

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING : 19 October 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(SE15/014) - (ABYAN) - No access to interpreters - Programme 1.4: IMA Onshore Management

Senator Hanson-Young, Sarah (L&CA 52) asked:

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: One of the issues that Abyan has raised herself is that she did not have access to interpreters during the interactions that she had with medical staff. The minister says that she did. Is that because he is referring to an interpreter via the telephone?

Mr Skill: I would have to confirm that. I have been advised that interpreters were available. I do not know whether that was on the phone or in person. I would have to check that.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Was there an interpreter available 24 hours a day while Abyan was in Villawood Detention Centre who speaks her language?

Mr Skill: That would be subject to the availability of the TIS—translation availability.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: So you do not know the answer to that question. It is an issue that the minister has wanted to debate, and you do not know the facts

Mr Skill: I know the facts that there were interpreters present at the vast majority of the interactions or consultations.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: This is what I am asking. Present in what form?

Senator KIM CARR: The issue is what language would these interpreters have been speaking.

Mr Pezzullo: If Mr Skill does not have that information at his fingertips, we have already agreed, subject to—

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Mr Skill, can you get that information so that we can get it out tonight, please?

CHAIR: Hang on, Senator Hanson-Young. Let the secretary finish what he is saying and then we will come to you.

Mr Pezzullo: I am becoming increasingly concerned to ensure that there seems to be both media interactions here—the minister was at pains to state this morning, as I heard him, that he is reluctant to get into too much detail, but there were certain pertinent facts that legal representatives had put on the record that he wished to engage on. There appears to be correspondence that is circulating today, I think you have referenced it yourself. I have been sitting at his table since nine o'clock so I have not had a chance to review that myself. My preference is to take this on notice, which is not to return to this matter today with an incomplete, impartial and potentially erroneous chronology for this committee. This is a sensitive, delicate matter. The less that is spoken about it in what I would call real time—with lawyers sending letters, Mr Skill having to take advice and respond to those letters—on the day that we are sitting the better. I would prefer to come back on notice. You asked some questions about the chronology last week and there might be some elements that Mr Skill can acquit today, because it is now of a historical record. For matters that are breaking today, I would like the chance to review those matters myself. My preference would be to take them notice, if that pleases the committee

Answer:

While in Australia and before her return to Nauru on 16 October 2015, Abyan met with IHMS on nine occasions and once with a general practitioner and nurse at the clinic where the termination procedure had been scheduled to occur.

Accredited telephone interpreting services were used at five of the nine IHMS consultations/reviews, as well as the consultation/review with the non-IHMS clinic. Accredited telephone interpreting services are used widely in health and medical interactions across the Australian community.

On occasions where an interpreter was not used, due to the unavailability of a Somali telephone interpreter at the time consultations occurred, each clinician considered that Abyan's English language ability was sufficient for the purpose of the consultation/review. Abyan consented to these consultations/reviews.