

Australia cancels citizenship of woman labelled ISIS terrorist

Tom Peters
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On February 16, Turkish authorities announced that a 26-year-old woman, Suhayra Aden, was captured with her two children while crossing the border from Syria. Turkey's Defence Ministry said she was wanted as an alleged Islamic State (ISIS) "terrorist." The three will likely be deported to New Zealand, where the woman has citizenship.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told the media: "This individual was clearly most appropriately dealt with by Australia... that is the place from which they departed for Syria." She added: "New Zealand frankly is tired of having Australia export its problems."

Aden travelled to the war-torn country in 2014 on an Australian passport. She was a dual New Zealand-Australian citizen, and had lived in Australia with her family since she was six years old. The Australian government cancelled her citizenship last year.

Responding to Ardern, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison declared that, under anti-democratic laws passed in 2015, any dual citizens who "engaged with terrorist activities" are "automatically" stripped of their Australian citizenship. Morrison made no comment on what this would mean for Aden's children, aged five and under. He described Aden as an "enemy of our country" who had "fought with terrorist organisations."

In fact, Aden has not been convicted of anything and the allegations against her remain unproven. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) pointed out: "The Turkish government has in the past labelled as terrorists people who merely lived under Islamic State and did not participate in fighting or actual acts of terrorism."

Aden travelled to Syria as a teenager and lived there under ISIS during the brutal war aimed at overthrowing

the regime of Bashar al-Assad. She reportedly married and had three children with two Swedish men, who were both killed in the war. One of her children died of pneumonia.

The growth of ISIS in Syria was the product of intervention by the United States and its allies, who provided weapons and other support to Islamist "rebels" who were fighting to topple Assad, including the Al Qaeda offshoot Al Nusra. Foreign fighters were allowed to flood into Syria, including from Libya, where they had been supported by the US and NATO in 2011 to overthrow the Gaddafi regime. The Syrian war has left at least 500,000 people dead and 6.5 million homeless.

Successive Australian and New Zealand governments, as minor imperialist allies of Washington, supported the war against Assad. They had previously sent troops to the illegal US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, aimed at securing US dominance over the resource-rich Middle East and central Asia. More than a million people have died in these wars and entire societies have been destroyed, with tens of millions made homeless.

Australia redeployed troops to Iraq in 2014 to support the US occupation of the country and military operations against ISIS fighters who had crossed into the country from Syria. New Zealand also sent troops to Iraq in 2015.

Aden and her children are among thousands of people, from many parts of the world, who have been detained after escaping from the horrors of war in Syria. Clark Jones, a criminologist at the Australian National University, told Radio NZ the detainees include 67 Australian women and children, including "around 34" children aged six years and under.

ABC reporter Dylan Welch, who spoke with Aden

during a visit to the Al-Hawl refugee camp in northern Syria in 2019, said: “She explained how worried she was, not only for herself but mainly for the kids. She was terrified she was going to lose the baby.” Aden’s children were suffering from malnutrition and dysentery.

The refugee camp in the middle of the desert houses about 70,000 people, including 10,000 former ISIS supporters.

Australia’s ruling elite, which has some of the world’s most draconian anti-refugee policies, is now seeking to wash its hands of any responsibility for the fate of its citizens caught up in this humanitarian disaster. The decision to abrogate citizenship violates the basic democratic rights of Aden and her children.

New Zealand’s Ardern feigned sympathy for the children, telling Newshub: “If we are thinking about the wellbeing of the kids, then surely we’d think about making sure this person was repatriated to the place they had family, and that place is Australia.”

However, the Australian and New Zealand governments have known that the three joint citizens were in the Al-Hawl camp at least since 2019, when Ardern and Morrison first discussed the issue. Nothing was done by either government to assist them, despite the immense dangers facing people in the camp.

New Zealand has one of the lowest refugee intakes in the world, at just 1,500 people per year. Successive NZ governments have collaborated with Australia’s abusive system of offshore detention of asylum seekers.

Ardern’s decision to publicly denounce Canberra for “exporting its problems” has nothing to do with humanitarian concerns. Australia and New Zealand are close allies and trading partners, but the economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has produced conflicts between the two countries.

Significantly, Ardern’s rebuke follows comments by Morrison on February 1 criticising New Zealand’s close trading relationship with China, which has overtaken Australia as New Zealand’s number one trading partner. Morrison called for New Zealand to “stick together” with the US and Australia, which are increasingly preparing for war against China.

At the same time, as the latest episode shows, the ruling class in both countries is stoking nationalism to divert growing anger over attacks on workers’ jobs and living standards.

Ardern’s Labour Party government is seeking to channel opposition to the long-term erosion of the rights of about 600,000 New Zealanders living in Australia. Under changes made to Australian legislation in 2001, those who migrated to Australia after that date have few means to apply for citizenship. They can be deported easily and are ineligible for welfare payments and disability support, regardless of how long they have lived in Australia.

New Zealand’s government and opposition parties have hypocritically denounced Australia’s policy of deporting NZ citizens, many of whom grew up in Australia, for criminal offences, including minor crimes. More than 2,000 people have been sent back under the hardline policy since 2015. New Zealand’s media has blamed the deportees for the growth of criminal gangs.

New Zealand, however, has similarly brutal anti-immigrant policies. Last year, for example, the Ardern government deported a paralysed Tongan woman despite warnings from doctors that she could die. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government barred thousands of temporary migrants from accessing welfare payments for nearly a year, while New Zealand’s border closure—one of the harshest in the world—has resulted in thousands of work visa holders being stranded overseas and unable to return.



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