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**Australia's stand on terrorism and foreign fighters: Op-ed of the High Commissioner in the Daily Star**

A column in these pages on 24 September asserted that Australia's proposed counter-terrorism legislation is 'anti-Muslim'.

That is wrong. Let's be clear: the Australian Government is acting to disrupt a growing terrorist threat so Australians of all backgrounds remain free to go about their lives in safety.

ISIL and similar terrorist organisations have plainly, violently and repeatedly demonstrated the international danger they pose. Earlier this week ISIL leaders called on supporters to kill people in a number of countries including Australia.

This incitement echoes statements by such groups going back years. It underlines their enduring hostility to our values: values shared by much of the international community, and embraced by millions of migrants to Australia from dozens of countries for generations.

The difference we see in ISIL is the growing threat its foreign fighters pose to their countries of origin. About 80 nations have citizens fighting with ISIL. We assess that about 60 Australians are on the ground fighting in Iraq and Syria and about 100 more are providing funding and facilitation.

We must face this threat squarely, alongside other countries facing the same threat. As the gathering international response to ISIL demonstrates, many countries have come to the judgment that we are in this together. This is certainly Australia's view.

The Australian Government's proposed counter-terrorism legislation will better enable us to prevent and disrupt terrorist threats, by creating a new offence of entering or remaining in, without a legitimate purpose, a declared area overseas where listed terrorist organisations are engaging in hostile activities.

This new measure would not prevent a person from travelling to a declared area for a legitimate purpose. Legitimate purposes include providing humanitarian aid, performing official government or UN duties, visiting family, working as a professional journalist, and appearing before a court.

Nor would this new measure, as some suggest, reverse the onus of proof. Rather, it would create a new offence for a person to intentionally enter a declared area without good reason. Guilt for this offence would not be presumed. It would be for the prosecution to disprove any evidence of legitimate purposes.

This work is not about targeting any one community. It's not about religion, it's not about what people wear - it's about dealing with a criminal threat.

As we move forward with new legislation, we also recognise that the strongest defence against violent extremism lies within the Australian community itself. The Australian Government will do all it can to support leaders in the community play a critical role in turning people away from violent extremism.

The great majority of Australians see themselves as committed members of Australia's successful, forward-looking multicultural society. That being who we are - and like nations taking a common stand against terrorism - the great majority of Australians see that we are in this together.

Greg Wilcock  
Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh