



AFGHANISTAN CONFLICT

The Hon. A. PICCOLO (Light) (16:27):

Today, I would like to make some comments about the tragedy that is unfolding in Afghanistan. I do so from an electorate point of view and the view of the people in my electorate. There is no doubt that the tragedy in Afghanistan is a symbol of the failure of Western foreign policy. Quite simply, we got it wrong. We have other examples like Syria and Iraq.

There are now parallels with Vietnam in terms of the scenes we have seen at Kabul airport. The visual images we see are reminiscent, as I said, of Vietnam and also paint a very powerful picture of a desperate nation that will now be under the control of the Taliban government. In terms of its impact on the local population, we have heard the stories and the fears of the women and girls in that community and how their democratic rights will be wound back. We have

also heard the pleas of minority ethnic groups like the Hazara, who have been persecuted in that country for centuries and continue to be and with the Taliban returning will suffer even more. Obviously, this will lead to a displacement of people and a flow of refugees. As a world community, we need to do our bit. When this was unfolding in Afghanistan, one area I did not realise it would impact on was the local scene in terms of the veterans.

I recently received an email from a local veteran we were working on a project, apologising for not responding to my emails. He said, 'The Afghanistan thing has just been really tough on us. It really has been tough on us.' The veterans are questioning whether their sacrifice and the sacrifice of their colleagues was worthwhile, or was it in vain. The Vietnam veterans have relived what happened to them back in Vietnam at the end of the war—a similar situation. Thankfully, though—unlike with the Vietnam veterans—we understand that our

veterans have done their job as our nation has asked. The Vietnam veterans did not have that courtesy from our nation and still today they remember that. For that reason, we have to ensure that the royal commission finally announced by the Prime Minister to look into the wellbeing of our veterans is well resourced and well run.

It is now more important than ever that this royal commission is not established to hide the truth but actually designed to open up the truth to make sure we support our veterans. The rate of suicide among our veterans is unacceptable. It is more than 10 times the average rate for people in the community. I see it with my local veterans who come to speak to me about how they are doing, and this whole Afghanistan matter, sadly, has made it a lot worse.

I have also received emails from other South Australians who have married Afghani men and women and whose partners are now stuck in Afghanistan. They are obviously very concerned about the wellbeing of their loved ones.

Also, for the first time in terms of an overseas conflict, I have received emails from those you might call Anglo-Australians—people who were born here of Anglo background—who are very much concerned about people in Afghanistan. They have seen the horrors and that has moved them. A lot of South Australians have friends

and family in Afghanistan. I have also heard of the impact on South Australians who have an Afghani heritage and who have family and friends in Afghanistan.

They are asking what are we going to do to assist their family and friends to make sure they are not persecuted and do not become victims of the Taliban. We have the moral obligation to support these people who worked alongside the so-called coalition of the willing, which includes Australia.

The Hazara community would like the Commonwealth Government to take the following steps: grant immediate permanent protection to Afghans in Australia on temporary visas, particularly Hazara Afghans; increase particularly Afghani citizenship; and prioritise family reunions to make sure that we support our Afghani community. This is time for real leadership, and that is doing what is morally right for humanity.