

Legislative Council
Tuesday, 13 May 2014

AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE LEAGUE

Statement

HON LIZ BEHJAT (North Metropolitan)

[9.43 pm]: I rise this evening to bring to the attention of the house a matter that disturbs me greatly. It also disturbs my colleagues on this side of the house greatly. It disturbs this government that I represent greatly and I know for a fact that it also disturbs members of the opposition and other parties greatly. The matter that I am referring to is the rise of a group called the Australian Defence League in Western Australia and in Australia in general. A number of members would have been in receipt of a letter from Dr Rateb Jneid, the president of the Islamic Council of Western Australia, inviting members to attend a meeting that it will hold on 21 May to discuss this issue of the Australian Defence League. Unfortunately, I am not able to attend that meeting—I definitely would attend a meeting of this nature to discuss those issues that are greatly concerning our fellow Muslim citizens in this state—because I am attending a citizenship ceremony on that day, something that I am very proud to do, as I know that all members of this house are very proud to do. No doubt on that day I will be welcoming a few more Muslims as citizens of Australia. I am very proud to do that. I am not proud of seeing groups such as the Australian Defence League growing in support around this country. I want to take a moment to give some background about these far-right groups that are starting to raise their head in Australia. We know of groups such as Blood & Honour Australia that are backed by Mr Geert Wilders, who, in my opinion, has no place in Australia. I was very glad to see that his visit was blocked some time ago. In June 2012, the then Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests was asked to comment on a meet and greet that was planned by Blood & Honour Australia with regard to Mr Geert Wilders. The response at that time stated — ... growth of any group that promotes disunity is an issue for concern. It is the right of every Australian to express their views, however, with that right comes responsibility. An important aspect of that responsibility in a multicultural society such as Western Australia is respect for difference ... Western Australian Government has 'zero tolerance' to racism. Fairness and equality are key features of our society. Fairness includes freedom from prejudice, discrimination and exclusion on the basis of characteristics such as origins, perceived 'race', culture, religion, ethnicity and nationality. Equality is about the right of all members of our community to achieve their full potential and is equal before and under the law. Websites and views that promote ideas contrary to these values are not supported. Nothing has changed in our opinion since those comments were made that we would not hold true today. On 3 October 2012, our Premier, Hon Colin Barnett, stated that the far right Dutch politician Geert Wilders would not be welcome in Western Australia because he would offend Muslims and could trigger violent protests. That is something that none of us in this house wants to see happening in our country at the moment.

- 2 - The Australian Defence League is an anti-Islam far-right group that exists primarily on social media but with the intentions of forming a larger social movement. The group first appeared in New South Wales in early 2010. It was reported that this group initially formed as an informal project of the far right Australian Protectionist Party. This group is also affiliated with the English Defence League, an active far-right group known for football hooliganism, street marches and violence, again something that none of us in this place would condone. It is a registered not-for-profit organisation but at the moment it is unclear how it is organised. It largely exists on Facebook and other social media. According to its official website, its objective is to "defend the Australian people by maintaining our way of life" and to "protest and confront all those who seek to pervert our way of life, or segregate our communities". Our way of life encompasses the Muslim community. Our way of life encompasses the Hindu community. Our way of life encompasses the Buddhist community. Our way of life encompasses everybody here in Western Australia. In particular, the attacks that are currently occurring on Islamic

people in our community are to be abhorred in every way, shape and form. We have seen Muslim women in New South Wales, in particular, being stalked and maliciously photographed and then cyberbullied by Australian Defence League members. We know that there has been some activity of the Australian Defence League in our own defence forces, but action has been taken to weed out those sorts of people from our defence forces because they have absolutely no place in our society today. We are very proud of our multicultural history here in Western Australia. I share a delight in going to citizenship ceremonies with all members of this house, both government and opposition members, and we are all very quick to embrace the differences that we share. It is important that we recognise and respect our differences and get together in a very peaceful and tolerant way. There is absolutely no way that the actions of groups such as the Australian Defence League or the Australian Liberty Alliance, another group that comes under the Q Society of Australia, should be allowed to survive in Australia, and definitely not in Western Australia. This evening I wanted to go on the record and firmly say that I fully support the Islamic Council of Western Australia's call for action to be taken against these groups. I will read one part of the letter sent to me by Dr Jneid — Australian society was built on the foundation of "Advance Fair Australia" which we all take pride in. That is true. One thing that all those I come across in the Islamic community do take pride in is the fact that they are now citizens of Western Australia. Some of our sisters and brothers from these Muslim societies have come from war-torn countries or from countries where people do not enjoy the freedom that we have in the democracy that we share. That meeting will be held on 21 May at the Multicultural Services Centre of WA in View Street, North Perth at 5.30 pm. I urge members to try to attend that meeting to show their support for the Islamic Council of WA and its call to outlaw this group. Once and for all we need to try, in every way we can, to stamp out the hatred and vile things that groups such as the Australian Defence League are trying to promote in this country. I urge all members to note that the people who have come to live in Western Australia, who become Australian citizens, who have done the right thing, who have embraced our way of life, who follow our laws and who take their responsibilities seriously should be given all the protection that anyone who has been born in or who has come to this country should be given. I urge all members to use any opportunity they can to decry the actions of Mr Geert Wilders, the Australian Defence League, the Q Society of Australia and any other society that promotes racial hatred in the way that those groups do.