



Senator Kristina Keneally  
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Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

I am writing on behalf of the members of Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) which represents over 150 religious congregations across Australia with approximately 5,500 Catholic religious women and men throughout the nation. CRA members and our colleagues serve in education, health care and social services and have grassroots knowledge of the needs of First Australians, refugees and asylum seekers, people struggling to survive on the margins of society and many others in need of assistance.

The members of CRA are deeply concerned for the safety and long-term future for the children and those young women who are Australian-born – who are languishing in Al Hawl refugee camp in northern Syria. Like yourself, we recognise the complexity and the political implications for Australia that are present in their situation, however, having followed this ‘story’ – we believe it is time for the Australian government on behalf of its citizens to act with compassion. Following the recent decision of the U.S. government to withdraw its troops from Syria, there is every possibility that these innocent children and their mothers may become collateral damage in the ensuing conflict.

Ms Keneally you have shown yourself to be a woman of principle, we note your considered approach to parliamentary business and recognise that you have spoken eloquently on behalf of these women and children. Minister Dutton’s hard-line approach that the “women and children will not be rescued” is surely at odds with Australia’s national values of justice and a ‘fair go. We also recognize how difficult it is to ‘cut-through’ on issues of such profound moral significance. We applaud your efforts and urge you to continue to proclaim the ‘rightness’ of bringing these people to Australia. While we understand that the women, mothers of these children, all have different stories – what of the children, whose innocence is unquestioned?

As a nation with a robust justice system, and in the face of growing international outrage and alarm, we see that you recognise it is time for Australia to follow the “golden rule” espoused by all the major faith traditions, to “do unto others, as you would have them do to you.” [Luke 6:31] The Australian government has the power and the means to make every diplomatic effort for the women and children whose lives are at stake. We urge you, in the name of compassion to continue to put pressure on the government to take whatever steps are necessary to bring these people to safety, while the narrow window of opportunity remains open.

Thank you for giving this your consideration.

Sr Anne McGuire rsm  
For CRA Justice Committee