



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

MOTIONS

Indonesia

SPEECH

Monday, 21 May 2018

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Monday, 21 May 2018	Source House
Page 162	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP	Question No.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (12:48): I commend the honourable member on the other side of the House for his linguistic ability in standing here and being able to speak Indonesian. I'm not sure if it was off the cuff or from paper, but nevertheless, it was most impressive. I wish I could understand it! I'm somewhat hesitant to endorse the words, other than to say full credit to it him.

Isn't it important for us to ensure that more Australians speak the languages of our nearest neighbours? I certainly endorse his enthusiasm for the work that is being done under the New Colombo Plan, to give young Australians the opportunity to work, live and, indeed, learn languages, in Indonesia as well as in other places, particularly across the Asia-Pacific region.

There is no doubt that once young Australians in particular have an opportunity to live and work in a foreign country and be immersed not just in their culture but also in their language then, yes, it does deepen the ties between those two countries but it also enriches Australia. It allows Australia to strengthen its hand as it continues to operate as part of the larger global political economy. Indeed, Indonesia is important; in fact, it is vital to us as Australians. My condolences go to the people of Indonesia, and I echo the sentiments already expressed by the opposition and by our Prime Minister in that regard.

Indonesia is a country of first-order importance to Australia, and that was confirmed in our foreign affairs white paper. To think this country is just on our doorstep; indeed, our northern archipelago is Indonesia. It has a vibrant economy and a vibrant democracy of now over 250 million people. It's quite extraordinary. This is why they are vital to us not just on economic grounds but also on security and strategic grounds. Economically, it's why we are negotiating the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. As part of ASEAN, we are negotiating with them for a regional comprehensive economic partnership. As someone who has worked and lived in Asia for much of his professional career pre-politics, I know that there is no substitute for experience on the ground, which is why there are far more business opportunities between the two countries and opportunities for young Australians and Australian small and medium businesses to make the most of the Indonesian marketplace, and also for us to be welcoming their businesses here to Australia.

Of course, our region is not as safe as we wish it were, which is why this relationship with Indonesia cannot be seen just on economic grounds; it must also be seen on strategic grounds, which is why, as a country, we are working so closely with Indonesia to address issues such as the fight against terrorism in particular. We, as a country, proudly operate as a sovereign nation, as a liberal, open democracy in a highly integrated and uncertain political environment internationally. As such, we, probably more than any other country in the world, need to ensure that our relationships are intact. If we look at our place in the world through the conventional wisdom of any economist or any political strategist, there is no larger country sitting in such close proximity to us than Indonesia. It's why that relationship needs to continue to be built. It's why I am eager to continue to support not just the foreign minister but of course the trade minister in trying to fast-track the negotiations for a comprehensive economic partnership. It's why we need to continue to work with ASEAN. While we ensure that our economy and our security ties are strengthened, let those people-to-people ties grow and let us speak their language as much as we encourage them to speak ours. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou): There being no further speakers, the debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.