

Let Priya and Nades and their family stay

A coalition of NSW justice and peace organisations today continued their campaign to bring the Tamil family currently being held on Christmas Island back to the Australian mainland. Following a court decision that further delayed a finding on this matter, the organisations called on Prime Minister Scott Morrison to bring the family back to a community setting while the court process continues.

Ms Gillian Hunt, Chairperson of the Pitt Street Uniting Church said 'This is a clear example of where we must listen to Jesus. His teaching: 'let the little children come unto me' compels us to show compassion to Kopika and Tharunicaa, and let them and their parents stay in mainland Australia with access to medical services while the court process continues.'

The General Secretary of the NSW Council of Churches, the Very Reverend Fr Dr Shenouda Mansour said 'We believe that Australians want people who are seeking asylum to be treated fairly. The Government can help Australians reach an understanding of the facts, and why it is fair and right to let them stay in Australia.'

Ministerial Discretion – why it must be used

Mr Phil Glendenning, Director of the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education said 'There is in our law a provision for Ministerial Discretion in cases where the law alone does not deliver a just outcome. This is such a case. And intervene he must.'

He further said 'We do not need to live in fear. We acknowledge that if the Minister exercises his discretion in this case, there may be concerns that it would be a precedent for future similar cases. However, the law provides that each case is considered on its merits, and so we do not think that a decision by Minister David Coleman will compromise interpretation of the law. That is, each case is weighed on its merits, and as each case is different, one cannot predict the outcome.'

Conclusion – call to the Government to act with compassion

Mr Glendenning said, 'It is important to remember that if Priya is deported she will be a stateless person. She has no documentation in Sri Lanka. Another reason to intervene'.

Father Shenouda said that representatives of the peace and justice coalition had invited the Prime Minister to discuss the best way forward, and how to build community support for a just and fair outcome.

Signatories and Contacts

NSW Ecumenical Council – The Reverend Dr Raymond Williamson OAM (President), and the Very Reverend Fr Dr Shenouda Mansour (General Secretary) – 0418 713 733

Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children, NSW – Gaby Judd (Coordinator)

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Pax Christi Australia – Fr Claude Mostowik – 0411 450 953 and Wies Schuiringa (Co-Convenors NSW Ecumenical Council Peace and Justice Commission)

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The Josephite Justice Network (Sisters of St Joseph) – Sister Jan Barnett