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**RELEASE THE BILOELA FAMILY FROM IMMIGRATION  
DETENTION**

The AMA today called on the Australian Government to release two Sri Lankan children and their parents from immigration detention on Christmas Island until their legal case has been finalised.

Almost 700 paediatricians and healthcare workers have signed a petition expressing grave concerns about the negative impact that detention is having on the development of five-year-old Kopika Murugappan and her three-year-old sister Tharunicaa.

The Australian-born sisters and their Tamil asylum seeker parents, Nades and Priya, have been in immigration detention for more than 1000 days while their cases remain in the court system.

“The AMA shares the concerns of these eminent paediatricians and other healthcare workers about the harms being caused to these two young children by being in detention for so long and at such a crucial time in their development,” AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said today.

“The first 2000 days of life is critical for children, and early childhood experiences have lasting effects. Continued detention is most likely causing these two little girls avoidable developmental harm.

“The ongoing legal process and associated delays are compounding the harm to these children and prompt resolution of the case one way or the other will be in the interest of all parties, including taxpayers who are funding the extraordinary cost of their detention on Christmas Island.

“I have personally spoken to Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton, appealing for him to release this family into the community immediately, until their legal case has been resolved.

“The AMA supports border policies that prevent the misery associated with people smuggling, but avoiding harm to children is also an international obligation for the Australian Government.

“Treating the family with compassion this Christmas will not affect the ultimate outcome of their case but will go a long way to reducing avoidable harms to the children who are innocent victims of the legal battle between their parents and the Australian Government.”

**Background**

- Nades and Priya Murugappan are Tamil asylum seekers who settled in the regional Queensland town of Biloela in 2014.
- Kopika and Tharunicaa were born in Biloela.
- In March 2018, after asylum claims for Nades, Priya, and Kopika were unsuccessful, the family was removed from Biloela, pending deportation to Sri Lanka.
- They have been in detention on Christmas Island since August 2019.
- In October 2019, the Department of Home Affairs told Senate Estimates that it had spent \$4.5 million keeping the family in detention, including \$2.5 million in detention costs, \$1.1 million in travel, and \$300,000 in legal costs.
- Detaining children in a remote offshore location contravenes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory.
- Social isolation, uncertainty and parental stress negatively affect social development and the capacity of the family to parent positively.

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