

Mr HARDGRAVE (Moreton—Minister for Vocational and Technical Education and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister) (5.07 pm)—I am pleased to join this debate but, like, I am sure, all those contributing to it, I wish it were not necessary for the parliament to hold it. We are, in a condolence motion, combining our concern for those who have been killed in natural disasters in Guatemala, where the entire side of a mountain has swamped all beneath it and where the hand of God has wreaked havoc upon the unsuspecting, and, equally, our concern for those who have been killed in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, where the hand of God has shaken hard, just as it did on Boxing Day in the same general region. Our concern for people in the subcontinent region is most profound—they are people who are very familiar to us—as it is for those in Guatemala.

The member for Melbourne Ports made an expansive contribution to this debate—quite understandably so, because he is proudly a member of the Jewish community of Australia. Whilst he did not mention that, he can speak with great observation from that perspective about the real hurt and impact of those who seek to create a disruption in the good conduct of people of many different religious backgrounds. He was right to talk about the evil of Bali both in 2002 and 2005. Perhaps this debate will centre more on that than the other two God-induced natural disasters.

The Bali bombings in both years make no sense to anybody with any intelligence, but unfortunately we are dealing with people who are preying on those who are, in a lot of ways, illiterate—unable to read and write the language that they speak. They are simply persuaded by those with the biggest voice, the biggest set of guns or the biggest set of thugs around them. They are told simplistic stories such as: ‘If you’ve got a problem, blame them. It is because of them that things aren’t working the way you want them to, so extract more than a pound of flesh by targeting them; they don’t matter.’ Yet those who are the true followers of Islam, as the member for Melbourne Ports reflected, know that the Koran itself talks about how God created many tribes. The Jewish traditions talk about the same thing, just as the Christian traditions talk about the same thing—that God created many tribes so that they could travel the world and all get to know each other. Out of that sense of travelling and getting to know each other comes a sense of knowledge, just as the very best science outcomes come from the catalyst of difference introduced to something that is the same.

In homogenous, monocultural societies around the world, there are people who stand out. I had a Korean girl on an exchange program in Rockhampton some years ago say to me that the thing she found most astonishing about Australia was all the differences in the faces and the range of people in our community. She said—and I do not know if it is right—that in Seoul if you see someone who is not Korean you know they are a tourist. That is simply not true in Australia. In fact, I have the most culturally diverse of all the electorates in Queensland. I have people who have come from all the faiths and all the lands to be a part of the Australian family. It is critically important that every one of them feels a sense of confidence that they are connected to, belong to and have a responsibility for the business of Australia.

It is the time of the holy month of Ramadan for the Muslim community, and the Islamic Society of Algester throw a big barbecue on Saturday nights during Ramadan. The community fast between sun up and sun down—I do not know how they manage to do that—to test their faith; I do not know how they do not get cranky in the process. But many of my mates do not seem to have that problem. But at 10 o’clock on a Saturday night there is an enormous barbecue and everyone comes together. Last Saturday night at Algester mosque was a time of enormous sombre reflection on the hurt inflicted upon innocents in Bali both in 2002 and 2005 and upon the hurt inflicted upon those innocents in Pakistan in particular.

Members may have forgotten, but in my electorate was the first mosque anywhere in the world that was burnt or damaged as a result of the September 11 bombings of 2001, the Kuraby mosque. The Islamic Society of Kuraby responded by not blaming the broad Australian community for the actions of one person. Instead, they said, ‘Let us not condemn all Australians because someone has done something so silly as to torch the mosque.’ It was an old Anglican Church building in Kuraby which was used by the Islamic society as a mosque. They built a new mosque in its place. To their great credit, the people around Sunnybank, Eight Mile Plains and, indeed, Kuraby, came to the mosque the morning after the fire and apologised to Imam Yusuf Peer for what had occurred.

Equally, the Bosnian born community that worship at the Islamic Society of Eight Mile Plains—and they are not the only ones who worship there—have walked away from hurt and conflict based on ethnic and religious lines in their old country to find a real peace and certainty here in Australia. They cry tears of concern for Australians killed. They fight back tears of real concern for all who have been killed. That is their way. They have been through too much hurt themselves. They understand very clearly the sorts of bloodshed and torment that happen along ethnic and religious lines. I know that the Somalian born community equally have been through all of that, and they are in my own electorate.

I think Australians in reflecting upon the very poor conduct of a very small group of people in Bali need to remind themselves that we as a nation have to do better than those people that we are angry at. We are as a nation literate; we are as a nation intelligent; we are as a nation multicultural, culturally diverse in every possible way. Not only are we a nation which says to people new to Australia, 'You are free to be who you are,' but we challenge them on an everyday basis to be that for Australia. We are an example to the rest of the world of a nation where difference is celebrated and where people are challenged to contribute something that is perhaps different to the business of growing a stronger nation. We are as a nation not a country which pushes people to hide away in corners. It is absolutely critical that we do that—that we do not create a set of victims in our own society on top of the victims that exist in other societies, that we in fact go out of our way to cross the street and embrace the difference that might happen to be in our schools and in our suburbs, that we invite people to be part of community groups and challenge them to contribute all that they are to the business of Australia. That is what we do as a nation; we do it darn well, and so we must.

Australians are and must continue to be an example to those few with the loud voices and the big guns and the big thugs that violence and attack on innocents is not ever the way to get your point across, that this cowardly way of killing innocents should never be rewarded and that there is no place in paradise for Jihadists; there is no place in paradise for extremists; there is no place in paradise for those who set out to murder others to try to prove a point.

I make one point which some might think I should be careful to make, because the popular view is that maybe we should try to contain that difference and try to get people to assimilate—in other words, change who they are and fit into the mould. I make the point about the dress code that Australia does not have. We actually do not have a dress code in this country. If we did, we could introduce on-the-spot fines for bad fashion, I suspect. The other week I went and talked to students from the Islamic School of Brisbane and found bright and intelligent young ladies making choices. I said, 'Freedom of choice, as long as you freely make that choice—you are not being forced to wear dress codes that your parents or others are inflicting upon you—then I respect the choices you make.' One girl said, 'I wear a hijab because I want people to know of my virtue and of my love of God.' That was an interesting comment. I told her that it was a pretty proud statement to make and that she should continue to hold that view and congratulated her for it.

Whilst others might say, 'Let's not have this; let's do something different,' we need to understand the fundamental point that we do not have dress codes in Australia and that people who make and exercise their right to wear certain things must take a certain amount of responsibility for the decisions they make. We need to be very certain when we have discussions about dress that we are not in fact feeding into the fervid hate behind the few who perpetrated the crimes against us all in Bali. We need to make certain that we do not create victims in our own society. We need to make certain that we give a sense of attachment and commitment and connection and that we challenge people to be part of this nation and do not drive them away. We need to make certain that people have confidence in their belonging in Australia.

The way in which the Islamic community is now reacting strongly to violations of their religion by those few in other places and rightly condemning those actions needs to be noted in this place. We need Muslims in Australia to take charge of their religion and the public relations associated with their religion at this time. We need Muslims in Australia to stand ready as an example to the evil in other places that their actions are not going to change the way in which we are bringing people of all backgrounds and beliefs together for the business and best benefit of Australia as a nation.