

PRESS STATEMENT

11 September 2016
Canberra
Prime Minister
E&OE

PRIME MINISTER:

Good afternoon. Last night on returning to Australia I received a report from the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator on the attack in Minto yesterday afternoon.

I have this morning received a further report and briefing from the Director-General of ASIO, the Commissioner of the Federal Police, the Justice Minister and Minister assisting me on counter-terrorism and the Counter Terrorism Coordinator.

It is alleged by the police that yesterday around 4 o'clock a 22-year-old man attacked a 59-year-old man in the street in Minto with a knife, inflicting very serious injuries.

The victim is in a serious condition and our thoughts and prayers are with him and his family. We hope that he makes a fast and complete recovery. The assailant has been charged with terrorism offences and attempted murder and you would have seen a more detailed briefing on the event by Deputy Commissioner Burns from NSW.

This attack yesterday occurred on the eve of the 15th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. That was an attack, a terrorist attack which changed the world. It was the largest mass casualty attack on American soil, of that kind. It saw John Howard invoke the ANZUS Treaty and it saw us stand then, as we stand today, shoulder to shoulder with free nations in the battle against terrorism. We have been shoulder-to-shoulder in that battle ever since.

At the G20 meetings and the East Asia Summit meetings this issue of terrorism and its changing nature, was front and centre. Every leader understood that continued strong economic growth, the prosperity of our nations, our prospects indeed, depend on stability. One of the great threats is terrorism. Last week I spoke about the way in which the threat of terrorism is changing - 9/11 was an elaborate attack, planned months in advance by al-Qaeda. What we've seen, what we saw yesterday, and what we have seen on Australian soil and elsewhere in the world is increasingly this type of lone actor attacks. I described this phenomenon last week in my Security Statement to the House; as Daesh is rolled back in the Middle East, as they lose territory, as they lose their forces, as more of their fighters are killed, they increasingly seek to spread their poison of terrorism beyond the borders of their so-called caliphate. So the nature of terrorism is changing, it's evolving and we have to change in our response too. That is why following the Nice Attack I asked the Coordinator of Counter-Terrorism to study that attack, the lone actor nature of it and also the way in which a large vehicle was used, and to draw the experience from that back so we can learn from it. It is critical that we continue to respond in as agile a fashion as our enemies seek to attack us.

Let me say something too about 9/11 and its links to what happened yesterday in Minto. At one level they seem very different, 15 years apart, very different events. But connecting them

both is a violent Islamist ideology which perverts the religion of Islam and seeks to destroy and threaten our way of life. What also is consistent or common between them is heroism. We remember, when we mourn those who died in the 9/11 attacks we also honour the heroism of those who rushed to the aid of the victims in New York and in Washington – the heroes of that hour. We honour them. Next week in New York I will visit the 9/11 Memorial with Lucy and honour those who lost their lives both as victims of the attack and also as victims of the attack while they were seeking to rescue those who had been assaulted by that terrorist attack.

You know in Minto yesterday there was an owner of some premises who sheltered the 59-year-old man who was assaulted. There was a bystander who confronted this assailant with his knife and managed to keep him at bay until the police arrived. Then there were the police who defended public safety courageously, brought the assailant under control and placed him under arrest. So we honour those heroes of today, just as we honour the heroes of 911.

So it is a challenge that we have to face and we have to recognise its risk. The terrorist threat is described or defined as probable. We saw recently a call by ISIL in their magazine for attacks in Australia. We can't say whether this particular call inspired this individual, those matters are still being investigated. But we have to recognise that terrorists, our enemies, will become more agile in the way they see to attack us. We must be agile in the way we respond.

Intelligence is absolutely critical. It is more important than ever, so I want to say to all Australians, if you see or become aware of something suspicious or unusual – if you know someone or believe someone could pose a threat to the community – please call the National Security Hotline 1800 1234 00. The Police and our security agencies are the best in the world, believe me. We have the finest police and intelligence agencies but they need strong intelligence. So it's vitally important that we bind together, we don't allow the terrorists to divide us, we don't allow them to turn one part of the community against another, that we bind together and when we see something suspicious or are concerned about something suspicious, let the people whose job it is to defend us, let them know.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister you mentioned that the call by ISIS for attacks, there have been arrests in Sydney, this attack. Is there any plan to increase the current terror level?

PRIME MINISTER:

The terror threat level is under review all the time but there certainly has been no move to change that today in response to this. "Probable" is the level at which it is appropriately set given the current circumstances.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister the Government is debating both the Omnibus Bill and the personal tax cuts...

PRIME MINISTER:

Do you mind if we just stick with this security issue and then we can come back to other matters?

JOURNALIST:

You have some more anti-terrorism legislation.

PRIME MINISTER:

We do.

JOURNALIST:

Its coming into the Parliament but in light of what's recently happened do you think you need more review of the legislative armoury?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we review it all the time Michelle. There are important pieces of legislation and the Attorney spoke about that earlier today and I spoke about it last week. Firstly, legislation increasing or expanding the scope of control orders so that – regrettably – it has to apply to people as young as 14. It's regrettable that we have to do that but that is the case as we've seen from experience. Also of course the post-sentence detention measures so that if people who are in prison for terrorist offences have failed to de-radicalise and a court concludes they remain a threat to society then they will remain in detention. A similar approach is taken as you know to sex offenders. Of course we will be changing the legislation to ensure that our targeting is consistent with the full scope of international law in the Middle East theatre – everywhere, but relevantly in the Middle East theatre.

We review the laws all the time. I think the most important thing to draw from this though is the critical importance of community solidarity. The one thing that is of most value to our police, our security services, is good intelligence. We need to know. The more they know the better they are able to defend us. So that's why it's very important to emphasise the critical significance of community solidarity and recognising that we've all got an interest in being alert to threats in our community.

Now what we're seeing, and again I talked about this last week – but we are seeing cases of people who are mentally ill, are vulnerable from that point of view, being inspired, motivated in some way, to violent acts of terror by some of this extremist propaganda.

It is critically important that if you believe there is somebody who could be at risk, to let our security services know.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister one of the pieces of legislation you mentioned would allow people who have served their jail term to be kept in detention, kept in jail essentially, if they're judged to continue to present a risk to the community. The Attorney said today that could go on

indefinitely. How does that work in a practical sense, would there be a yearly review of a particular person's case, a ten-yearly review? Surely there are human and civil rights to consider?

PRIME MINISTER:

There will be a mechanism for review and it is modelled very much on the legislation that applies in most state jurisdictions to sex offenders and was considered and upheld by the High Court in – I believe – Fardon's case.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think that there is some reluctance from the Muslim community in particular to come forward with information when the situation may be ambiguous, they worry what might happen to relatives if they approach the authorities?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well Michelle that's why it is very important for leaders to be always emphasising inclusiveness. We are a big, successful – very successful – multicultural nation. The most successful multicultural nation in the world in my judgement, but I would say that, I'm the Prime Minister. But I believe we are. I believe objectively we are. That multicultural nation includes many Muslims, we have people from every possible faith and race and background and so forth. We have a common cause in protecting ourselves and protecting our neighbours and that is why cooperation is very important, as you've heard Director Generals of ASIO say again and again, that collaboration and engagement with the Muslim community is a very important part of it.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think that Muslim community leaders are doing enough though to be part of Team Australia?

PRIME MINISTER:

That's a very provocative question, can I say to you that we are committed to very strong engagement with the Muslim community at every level.

JOURNALIST:

Is the renewed discussion of changing 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act a factor in the relationship with that community?

PRIME MINISTER:

That is another issue. As you know it is not on the Government's agenda.

JOURNALIST:

But there is a lot of talk about it, including from your own backbench in the Senate.

PRIME MINISTER:

I've said to you it's not. I understand that there is a lot of talk about many things. This is a Parliament, it's a place for talk and discussion. But it is not on the Government's agenda, we've got many other things to deal with at this time.

JOURNALIST:

This week you are debating the Omnibus Savings Bill and also the tax cuts for people earning over \$80,000. Is it fair to be hitting some of the lowest income earners in society with some of the changes in the Omnibus Bill, for example the Energy Supplement Payment, at the same time as going ahead with tax cuts for wealthy Australians and do you really expect Labor to support those cuts to fund the Government's agenda?

PRIME MINISTER:

We expect the Labor Party to support all the measures they supported during the election campaign. I believe the Australian people expect that too.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister did you promise church leaders privately that you would provide taxpayer funding for the 'yes' and 'no' case in a same-sex marriage plebiscite campaign?

PRIME MINISTER:

There has been extensive consultation, mostly I might say by the Attorney General, with advocates both for the 'yes' and the 'no' case in respect of the same sex plebiscite. I'm not going to get into a debate about a private meeting and a private discussion but I just draw your attention to what I've said publically, which is that the details of the plebiscite will be determined by the Cabinet and then be subject to the usual Party Room procedures. Then of course it will have to find support in both Houses of Parliament. The second point I'd make is that any public funding, whatever the nature and terms of it may be, will be scrupulously equal and fair as between the 'yes' case and the 'no' case. As you would expect. But the nature, the extent of any funding is a matter for the Cabinet's consideration.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister what do you say about John Howard's argument that there should be IR and taxation on the agenda at the moment?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I was just asked about taxation measures so it's clearly on the agenda. We took the largest reforms to superannuation in at least a decade, put them in the Budget and took them to the election. We took the largest reforms to business tax in at least that long, you'd have to go back many years to find the last reduction in company tax. In terms of IR I think you mentioned, the whole trigger for the double dissolution election were two important pieces of Industrial legislation, the restoration of the Building and Construction Commission and the Registered Organisations Bill - the former to restore the rule of law to the construction sector,

the latter, the Registered Organisations Bill to ensure that officials of both unions and employer organisations have the same obligations of accountability, transparency and so forth as directors of companies do. So tax and IR are very much on the agenda and featured as you know, very much in the election. Because they underpin our national economic plan, the object of which of course is to drive more growth and more jobs and which is succeeding. Don't forget, GDP growth to the last year, 3.3 per cent, the envy of comparable nations, higher than any G7 economy. Remarkable, the fact that we have been able, through the hard work of millions of Australians, supported by clear economic leadership from my Government, the fact that we've been able to continue to successfully transition from a mining construction boom – which had obviously fuelled up our economy and economic growth – then as it declined, there were reams of economists, convoys of economists who said Australia was going to have a hard landing. What we've seen is continued strong economic growth. That is because of our Free Trade Agreements, it's because of our Innovation Agenda, it's because of our commitment to Australian industry, it's because of our support for business. You see that in the confidence figures. Business and consumer confidence has remained high. That is because Australians recognise that our economic plan is the pathway to deliver stronger growth and more jobs.

On that note, thank you very much.