

Repatriation of Australian women and families from Syria

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Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) expresses our deep concern following yesterday's announcement by Prime Minister Albanese that the Australian Government will not support the repatriation of a group of Australian relatives of ISIS fighters return home from Syria, where they have been held in refugee camps for more than six years.

34 women and children have been detained in the Al-Roj camp in north-eastern Syria after plans for their journey back to Australia were blocked by Syrian government authorities earlier this week.

Both Prime Minister Albanese and the federal opposition have expressed support for adults in the group being blocked from entering Australia. CSSA CEO, Dr Jerry Nockles stated that as both major parties adopt a hard-lined and hard-hearted approach towards these women and their children, we should recall the words of Pope Leo XIV, "No human being is defined only by his or her actions. Justice is always a process of reparation."

"These women are mothers, daughters and sisters who, even if they have made grave mistakes, remain deserving of our compassion and mercy – especially the children who have been caught up in the conflict. To deny them the opportunity for redemption is to deny the very essence of our Catholic tradition" Dr Nockles said.

"As Lent begins, we are reminded that Christianity is not merely performative but rather a matter of deep conviction. We are called to break our hearts, not tear our clothes. This distinction is crucial. We must break our hearts open to those on the margins, because hardened hearts are cold hearts, and cold hearts are uncompromising hearts" Dr Nockles added.

CSSA urges our political leaders to consider what it truly means to uphold Australian values and whether this includes the wholesale rejection of citizens who have made terrible choices. "The measure of our society is not how we treat those who have done right, but how we respond to those who have erred."

MEDIA RELEASE



"A just society balances accountability with mercy, recognising that redemption is possible for all."

Dr Nockles urged our political leaders to have the courage to offer pathways to repatriation and rehabilitation while ensuring community safety - the latter requiring more courage, but also as the approach that truly reflects our best selves as Australians.

"These women and their innocent children deserve individualised assessment, not blanket condemnation. Our national security can be maintained for this small group of people while still honouring our humanitarian obligations and our Christian duty to see the dignity in every human being" Dr Nockles concluded.

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About CSSA

CSSA is the national peak body for Catholic social service providers. CSSA's network of forty-two member agencies runs across all Australian States and Territories with a combined total of over seven hundred sites, delivering essential services to vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians.

Media Contact | Neha Shetty | 02 6285 1366 | neha.shetty@cssa.org.au