



Tamil Solidarity:

For the rights of workers & all oppressed people in Sri Lanka
இலங்கையில் ஒடுக்கப்படும் அனைவரது உரிமைகளுக்கும்
போராடும் -தமிழ் ஒருங்கமைப்பு

End the suffering! End the hypocrisy! **GRANT ASYLUM TO MERAK REFUGEES NOW!**

International human rights organisations and governments, who boast about their concern for human rights, have ignored the plight of over 250 Sri Lankan Tamil-speaking refugees held in a small boat near Merak, Indonesia. They are fleeing horrible war and abuse in Sri Lanka which faces a UN war crimes investigation for the atrocities carried out against the Tamil-speaking minority. But the Australian government and other governments, who then remained silent, is now turning a blind eye to the horrific suffering of these refugees.

They have been crowded on a small boat for over 100 days. They are in Merak because their boat was stopped by the Indonesian navy on direct instruction from the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Kevin Rudd.

Tragically a 29 year-old man has died when the authorities delayed taking him to hospital. Now the health of all the refugees is deteriorating on a daily basis. They are forced to eat disgusting and inadequate food. There are no proper facilities for cleaning and washing. Access to water is also restricted. There is only one toilet. They are suffering from all sorts of stomach-related diseases. Skin conditions stop the children sleeping and rashes and disease spread quickly.

Incredibly the Australian and Indonesian governments want others to believe that these refugees don't want to get off the boat where they suffer so badly. On the contrary, the refugees can't wait to get off the boat but they are given no other



acceptable choice. The only option on offer is to suffer similar, sometimes even worse, conditions in Indonesian detention centres for many years. The Indonesian government is not bound by the international refugee convention. Recently the Sri Lankan authorities, the very people most feared by the refugees, were allowed to interrogate Sri Lankan detainees. This is a fate that these refugees refuse to accept. For them it is almost the same as jumping into the Merak sea.

The refugees have continually repeated that all they want to do is to get off the boat, as long as the Australian government, or any other country that is signed up to the UN refugee convention or the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR),

accepts that they will process their refugee claims fairly. They would be out of the boat today if the Australian government said that it would allow UNHCR to process their claims. UNHCR, which is supposed to protect the rights of the refugees, has also refused to talk to them. The PRP (Working People's Association in Indonesia), acting for the refugees, visited the UNHCR office in Jakarta where they were intimidated and told point blank that UNHCR would do nothing until the refugees get off the boat. That is to say that they would only do what the Indonesian government asked them to do, as the refugees would be in its custody if they disembark.

The Australian government is evading its international responsibility by using



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Indonesia through this scheme, known as the 'Indonesian solution'. UNHCR, instead of opposing this scheme, seems to be facilitating it. UNHCR doesn't need any government's permission to speak to the refugees, among whom quite a large number have UNHCR cards showing that they have been recognised as refugees. The hypocrisy of UNHCR, who continues to ignore these refugees, must be exposed.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), an agency that collects money from ordinary people around the world and receives tax payers' money as funding from governments such as the UK, is also refusing to provide the proper facilities for these refugees. They complied with the Indonesian government on all issues and closed down their office in Merak.

Activists around the world are campaigning for the Merak refugees. However, so far the calls for immediate action have fallen on deaf ears. The Australian government is starving the refugees out by dragging the process on. They know that the more they drag this matter on, the more tired and desperate these refugees will become. They want these refugees to be sent to Indonesian detention centres or back to Sri Lanka where they will face more misery.

It wouldn't take long for the Australian government to process these refugees

and treat them humanely. The idea that just over 250 people could be a drain on Australian resources is unacceptable. The Rudd government is pandering to the right wing. For Indonesia, the Merak refugees provide a chance to negotiate a better deal from Australia for its Indonesian solution. These refugees are trapped in the middle of these right-wing political games and continue to suffer.

But we cannot give up the fight. Not a single person on the boat should be returned back to Sri Lanka where they face imprisonment, torture and death. They should be allowed to lead a decent life. But the refugees are tired, sick and frustrated. We must act fast and intensify our fight to save them. We must find a quick and favourable solution to their problem.

We must end their misery immediately

- We urge all Australian trade unions and other activists to support them
- We call for international protests at Australian embassies around the world
- All those who care about human rights must come forward to add their voice to protest for these refugees
- Tamil-speaking people around the world must raise their protest voice in support of these refugees

1. No to detention camps!

Let the IDP control the aid! For the immediate shutdown of militarised detention camps. For the provision of food, housing and health facilities to Tamil people and refugees, administered under the control of their own elected and accountable representatives.

2. Withdraw the troops!

For an immediate end to military operations in Sri Lanka. Withdraw the army from all Tamil areas. Stop the disappearances.

3. Not a rupee, not a bullet for the Rajapakse regime!

For an immediate end to military and commercial support for Sri Lanka by governments around the world. Support action such as workers' boycotts of arms shipments.

4. Democratic rights for all!

For the freedom of speech and the media, freedom of association and the right to free and fair elections.

Reject bogus/ rigged elections.

Freedom to stand in elections for parties which accept equal rights for all, regardless of nationality, religion, caste and sex. Support the work of bodies like the Civil Monitoring Committee investigating kidnappings and extra-judicial murders.

5. Support independent trade unions!

For full trade union rights, free from intimidation and state interference. Support campaigns by independent trade unions on workers' rights, pay and conditions to organise all working-class people, regardless of ethnic, religious or other differences. Unity is strength.

6. Defend the right to self-determination!

Support a mass movement of Tamil workers and poor for the right to determine their own future. Full and equal rights of any minorities to be guaranteed in all areas.

I would like to join Tamil Solidarity I would like to find out more

Name _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

Address _____

Post code _____