

Tony Abbott calls for religious reformation of Islam

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Former prime minister Tony Abbott says he has been inundated by people urging him to stay in parliament.

Tony Abbott has urged Australians to express greater confidence in Western civilisation, declaring “all cultures are not equal” and calling for a religious “reformation” of Islam.

In a broad-ranging interview broadcast this evening with Sky News’s Paul Murray, the conservative former prime minister gave little indication he was preparing to retire, saying he had received “thousands and thousands” of messages urging him to remain in parliament.

“I haven’t entirely resolved it (the question of his future),” Mr Abbott said. “It’s something I will discuss with my family, particularly over the Christmas period.

“Public life is a vocation, if I may say so; being a member of parliament, including a backbench member of parliament, is a noble and an honourable calling.

“I still have a contribution to make to public life.”

Turning to questions of terrorism, Mr Abbott backed cabinet minister Josh Frydenberg’s view that recent violence reflected “a problem within Islam”.

“We’ve got to work closely with live-and-let-live Muslims because there needs to be, as President (Abdel Fattah) Al-Sisi of Egypt has said, a religious revolution inside Islam,” he said.

“All of those things that Islam has never had – a Reformation, an Enlightenment, a well-developed concept of the separation of church and state – that needs to happen, but we can’t do it; Muslims have got to do this for themselves, but we should work with those who are pushing in that direction.

“The other thing that’s needed is a restoration of cultural self-confidence in those who are supporters of Western civilisation. All cultures are not equal and, frankly, a culture that believes in decency and tolerance is much to be preferred to one which thinks that you can kill in the name of God, and we’ve got to be prepared to say that.”

Mr Abbott said there were “encouraging straws in the wind” about the international resolve to deal with Islamic State “very, very forcefully”.

“Certainly President Obama’s decision a week or so back to put those special operations forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria to fight – not just to advise – I think is a very encouraging sign that finally there is developing a real will to win this because in the end Islamic State can’t be contained; it has to be destroyed,” he said.

Mr Abbott refused to resile from the “tough but necessary” policies that formed the centrepiece of his first budget including the GP co-payment, cutting the indexation rate of pensions and university fee deregulation.

“All of these things, I think, were justifiable and right. Obviously in the circumstances of the aftermath of that budget they struggled but nevertheless they were all very defensible policies and I’m happy to continue to defend them,” he said.

Mr Abbott offered opinions on the following topics:

* The knighting of Prince Phillip was a “bit of an own goal”; “I take full responsibility for that, absolute full responsibility”;

* The reason for defending his legacy was that “it has been the foundation upon which the new government is now building”;

* Recent contradictions of Julie Bishop over his exit: “I will correct the record when the record is falsified”;

* Bill Shorten had been “very constructive on national security .. I wish Labor had taken a similar approach to budget repair”;

* Work for the dole: “what was so wrong with saying it is not right for kids to leave school and go on the dole?”

* The GP co-payment: ‘what was so wrong with seeking a modest co-payment for visits to the GP?’

* “I am humbled and exhilarated by the support I have received over the years.”