



MEDIA RELEASE

Interfaith Service on Asylum Seekers and Refugees 10 October 2019

A group 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.

To encourage the Government to bring the family back to a community setting while the court process continues, the NSW Ecumenical Council and the Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sydney, are hosting an Interfaith Service on Asylum Seekers and Refugees. The Service will be held at the Pitt Street Uniting Church in central Sydney on Thursday afternoon, 10 October 2019, 5.15-7.30pm.

Many of Australia's varied faith traditions will be participating, including representatives of the Buddhist, Hindu, Jain and Jewish traditions, along with Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Quaker (Society of Friends) and Uniting Church participants. In the Service, participants will pray and reflect, and will ask the Australian Government for a more compassionate approach for refugees and asylum seekers in Australia as well as contributing more to regional support for these people.

Fr Claude Mostowik msc, President of Pax Christi Australia 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 Tharunicaa 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 for the family. He also invited people to sign a petition and share it with their friends and family.

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 For Refugees, NSW – Gaby Judd (Coordinator)

The Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education – Phil Glendenning, Director – 0413 013 758

Pax Christi Australia – Fr Claude Mostowik – 0411 450 953 and Wies Schuiringa (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 – Fr Claude Mostowik – 0411 450 953

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