

I am an Afghan Australian woman and I speak today because I want the Australian people to hear a different story.

The last months have been very difficult for the Afghan community in Australia. We are a small community and many terrible things have happened to us.

The two issues that this election is about - the war in Afghanistan and the refugee issue - affect my community directly. We have had war in our country for twenty years. Many of us have escaped Afghanistan because of this terror. We have come to Australia to find peace, to find freedom.

It is hard to understand why there is so much hatred towards refugees.

What is happening to my people at the moment in Afghanistan and in Australia breaks my heart. It breaks my heart as a mother, as a woman who believes in human rights. I cannot watch the news anymore to see the babies burned by the bombs. To see the women crying because their children have drowned in the sea. To hear about the children starving. It is very hard to speak because I feel the sadness and the tragedy of what I see. In war, it is the women and children who must pay with their blood.

I feel very sad about the politics in this election. Refugees have been through too much already. They risk their lives leaving their homes and their families. When we chase refugees back to the sea with the navy boats, we are making their lives worse than before, because we take away the only thing that they have left. We take away their hope.

But we also take away their rights under international law.

When we put the children and women in detention, we take away their freedom, the very thing they came here for. In detention, the children don't get education. The only thing they learn is that Australia is a prison and that Australians don't care. Detention is a violent experience for many women and children.

For the asylum seekers on the boats, many have suffered and many have died. We know of a baby who was born in Australian waters in one of the broken boats and died three days later because of the lack of medical attention. We do not see this

mother's sadness in the newspapers. We only hear from the government that she is a queue jumper and illegal. This language is very dangerous because it turns refugees into something to be hated, to be feared. We need to change this language because we can see how refugees have become easy targets for violence.

I know that many Australians have a very negative idea about Islam, about refugees, and the Afghan people.

For Afghan women in Australia, we are aware of the anti muslim feeling here. Many Muslim women have a fear to go into the public space. We know women and girls have been attacked and spat at. This violence in the Australian community has made many women stay in their homes. The silence about attacks on women and girls must be broken. War on terrorism is no excuse for attacking muslim communities. Afghan refugees have escaped terror. Racism is just another form of terror.

I speak today because I am worried about the future. Do we want our children to grow up to hate? To think that it is normal to hate? If we are silent about the violence of war, the violence of racism, we are part of the problem. We must speak strong so that our children have a future.