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Member for Mallee

Media Statement
Sri Lankan Tamil Family

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The Commonwealth Government, through the Department of Home Affairs and Australian Border Force (ABF), is committed to the welfare of all individuals within Australia's Immigration Detention network.

The Minister for Immigration, Alex Hawke, determined that the Sri Lankan family have been released from Christmas Island and have been reunited in Perth. The family will reside in suburban Perth in a community detention placement, close to schools and support services, while the youngest child receives medical treatment from the nearby Perth Children's Hospital. They will receive housing, schooling, medical, and financial support.

My main concern in this situation has been with the children of the family. They were born into a situation not of their own making and my heart goes out to them. As with every child they deserve every opportunity to succeed in life. Their new living arrangements in Perth will bring some stability while their parents pursue ongoing legal matters.

The decision to allow the family to reunite and remain in Perth does not create a pathway to a permanent visa.

I understand this is an important issue to many, and there appears to be a lot of incomplete and inaccurate information in the media.

Many migration cases have their own unique set of complex circumstances. The case of this family is one of these.

The mother and father arrived illegally by boat in 2012 and 2013 respectively. They were placed in detention under the former Labor Government and were assessed at that time as not being owed protection by Australia under the United Nations definition (ie. they are not refugees).

As such, they were informed by the former Government that they would never be permanently settled in Australia. They did not accept that decision. They have since accessed our legal system to apply to many levels of Australian courts for review.

The full Australian judicial system has determined that they are not legitimate refugees, and are not owed protection by Australia.

Prior to having children, the family were informed there was no prospect of them remaining in Australia. Like many other countries, Australian law says that children born here to non-citizens adopt the status of their parents, that is, they can avail themselves of Sri Lankan citizenship.

With the end of the civil war in 2009, Tamils from around the world have safely returned to Sri Lanka and been accepted back by a democratically elected Government in that country. This includes more than 1,500 who had arrived in Australia by boat.

The circumstances of this family are not entirely unique - they have the option to leave detention and return to Sri Lanka at any time, as others have.

The Government's strong border protection policies have succeeded in putting an end to the horrendous loss of life that occurred when people were put on dangerous boat journeys by criminal people smugglers.

We have been fair, clear and consistent for a long time; we are not going to allow criminal people smugglers to resume their deadly trade. Arriving illegally is not a path to resettlement in this country.

History shows us the tragic consequences of allowing exceptions to our strong border protection policies.

The Government has a responsibility to act in the national interest - I'm sure everyone would agree that the resumption of illegal boat arrivals and people risking their lives is not in anyone's interest.

Australia remains one of the most generous humanitarian resettlement countries in the world. Our Humanitarian Migration Program has 13,750 places in 2021-22, upholding our long-term commitment to refugee resettlement.

In Mallee there are thousands of people who experience issues with visas and many have contacted me to assist them to continue living and working in Australia. I have supported and campaigned for these people to remain in Australia.