

Let Priya and Nades and their family stay

The command to love others as we love ourselves is not, of course, a uniquely Christian expression; rather, it is evidence of a universal truth – we cannot diminish others without diminishing ourselves.

- Father Rod Bower, Archdeacon for Justice Ministries, Anglican Diocese of Newcastle (The Saturday Paper, September 7-13 2019, p 7).

We, the organisations that have issued this statement, call on the Australian Federal Government to show compassion and empathy for Priya, Nades, Kopika and Tharunicaa – the Tamil family who have been adopted by the community of Biloela. The children born to this precious family are Australians. They belong here.

We know that Australians are fair, they want everyone to have the same chance in life. We are sad at the division being sown in our communities over this situation.

We think the Australian people understand that policies are there for governing us - to keep us safe and secure - and at the same time, discretion is there to help in individual cases, such as this Tamil family that has called Biloela home.

Australia is not only rich in natural resources; it is rich in its moral compass of love and compassion.

Australia needs the leadership of our Prime Minister at this time. We call on you, Prime Minister Scott Morrison, to build our nation's understanding of itself as compassionate and fair. We call upon you to explain to those who do not understand the details of this situation that granting Priya, Nades, Kopika and Tharunicaa refugee status will build a future of diversity, acceptance and love.

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. Priya's and Nades' children were born in Australia, they know no other world other than Australia, and their family has been accepted by an Australian community who regard them as important and valued members of that community. It is for cases like this that the Minister is given a discretionary power to intervene. And intervene he must.

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.

Now is the time to act. Let Priya, Nades, Kopika and Tharunicaa return to a place of safety on the Australian mainland. Let them be welcomed as refugees, so they can become Australian citizens.

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Signatories and Contacts

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The Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education – Phil Glendenning, Director

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

Church Council, Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sydney

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Justice and Peace Centre

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