

ALIER CHOL RIAK — TRIBUTE

Statement

HON AYOR MAKUR CHUOT (North Metropolitan) [6.25 pm]: I rise to talk about Alier Chol Riak, a Western Australian who was murdered at Docklands in Melbourne a few weeks ago, on 13 March. His tragic death was very painful to his family, whom I know. Family and friends who knew him remember him as a very lovely young man. Alier Chol Riak was an accomplished young man with a fine character. He was a rising basketball player and the pride of our South Sudanese community. He came from a wonderful, loving and proud family of Chol Riak. Alier's memorial was held at John Septimus Roe Anglican Community School in Mirrabooka on 26 March. It was attended by Dave Kelly, the Minister for Youth; Meredith Hammat, the member for Mirrabooka; and Dr Anne Aly, the member for Cowan. Also in attendance were John Aciek, president of the South Sudanese community in Perth, as well as family, friends, many members of the South Sudanese community and, of course, Alier's sporting community.

I wish to share a little bit about Alier. He was born in Kenya in a refugee camp. His parents are Ayen Malek and James Chol Riak. The family now lives in Ellenbrook. Alier was an excellent basketball player and he attended John Septimus Roe in Mirrabooka. I will quote some of the words that were shared around by Alier's colleagues. This is a quote from his school —

He was an inspiring young man and student. He loved giving back to his community and came back to visit each year to reconnect with staff and talk to our Basketball students and run skills sessions with them.

Alier was a valued member of our community and made deep connections with his fellow classmates and staff. He was a leader and a passionate sportsman who always had a basketball in his hands.

We are deeply saddened to know a young man with such a bright future, has passed away under such tragic circumstances.

Alier played for the Warwick Senators and then coached them. He inspired many young people through this sport. He made other migrant youths feel like there was a place for them in Australia. Alier earned a basketball scholarship to the United States, which is very difficult to do. He went to Minnesota to play basketball and study a bachelor of arts degree at Winona State University. He finished university in 2021. Upon his return to Australia, he signed up to play for the Darwin Salties in the National Basketball League, division 1, north. But, sadly, he died before he could even wear his uniform. The last thing that he and his new head coach, Matt Flinn, discussed was how excited they both were to start this journey together. In Matt's words —

“He had such a raw passion that shone through every time we spoke about basketball and life—I told him to select his flights and get moving, he was pumped.

Basketball Western Australia's general operations manager, Adam Bowler, described Alier as someone who was not only a talented young basketball player, but also a great character. Alier was a former WA high-performance state team athlete and a valued employee with Basketball WA, working as a games controller.

In March, Alier visited Melbourne to celebrate his twenty-third birthday with his elder brother Kuol, who was 26 years old, and a girlfriend who lived in Melbourne. As he and his brother were leaving a venue, they were attacked by a group of young men. It was a very sad moment because Alier had just turned 23. Alier and his brother were injured, and, sadly, Alier lost his life that same night. Six men were aged between 19 and 22 years have been charged with stabbing and killing Alier. Naturally, the family wants justice. The first court hearing is scheduled for 28 July. A lot of things have been said about African youth violence in Melbourne. Much has been done to improve things; still more needs to be done. We must continue to find ways to heal intergenerational grief and trauma that occurs within culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We must engage youth from CALD backgrounds in positive pursuits in the wider community. Only then will no more lives be so tragically lost, as was Alier's.

As a mother of good, loving boys, and as someone who knew Alier's family quite well, it is hard to understand what makes a group of our young people attack each other, including those who come from their own community. Sometimes I question: Is it bad parenting, drugs or mental illness, or is it a deep personal crisis of identity and belonging? What can be done? We can do plenty; we must not give up on our children. I believe that the community is a powerful healer in this situation. As a proud community that respects life, the South Sudanese community wants to work together with the wider community; for instance, African community leaders here in Western Australia are keen to work together with the government to help at-risk youth. The Organisation of African Communities WA offers mentorship programs like Stop the Violence and Mentor Me ReConnect and works with Edith Cowan University, the Western Australia Police Force, the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and the Office of Multicultural Interests.

Stop the Violence is a training program focused on identifying what violence is, creating awareness on how to stop it both within and outside African communities, especially amongst youth. Mentor Me ReConnect is a culturally

appropriate mentoring program designed to address assault and violence, antisocial behaviour, alcohol and drug-related crimes and low participation rates in higher education among young people of African background. CALD communities need more police officers like Sergeant Don Emanuel-Smith, who was recognised as WA's top cop in 2011 for his work establishing relationships within African and multicultural communities. Even today he goes into CALD communities to develop trust with Muslim, Burmese, Vietnamese and African leaders and other members.

Mostly, I believe it is how we behave in our families that ensures our children choose a path into adulthood that is life affirming. No doubt, it is hard work. I applaud the work being done in WA to help our youth, and I am sure that there is a lot of work being done in Melbourne, too. We still need more funding to develop and expand mentorship programs. Sports, policing and justice programs are needed to serve CALD communities, particularly African youth. Please do not let Alier Chol Riak's death be in vain.

Rest in peace, gentle soul.