



NEWSLETTER June 2021

Dear Grandmothers and Friends,

From this on Christmas Island....

To this in Perth....



...WHAT AND WHERE NEXT FOR THE BILOELA FAMILY?

The Murugappan family remains for the foreseeable future in the uncertain limbo constructed by the Morrison Government to be a cornerstone of its punishing refugee policy.

It was a limited concession by Immigration Minister, Alex Hawke, to have Nades and his 6 year old daughter, Kopika, flown from remote Christmas Island on 15 June to be with his wife Priya and 4 year old Tharnicaa hospitalised in Perth with pneumonia and a blood infection.

Now released from hospital, her medical care team say Tharnicaa requires weeks of further treatment. **Indefinite community detention is not a solution.** In the meantime, the community of Biloela in central Queensland, along with the nationwide refugee support sector and the Federal Opposition, continues to agitate for the family to be returned there. **Read more:** <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-17/government-18000-reasons-not-grant-murugappan-biloela-visas/100220476>

An eye-watering \$6.7m has been spent over the past 18 months to keep the Murugappan family of four on Christmas Island. **Read more:** <https://www.news.com.au/national/politics/taxpayers-spent-67m-detaining-biloela-family-between-august-2019-and-january-2021/news-story/227979ef56b52c9c8d628eff4d1a4103>

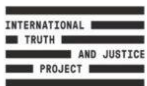


Grandmothers for Refugees around the country stand with all compassionate Australians who understand that freedom based on the persecution of others is tainted. This injustice calls for national action. Share this newsletter with family and friends. Invite them to join us. Go to join@grandmothersforrefugees.org

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

The Federal Government relies on a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) report on conditions in Sri Lanka when making assessments of claims by asylum seekers from that country, including the Murugappan family.

However, a UK tribunal has found DFAT's Country Information Report seriously deficient, as outlined in this media release from Australian Human Rights groups.



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE: Human rights groups demand suspension of reports on Sri Lanka to assess refugee applications following rejection by a UK court

Media Release

Thursday 3 June 2021

In a landmark immigration case in the United Kingdom, three Upper Tribunal judges have been scathing in their rejection of Australian and UK country reports used as a basis to determine asylum applications for Sri Lankan Tamils. The consequences for many Sri Lankan applicants, particularly Tamil people seeking asylum in Australia has been the refusal of protection, based on what the UK court has said is unreliable information. The court also confirmed that if returned to Sri Lanka, they risk being subjected to torture, which the Tribunal says is endemic in the country.

In a submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP) and the Australian

Centre for International Justice (ACIJ) advised DFAT last year of their concerns relating to the accuracy, methodology and validity of the conclusions reached in DFAT's *Country Information Report Sri Lanka 4 November 2019*. DFAT's Country Information reports are required to be considered by decision makers at the Department of Home Affairs, the Immigration Assessment Authority (IAA) and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) when assessing claims for refugee protection. The reports are held to be credible and authoritative and decision makers rarely depart from their findings.

The submission made by the ITJP and the ACIJ has been vindicated, given the judgement of the three bench Tribunal – the decision referenced the inaccurate DFAT 2019 report on Sri Lanka and found serious methodological shortcomings noting that: “none of the sources are identified, there is no explanation as to how the information from these sources was obtained, and there is no annex containing, for example, records of any interviews... Indeed, it is unclear whether any formal interviews took place. The report does not provide direct quotes from any source. In light of these matters, it is difficult to gauge the reliability of the sources which have informed the “judgement and assessment” applied to them by the authors of the report.”

A similar country report produced by the UK Home Office was also resoundingly rejected and criticised for its choice of sources. The Home Office was prompted to remove the relevant report following the judgement. #

Read the full Media release here: [JOINT MEDIA RELEASE: Human rights groups demand suspension of reports on Sri Lanka to assess refugee applications following rejection by a UK court | Asylum Seeker Resource Centre \(asrc.org.au\)](#)

Refugees on Hunger Strike – personal action of last resort

From SBS News 21 June 2021

Fourteen asylum seekers brought to Australia under the now-repealed Medevac legislation have begun a hunger strike in a bid to draw attention to their ongoing detention.

The detainees are in Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation after being transferred to the mainland from Manus Island and Nauru for medical treatment.

The strike began on Thursday (17/6/21) and is now entering its fourth day, according to a spokesperson from the Refugee Action Coalition.

A detainee participating in the strike who has been in immigration detention in Nauru and Melbourne for close to nine years told SBS News the strike was a protest against what they see as indefinite detention.

“We came here for Medevac ... and we are still here, stuck in detention for nothing,” he said.

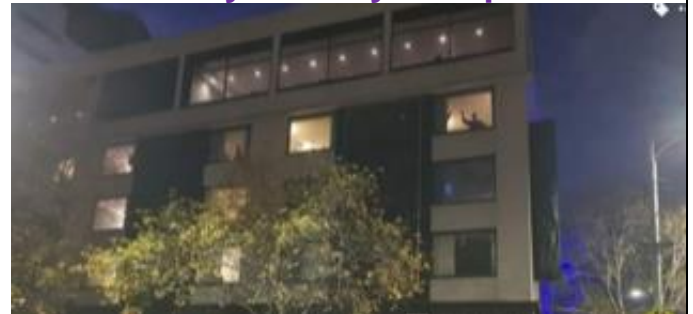
“We need to have an answer, why are we stuck here? If you don’t really want me, if you don’t want us, send back, I don’t know, somewhere. It’s enough.”

An Australian Border Force spokesperson said they were aware that a small number of detainees at the facility were engaging in a “peaceful demonstration by refusing to attend meal services”.



Grandmothers! Urgent CALL TO ACTION!

You are needed at
The Park Prison Hotel
Swanston St opposite Lincoln Sq
Every Sunday 3 – 4pm



Grandmothers for Refugees have been asked to be the core presence at the prison hotel site each Sunday afternoon.

Please join the action to support the 35 men inside and show them that they are not forgotten.





Supporting G4R activities

G4R does not run fundraising activities. However, **donations are always welcome** and may be made by direct funds transfer to our bank account:

Name: Grandmothers for Refugees
BSB:083170
Account No: 83 813 3480

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

To mark Refugee Week 2021, we Grandmothers turn our focus to the devastating impacts on innocent children as highlighted in this edited extract from a 20 June 2021 Guardian report by Josh Taylor.

Community detention: what does it mean for the Biloela children and the 181 others?

Children living in the limbo of community detention suffer poor mental health because of their parents' uncertain futures.

While the plight of the Murugappan family from Biloela has captured the attention of the nation, they now join the close to 450 people – adults and children – living in community detention in Australia after they or their parents were transferred into offshore detention from July 2013 as a result of Australia's strict policy of not resettling people who arrived in Australia by boat.

In the past eight years, approximately 200 children have been born to asylum seekers held in Australia's immigration detention network, including 153 in Australia, according to data provided by the home affairs department to the parliament in May – 181 of those children are in Australia.

Children born in Australia to asylum seekers are given their parents' immigration status, meaning under government policy they are unauthorised maritime arrivals and will not be resettled.

Guardian Australia has previously reported on the challenges faced by some of these asylum seekers and their Australian-born children in [the Lives in Limbo series](#) last year.

Pakistani refugees Zijah Haider and Mehreen Ibrahim met and married in Australia and had a daughter, Eshal in 2018. Ibrahim [told Guardian Australia as part of the series](#) their then-two-year-old daughter had been confused about why her father had been taken into immigration detention, and had been slow to learn to talk as a result of the stress.

Many in the limbo of community detention are reluctant to speak while their future remains uncertain. Living in community detention in Australia is seen as an improvement on the conditions faced on Nauru, and they fear media attention could accelerate any plans the government has to force them to leave Australia.

In an Australian Human Rights Commission [report in 2019](#), caseworkers reported children living in community detention had poor mental health because of the uncertainty their parents face.

“So dad's depressed, he hasn't gotten up for two days, and so older kids are helping younger kids to get organised, get off to school, and getting organised and really taking a lead role because of the fallout from the adults in the family unit and their mental health,” a case worker told the commission.

“Their parents [are] struggling mentally and they're not coping,” another said. “That has an impact on children's ability to develop normally and ability to engage in school and all of that. The domino effect of that is that if the parents aren't coping, that then impacts the whole entire family, and specifically the children.”

Read the Guardian Report in full here: [Community detention: what does it mean for the Biloela children and the 181 others? | Biloela family | The Guardian](#)

Letter writers. If at first you don't succeed....

OFFICIAL

Dear Dr Ker Walsh

Thank you for your email. I have forwarded it to **David Wilden, the First Assistant Secretary of the Refugee, Humanitarian and Settlement Division**, who is the right person to consider the proposal you have made to use a community sponsorship model more broadly than it is currently applied. At present the scope of my work is limited to those arriving under refugee or humanitarian visas.



Dear David Wilden,

I refer you to the official correspondence 17/5/21 below from the Commonwealth Coordinator-General for Migrant Services which was referred to you for your attention. Further below is my original correspondence sent to Ms Larkins on 11/5/21.

I understand that there are many demands on the time of our senior public servants.

Nevertheless, I am disappointed that I have not received any communication from you during these past 6 weeks. The matter is serious and deserving of your professional and timely attention.

I look forward to having an opportunity to speak to the proposition that community sponsorship of refugees already in Australia is a viable and compelling alternative to the indefinite detention and systemic punishment of people who have a legitimate call on Australia to provide asylum and safe haven.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Jean Ker Walsh

For earlier correspondence on this matter, go to our [May Newsletter](#) posted on the [News Page](#) of our [G4R website](#).

Correspondence OUT

As part of our 2021-22 Action Plan, requests for meetings have been sent recently to:

Hon. Alex Hawke MP
Minister for Immigration

The Hon Senator Kristina Kenneally
Opposition Home Affairs spokesperson

The Hon Senator Nick McKim
Deputy Leader of the Australian Greens in the Senate

Victorian Senators

Kim Carr
Kimberley Kitching
Jess Walsh

For Letter Writing Tips... go to the **Resources Page** of our website.

You will also find there, links to Australian Parliament House contact information for Members and Senators.

Topics for your timely letters to Editors, and to MPs and their influencers...

- ✚ **Concern for the men on hunger strike** in MITA. Two have been hospitalised (as at 22/6/21).
- ✚ Request urgent updates on their condition.
- ✚ **What is the plan for the Biloela family** once Tharnicaa's health treatment plan is completed in Perth?
- ✚ Indefinite detention is not a solution. #backtobilo
- ✚ **180+ children are in community detention** around Australia. Some of them have been born here.
- ✚ These are children born under the Southern Cross. They deserve to grow and flourish in their country of birth.

These three Infographics have been created as part of an online resource kit being tested for the upcoming federal election campaign. To see them in full, go to the Resources Page on our website www.grandmothersforrefugees.org/resources then send us your feedback.

Special thanks to Executive Member, Gill Meek, for her skilled work on the Infographics.



We have produced a set of three most informative Infographics.

>>> Go to [Resources](#) to view them.

Members' Briefing

The 9 June **Members' Briefing from David Manne and Ben Goulding of Refugee Legal** attracted more than 100 participants. It was an unexpected success which meant the Zoom meeting limit prevented an unlucky few from joining the session. We send our apologies.

What we have learned is that there is an appetite for such briefings – so we are looking to do more of them in coming months. We will investigate using the Webinar capability on Zoom to enable wider participation.

In the meantime, notes from the Briefing are available on our website News Page.



Notes from David Manne briefing to GFR June 9, 2021 (Courtesy of Member, Gillian Essex)

- Work of Grandmothers fundamental, as change has to come from community. Grandmothers hold a special place in society as well as families.
- **Refugee Legal (RL)** has been around for 34 years. The

heart of the work is a free legal service for refugees and vulnerable migrants (including women on partner visas) – because the law had become too onerous for most people to deal with it in order to get a fair go. Many of the people who formed the group have gone on to have eminent legal careers. The focus hasn't changed – there has been a continuing need. The work changes people's lives immeasurably for the better.... [READ More here...](#)

Thanks for this positive member feedback.

***Thank you so much for providing this opportunity to gain insights from those working at the 'coal face' on refugee rights. They are issues that affect so many lives and which are so vital to returning Australia to a more compassionate and international-law-respecting, and more democratic nation.*

****Thanks very much for the well organised and executed briefing today.**

***It was great to be connected with David and Ben and hear first-hand about the refugee legal service. Also, an example of different voices and actors being stronger through collaboration.*

****Thanks for organising this. It went so well.**

Electorate groups are encouraged to plan local activities to mark these upcoming anniversaries.

**8 years too long
19 July**

**20 years since Tampa
26 August**

**Remembering 'children overboard'
8-10 October**

**Remembering SIEVX
20 October**

**Human Rights Day
10 December**

Grandmothers for Refugees Plan for 2021-22

Our Principal Objective:

To reset Australia's refugee policy to provide welcome, protection, and safe settlement and to be fully consistent with the Refugee Convention and Protocols and International Human Rights obligations.

To reach this objective we call for:

- **Immediate release from detention of all refugees and people seeking asylum.**
- **An end to mandatory detention of people seeking asylum, both onshore and offshore.**
- **Rights to apply for permanent protection and an end to all forms of temporary visas for refugees.**
- **Appropriate support for all refugees, people seeking asylum and their families living in community settings.**
- **Policies which assist refugees to reunite with their families.**



It has been a remarkably busy month. We trust you are staying safe and well.

With best wishes until we are back with a July edition.

Jean, Margaret, Jane, Linda, Gill

G4R Executive

Contact us at info@grandmothersforrefugees.org

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org