



NORTH BELCONNEN UNITING CHURCH

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OPEN LETTER TO THE HON SCOTT MORRISON MP, PRIME MINISTER THE HON ALEX HAWKE MP, MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND THE GOVERNMENT OF AUSTRALIA

We call on the Government of Australia to urgently give permission for the Murugappan family to live in Australia permanently. Continuing detention for this family, the parents and their two very young children, has no justification except to cause harm to their physical and mental health. The family has suffered removal from their home in Biloela, detention in various forms in Melbourne, Christmas Island, Perth and elsewhere. They have lived with the threat of deportation for more than four years at enormous cost to them and the Australian taxpayer. To what end!

Under the Migration Act, the Minister for Immigration, Hon Alex Hawke MP, has the power today to exercise compassion by granting permanent visas to the family to stay in Australia, if it is the public interest. What is stopping the Minister from showing compassion to a family whose parents have already demonstrated a commitment to Australia since the parents arrived in 2012 and 2013, including to the community of Biloela? It would seem that politics trumps principle and the values that underpin Australian, a fair go for all.

There is nothing fair about the treatment of this family which only seeks a safe place to raise their family. Biloela is that place where the local community has embraced them for the way they have contributed to the life of the town. We implore the government to live up to the ideals that characterised the response by former governments, including the Fraser and Hawke governments who provided safe haven to tens of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers from Vietnam and China respectively.

As a Christian voice in Australia, we are guided and faithful to the words of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew.

³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

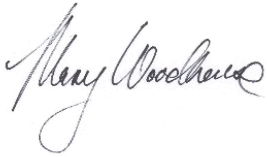
³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

It is these words which should inform our response to this family who have done nothing wrong, only sought safety from danger and a peaceful place to live. This is the Australia of compassion and care for the stranger who has knocked at our door. We need to pause and reflect on how we would react should we walk in their shoes. We would hope it would be opened. Please end this virtual torture of a decent family before it is too late and something worse happens to them. They have already endured too much suffering living in a suspended life.

We are a society built on values of respect for the Refugee Convention, Human Rights and justice for all. Please let us live up to these values by granting the Murugappan family a permanent visa to stay in the country they now call home.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mary Woodhouse". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and a decorative flourish at the end.

Mary Woodhouse
Chair, Church Council