

CHRISTCHURCH TERRORIST ATTACK

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion

On motion without notice by **Mr D.A. Templeman (Leader of the House)**, resolved with an absolute majority —

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the Premier to move a motion forthwith on the recent tragic events in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Motion

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [2.02 pm]: I move —

That this house, on the behalf of the people of Western Australia, expresses its deepest sympathy to the people of New Zealand and those affected by the abhorrent terrorist attack in Christchurch. Further, that this house unequivocally condemns all acts of hatred and intolerance within our community.

On Friday, the world witnessed something abhorrent—an act of premeditated hatred that so far has claimed the lives of 50 people in Christchurch, New Zealand, a nation very close to our hearts as Australians. It is our dearest friend and closest ally. This hurts because it hits so close to home; they are our siblings. We stand with them on their darkest day.

The stories of the 50 victims are heartbreaking. They include high school students with promising futures, sporting prodigies, twins separated forever, fathers who shielded their children from bullets, and a wife who protected her husband in his wheelchair. This community has had the soul ripped out of it. It is a city that is grieving once again, this time from the acts of a terrorist.

This was a grotesque act of violence against the Muslim community of Christchurch. It is sickening, not just because they were targeted for their faith, but because they were attacked at a time when they came together to practise that faith. It sickens me because I know that this week, and for many weeks to come, Friday prayers across Australia and New Zealand will not feel the same for Muslim families. They will be stained by fear and grief.

In some ways, this was a uniquely modern terrorist attack. It was streamed live as it occurred, hosted on social media, and couched in the hateful rhetoric of modern far-right extremism. But in other ways, it is the same attack we have seen around the world—that is, violence and intimidation against people who are vulnerable and perceived by some as different. However, as Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has rightfully said, “They are us.”

We are a multicultural society. I believe we are a successful one. The Muslim community is a welcome and major part of it. When we try to reconcile what has taken place, it seems like these are the actions of a madman. But the reality is that they were premeditated. So we ask ourselves: how could someone possibly commit this act of evil? It is incomprehensible. But I know this does not happen in a vacuum. Although we may not know what truly drives someone to commit mass murder, the sentiment to target the Muslim community does not grow naturally in a person’s heart. It is fuelled by those who seek to stoke division and fear, and who enjoy and get pleasure from denigrating others. Anyone in public life, anyone with a public platform, and any Australian must be incredibly mindful of the impact words can have, their ability to shape attitudes, incite violence, and instil fear.

Although we value free speech, we know it has a cost—a cost that is not necessarily borne by the one who utters the words. Any Australian who seeks to benefit from racial division stands condemned by me and by my government. They are us and we will not tolerate attacks against them. The government will stay vigilant against the threat of terrorism against Western Australians, including that of the far right. Every support has been provided to mosques to reassure visitors of their security. I know that the Western Australia Police Force has a strong relationship with the Muslim community and this arrangement, initiated by the Western Australia Police Force and supported by the leaders of the community, reflects that.

As I said on the weekend, I am proud of Western Australians’ response to this act of terrorism. It has been heartening to see the outpouring of grief at what has occurred in New Zealand and support for our own state’s Muslim community. It has been equally heartening to see the universal condemnation for those who have sought to use this attack to further hurt and disparage the Muslim community. It is a timely reminder that Western Australians know that our multiculturalism is a source of strength, not weakness. My only request to Western Australians is to keep it up. Talk to your neighbours, and offer them your support. Do not accept the rhetoric of division, and do not be afraid to have a hard conversation. We cannot allow our society to be belittled by selfishness and fear. It is beneath us. It is not the Western Australia we want to leave to our children.

In closing, on behalf of the government of Western Australia and the state Parliamentary Labor Party, I offer our deepest sympathies and condolences to those affected by the terrorist attack in Christchurch, those who have lost friends and family in the attack, the New Zealand community here in Western Australia, and the Muslim community in Western Australia. Our hearts go out to New Zealand—a country and people that must be deeply

traumatised by what has occurred. We stand in solidarity with you, in support of you, and in condemnation of all acts of hatred and intolerance in our communities.

DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton — Leader of the Opposition) [2.08 pm]: I rise to support this motion on behalf of the Liberal opposition. The terrorist attack in Christchurch last Friday was indescribable. To say that it was reprehensible, disgusting, horrendous or atrocious is to immeasurably understate its impact. Friday's attack was all those and more. Friday's atrocity was profoundly heartbreaking. It has quite rightly shattered the sense of safety, security, and safe haven that we derive from living in what we thought were the safe havens of Australia and New Zealand. To the people of New Zealand, both here and in New Zealand: kia ora. We offer you our most sincere condolences. To the people of Christchurch, we offer you our love, prayers and sympathy. Your community has suffered much over recent years. For the loss and tragedy you have endured, we embrace you as close as we can.

To the families and loved ones of the victims, we grieve for you and with you. You have suffered tremendous loss and I hope you can find peace and comfort at these terrible times, as difficult as that will be. To our friends in the Muslim community in Christchurch, New Zealand, and in Australia and around the world, we mourn your loss. We utterly reject the reasons for the attack on you and we stand with you at all times. We are in Western Australia, as they are in New Zealand, a proud multicultural community. We embrace people of all faiths and welcome them into our community with open arms—they are us; we are them. Violence for any reason is unacceptable. Friday's terrorist attack was evil and heartless, committed against defenceless people of faith who were attending their place of worship at a time when most of them were there. They were at a place that they thought, quite rightly, they would be visiting in harmony and peace, not violence and bloodshed.

To the first responders—the police, paramedics and others who went to the front line of the tragedy—our thoughts are with you and we pray for you too. You stared terrorism in the face and had to overlook the horrendous tragedy that confronted you. You came to the support of those victims who needed your help. Your task was beyond imagination; your efforts beyond praise.

The perpetrator of this attack is a terrorist. His name never requires repeating. He is a person to fade away into history as an irrelevant, heartless, useless terrorist—he is unhinged, his reasons unsound and his actions reprehensible. The only people we should remember are the victims and their loved ones. They did not deserve the atrocity that was visited upon them. The stories of those victims have started to be told, and they will continue over the coming days, weeks and months. Their lives will be celebrated the world over, as they deserve. But they did not deserve to die; they deserved to continue to live a rich and fulfilled life, continuing to make a contribution to, in many cases, their new community—their adopted community of New Zealand and Christchurch—and to their families, and, of course, to worship the god that they wanted to, when they wanted to. May they rest in peace.

We condemn all acts of hatred and intolerance in our community. There is no place in our community for hatred and intolerance, and no place for violence, threats and intimidation. As I said before, we are a community that opens our arms to our multicultural and multid denominational community. We are a society that celebrates and embraces religious diversity. As a former Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, I have experienced more than most the positive influence of migration on our nation. I have enjoyed and cherished associating with the diverse ethnic and religious communities that enrich our community here in Western Australia, as they do in New Zealand. I thank those communities for choosing Australia to call home. I abhor those in our community who seek to divide our community with their nonsensical, irrational racist rants simply to appeal to a small minority of people who do not represent the values and aspirations of our nation. Those spruikers of hatred do not represent free speech or freedom. They are a repugnant and repulsive element who know only how to hurt and harm by their forms of words. We reject them and abhor them. I will not mention the name of the Queensland senator who is the face of this hatred. He deserves no acknowledgment. That said, I look forward to the Australian people passing judgement on him when the opportunity arises, and I am confident that it will be an action of rejection.

Once again, on behalf of the opposition, I offer our deepest sympathies to the people of New Zealand and to the Muslim community there. You are more than mates; you are family. We love you, we care for you, we grieve for you and we will always be there with you.

Members: Hear, hear!

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [2.13 pm]: I rise this afternoon on behalf of the Nationals WA to join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to express our genuine and sincere condolences to a nation that many of us consider family. As New Zealanders as a people come to terms with the horrific events perpetrated by an individual whose actions are unspeakable and abhorrent, we send our prayers and our thoughts. Rather than dwelling on this individual, we would do well to focus on the humanity and resilience of those people who are now drawing together as a community that has been shocked to its core. In the wake of this tragedy, New Zealand, and no doubt many nations, will dissect and review policies and structures. But just now, with relatives waiting to bury their loved ones, I hope that we can focus on every one of those people who lost their life or were injured. I hope that we can focus on their stories and celebrate their contribution to their

community. Already, reports emerging from New Zealand are putting a human face on every one of these 50-plus people. I hope we can move forward with a renewed vigour to celebrate our nation's diversity.

New Zealand and Australia share more similarities than differences and this is why our grief and our shock is so raw. Let us make sure that we as decision-makers learn about and celebrate the cultural diversity of our nation. I commend communities such as Katanning where this diversity is celebrated every year with a festival showcasing over 40 cultures in the one regional centre in Western Australia. I commend community leaders like Alep Mydie, who in the wake of this tragedy said —

... we have to ... move forward and show that we are united as one, regardless of our colour, our religion ... at the end of the day we are all human beings.

“There's no room for hate.”

As mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, friends, cousins and colleagues prepare to bury those who lost their lives on this horrific occasion, we must all recommit to resisting those who perpetrate or express extremist views, to call out racism and bigotry, and to celebrate the people and the humanity of our nation and our neighbours.

To our friends across the ditch, we grieve with you. To those from New Zealand who live here in Australia, we share your grief. On behalf of Nationals in Western Australia, we know that there are dark days ahead, but you are a nation that will heal and strengthen in the wake of this act of horror. I say to you all, *kia kaha*. I say to you all, be strong.

Members: Hear, hear!

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members. I ask that all members rise to observe one minute's silence in order to carry the motion.

Question passed; members and officers standing as a mark of respect.