



**MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HON ALEXANDER DOWNER, MP**

TRANSCRIPTION: PROOF COPY E & OE

DATE: 9 November 2003

TITLE: Doorstop Interview, Adelaide Electorate Office, Minasa Bone, Saudi explosions.

FOREIGN MINISTER DOWNER: First of all, I just want to say something about the boat that arrived off the coast of Australia - off the coast of Melville Island on the fourth of November. It's known as SIEV 14. This boat has now returned to Indonesia, to the Port of Saumlaki, which is on the island of Yamdena. The boat was, as you know, off the coast of Australia. It was accompanied back to the edge of international waters by an Australian naval vessel, and then sailed through Indonesian waters to the Port of Saumlaki.

We have been in discussion - particularly me and my Department - with the Indonesians over the last few days about this boat. It was an Indonesian boat - an Indonesian flagged vessel. It had an Indonesian crew. And the Indonesians have been extremely constructive and co-operative in their dealings with us, and we appreciate very much the help that we've been given by the Indonesians.

I understand that the fourteen passengers and four crew are now in the care of the Indonesian police in Saumlaki, and officers from the International Organisation of Migration are on the island of Yamdena, and they're going to provide assistance to the fourteen passengers, should they wish to have assistance.

But this has been a - a very good illustration of how effective international cooperation between Australia and our neighbours - for that matter beyond - but between Australia and our neighbours has become over the last two years. We've had excellent cooperation from the Indonesian Government and from Indonesian officials, and more broadly the cooperation we've had from the Indonesians over the last two years is one of many reasons that we have only had two boats come close to or to the Australian coastline in this way since August 2001.

We've demonstrated a very clear point - that if you are strong in standing up to the people smugglers, people smugglers won't be able to make money out of Australia and out of our goodwill. And part of our strength is the strength of our border controls here in Australia, but part of our strength is the degree of cooperation we have with the Indonesian Government, and that's worked very well in this case.

QUESTION: This explosion in Saudi Arabia, Minister - what can you tell us?

DOWNER: Well, we understand that there was possibly more than one explosion at a compound in Saudi Arabia. In Riyadh. And a number of people have been killed, perhaps somewhere in the vicinity of twenty or thirty is the last I've heard. Around a hundred people injured. This is a compound which houses foreigners. Most of the foreigners in the compound are from neighbouring Arab countries. And so what this attack is, is an attack on



Arabs. This is an attack on Muslims. And it is becoming an increasing pattern now for Al Qaeda and other similar terrorist organisations to attack their own people, and to attack fellow Muslims.

And this illustrates a point about Al Qaeda and other similar terrorist organisations - that they're not just anti-Western, but they are opposed to moderate Muslim people as well. And I think this attack will cause a great sense of anger in Saudi Arabia, and in many parts of the Arab world, that just because the people staying in that compound were foreigners apparently meant that they were worthy of attack, and the foreigners who were killed were nearly all Arabs, it would appear.

Apparently in this compound there were only four people who were, if you like, European. All the rest - and I think Western European. I'm not sure whether there were any Americans there at all. And it just illustrates a point. The terrorists are increasingly turning on - on fellow Muslims. We see it in Iraq. We saw it in Indonesia with the Marriott Hotel bombing. We've seen it twice in Riyadh now over the last six months. And I think this kind of attack will do the terrorist cause a great deal of damage with the broader Arab community.

QUESTION: Minister, now that the Kurds are, as you say, in the care of the Indonesian police, what seems likely to become of them? [indistinct]

DOWNER: Well, it depends what they want to do, of course. They didn't apply for asylum when they were in contact with Australian authorities, or with the Australians themselves on Melville Island. So we don't know what precisely they'll want to do. They could - these are people from Turkey - these are Turks. So we're advised, and so they claim, so - you don't really know what they'll do.

But the International Organisation of Migration is in Yamdena - on the island of Yamdena. And they'll be talking to them, and they'll obviously establish what they want and what sort of claims they might make if they make any claims. But they haven't made any claims yet, to the best of my knowledge.

QUESTION: Why do you think that is, if they've come all this way? Or came all this way. Why wouldn't they apply for asylum?

DOWNER: Well, presumably - look, you can only make assumptions about this. I don't know the answer to that. They came from Turkey. They didn't come from some battle zone. But they - of course there is conflict between the Turkish Government and Kurdish minority. But why they came, I don't know. Why they would have been on board an Indonesian fishing boat, why they would have wanted to come to Australia - assuming they did want to come to Australia - we just don't know the answer to that and anything else would be idle speculation.

But I suppose I could make this point to you - if this was a people smuggling racket, then the people smugglers have been sent a very sharp message. And that message is you can't make easy money loading people onto dangerous little boats and sending them significant distances across the sea at great risk to their lives and succeed.



And the more the word gets out that people smugglers can't make money in that dangerous and immoral and what's more illegal way, the less people will be prepared to pay people smugglers on these kinds of dangerous adventures, if that's what this was.

QUESTION: There's a lot of press reaction from all sorts of people about the indecent haste that Melville Island was excised from the immigration zone. Is that a bit of overkill, do you think? I mean, a lot of people think it might be.

DOWNER: Well, I mean the Labor Party seems to think that the [indistinct] has not been taking this issue seriously. They've been making jokes about how these people could have been coming to Australia for the World Cup Rugby, and such frivolous remarks. But you know, they - they illustrate a point that they don't take the issue seriously full stop.

Now, the point about the excision of Melville Island is that you have to make sure that there are appropriate deterrents in place. Otherwise you will get a flood of people coming to Australia illegally, because they know that we're soft on dealing with people smuggling. So Melville Island may have been targeted very specifically by these people, and in those circumstances we want to make sure that we make life as difficult as we can for people smugglers who target particular parts of Australia, or islands of Australia. And that's why we've excised it.

Look, we - we make no apology for the fact that we have always taken a very tough stand on this issue of people smuggling. And I know that the Labor Party and the Democrats, and the Greens think we should be more accommodating for people smugglers' activities. I know they think that. And they're entitled to that point of view. But I think that it is quite contrary to Australia's national interest to be weak on this issue, because if you're weak on it, you will end up with very substantial numbers of people trying to get to Australia illegally, because the people smugglers will be able to boast that they can succeed. And I think that will undermine our border security policies, and that's why, with the excision of Melville Island, we've taken a strong decision.

QUESTION: Could it be said that the Kurds on Melville Island hadn't for some reason applied ...

DOWNER: Well, there's not a - just if I could stop you for a minute. There isn't a country called Kurdistan. There's a country - there are Kurdish people who live in different countries, but as I understand it these people, whatever ethnic minority they may be from, these people came from Turkey.

QUESTION: [indistinct]

DOWNER: It's important to be correct though.

QUESTION: The Turkish Kurds that apparently for some strange reason didn't apply for asylum on Melville Island. Were they given the opportunity? Because there are reports that they were denied - correct me if I'm wrong - they were denied legal assistance. And I'm just wondering if there's a complete media blackout - there were reports that they were denied legal assistance. There were also reports that Melville Islanders were forbidden to talk to the



media. How do we know that these people did not in fact make a verbal application, and that has been not passed on to the media? How do we know that?

DOWNER: I haven't heard - I don't know about what's passed on to the media or not, but I haven't heard that they have made an application, be it an oral or a written application. And I've been advised that they haven't made an application. I can only pass on to you the advice I have. Whatever the media knew or didn't know, I'm telling you what I know. If they made any kind of legal application, well I just make the point to you that a legal application was made on their behalf in the Northern Territory Supreme Court, and that was thrown out.

Look, the simple point here, and let's be absolutely clear about this - it seems, but we can't be sure - it seems possible that these people had a fishing boat provided by a people smuggler. And that they paid somebody, knowing - knowing that it was illegal to come to Australia without a visa.

It's illegal to come to Australia without a visa. You can come to Australia, and tens of thousands of people visit Australia, and some migrate, every year. But they are all required to get a visa. So we know who they are, we know something about them, and they can follow due process.

Now, if these people were trying to come here illegally, then they may have paid a people smuggler, and in paying a people smuggler they knew that what they were doing was an endeavour to break Australian law. And in those circumstances we are right to uphold Australian laws, and to make sure that we are as efficient and as effective as possible in doing that.

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