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*A Lesson for Australia on Love and Community:
Can the Town of Biloela Help Free Their Tamil Friends from
Australia's Border Regime?*

One morning, in the early hours of March 2018, when Nadesalingam, Priya and their two Australian-born daughters, Kopika and Tharunicaa were still asleep they were arrested by Australian Border Force officers in a dramatic and traumatic raid on their home in Biloela, central Queensland. The family were forcibly transported to Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation facility in Broadmeadows, a suburb of Melbourne; the distance was part of the ploy to separate the family from the community that had already created strong friendships, bonds and ties with the Tamil family.

I especially feel for the two children who must have been traumatised by the Australian Border Force raid on their home and subsequent incarceration and the way the community of Biloela has responded is unsurprising really. Unsurprising for people to respond in the way this community has to the plight of people who have become refugees, and the subsequent struggle we go to, to achieve a safe new life. I can see how Nades and Priya would have become valued members of the community very quickly and made many friends.

The small town of Biloela very much want them to be there and to be part of their community. Biloela came out fighting to bring the Tamil family back to their home, with friends and neighbours forming a group, organising support, and protests at Parliament. Friends and neighbours flew to Melbourne initially to support their friends Priya and Nades and the children, and have visited them since. In a democratic country you would think the Government would listen and take direction from its own people in areas that clearly require discretionary rulings such as this.

The children are too young to understand why this harassment and suffering was inflicted upon them. They do not understand the politics behind the Government's actions. This trauma could destroy their entire childhood. Neither Kopika nor Tharunicaa have done anything wrong or committed any crime to have been detained indefinitely, neither have their parents.

While other kids are going to school and living with their families in their homes, enjoying freedom and friendships, these two kids are being detained. A last-minute injunction prevented their deportation in August last year, the family already in the air on a plane bound for Sri Lanka when it was forced to land in Darwin. Two weeks later Nades, Priya and the children were moved to Christmas Island, to the reopened detention centre, empty yet operating on full security and staffing, where the family of four live an isolated existence. They are watched constantly by guards who are also constantly recording them with body cameras. They are the solitary inhabitants of the \$23 million taxpayer-funded Christmas Island detention facility.

UNHCR, and many other organisations have urged the Australian Government to release the Tamil family from Christmas Island. Kids do

not belong in detention—it's not just a slogan it's the reality and truth, it is about morality—feel the inhumanity of this situation!



=Children need some=
more kindness

As a refugee who “came by boat,” I have seen a lot in the past seven years. A lot of grief, sadness, a lot of unnecessary pressure, torture and abuse. I have seen a lot of decisions made in the name of cruelty, to deliberately discourage others to seek protection the way I did, the only way I could at the time; by boat. I can only imagine the mental anguish they must be going through right now, and it brings me to tears. The suffering they continue to face, now, still.

For the past years I have seen families and children who were detained in Nauru detention centres become sicker and sicker. I have seen efforts by fellow refugees and caring Australian people to eventually have them brought to Australia for medical treatment, then released into the community, not permanently, not with all their rights, but released

nevertheless, with some rights and some access to medical care, in most cases.

Yet the Biloela family's claims have fallen on deaf ears—the minister refusing to use his discretionary powers. The traumas suffered as Tamils in Sri Lanka are very real and Sri Lanka is still not a safe place for them to return to. The family remain in the well-known limbo that refugees and asylum seekers have come to know so well. The tension and fear associated with living in a prison-like environment takes an unspeakable toll. Sleep, relaxation, joy, friendships and happiness, considered essential to childhood, these basics elude these two innocent children in detention.

I wonder how much longer this family will have to suffer, especially the two kids. I wonder what the long-term effects will be on these two kids. I wonder how people in the Government can care so little.

Australia, as a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, must take its obligations seriously and take immediate action to stop this punitive, political-prisoner, deterrent-style politics. Human rights are not negotiable and should not be seen as political issues. Refugees are not political tools, pawns, slaves to be used by the Government for their political agenda. Asylum seekers are people, like you, the difference being that we have been forced to flee our homelands. Biloela embraced Nades and Priya and their kids, they found a home where they were wanted. Biloela want their friends back, to stay.