Football Club was king hit. Somehow or other he managed to survive and it appears as though he will be able to make some sort of meaningful contribution to society in the years to come; it is an amazing recovery by Luke Adams. Road rage and rail rage, if we like, or the rage that seems to be occurring on our railway systems particularly through to Armadale and Midland, also give some cause for concern.

I briefly want to talk about White Ribbon Day. Obviously, I am a supporter of this particular campaign and I agree with the sentiments of sportsmen and celebrities like David Wirrpanda who have sworn an oath to never commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women. The White Ribbon Day chairman, Andrew O'Keefe, is quoted as saying a few other interesting things in *The West Australian*. He said that he is one of some 1 400 male ambassadors across Australia promoting the oath. He goes on to say —

"There are no shades of grey when it comes to violence against women," ...

"It is totally unacceptable that domestic and family violence is the major cause of homelessness amongst women and their children.

"It's unacceptable that one in four children aged between 12 to 20 reports having witnessed an act of physical violence by their father or stepfather against their mother or stepmother.

That is a shocking sort of thing to have to acknowledge in society today. Mr O'Keefe goes on to say —

"Perhaps most shockingly of all, it's unacceptable that one of the most at-risk groups for domestic violence is pregnant women."

That is a pretty sad story, and an indictment of the society in which we live. It certainly gives further cause for us to do something about it. White Ribbon Day is an attempt to put that issue front and centre of everybody's value systems.

I want to take the issue of domestic violence a step further, though, and talk about a petition that I tabled on 22 September this year. The petition reads in part —

We the undersigned residents of Western Australia are requesting that the State Government provide more resources to Geraldton and Midwest Region to stop the violence in our communities.

The family feuding must stop and the State Government must prosecute the perpetrators or remove them from our communities.

Your petitioners therefore respectfully request the Legislative Council to support the allocation of more resources into Geraldton and Midwest Region by the Barnett Government.

That particular petition has now gone a step or two further, with a big meeting and march held in Geraldton on Monday, 14 November. I want to mention some of the people who spoke at that march. I cannot mention all of them, because not all of them want to be mentioned for fear of reprisal, which is a problem in itself, but I will

mention the outstanding contributions of Mr Wayne McDonald, Ms Charmaine Green, Mr Jim Sandy, Ms Leza Radcliffe and Ms Jenny Kniveton. At the meeting, which was held in Maitland Park in Geraldton, there were police officers and people from government agencies. I was obviously present, and so was the federal member for Durack, and some 50 or so concerned local residents. We discussed school violence, drugs, alcohol, law enforcement and police liaison, bullying, and street fighting. All those sorts of issues are literally tearing apart Aboriginal families and their communities, not only in Geraldton but also in some of the surrounding towns. The people most impacted, of course, are the youth and children in these communities. That is perpetuating this problem, and that is what I am particularly concerned to address.

**Hon Max Trenorden:** I have bad news for you—Hon Terry Redman was mugged in Northam.

**Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM:** That is certainly one of those issues, Hon Max Trenorden, that for obvious reasons I was not going to mention, because it is very close to us here in Parliament. But it goes to show, does it not, that all of us can, in some way, shape or form, be affected by this cancerous-like growth of violence in our society, and that is something that we need to address? This group of people is endeavouring to do something about that.

After the presentation of the speeches, the march moved to the foreshore in a demonstration of support for governments and communities that are trying to help these people address the issue. The big question, though, is: how can the violence be stopped? Much has been done in the past 10 years or so, especially with the Barndimalgu court, which deals with family violence in Aboriginal communities. That court has been quite a big success. However, despite the improvements in Geraldton—yes, there is more to be done—the big problem is in the surrounding towns, where women live in fear. Those communities are urgently seeking some sort of assistance. What can be done? Maybe some sort of social infrastructure spending through even royalties for regions will help address the very pressing issue of violence in Geraldton and Mid West towns such as Mullewa, Mingenew and Three Springs and these sorts of locations. However, in turn, jobs, education and programs to improve self-esteem need to be put in place. If that is done, I believe that a significant part of this violence issue can be addressed, if not in the long term resolved.

It is a huge issue. I do not know where we start. But I would certainly suggest that ministers across government, and cabinet, might like to give that issue in Geraldton and the Mid West the same serious attention that they obviously are giving to the issue in metropolitan Perth.