

Letter in reply to Guardian Australia article – 18/4/2022

The UN special rapporteurs are rightly critical of Australia for failing to repatriate its citizens from camps in North and East Syria (NES) (Guardian Australia, 17 April 2022). Yet they fail to see the bigger picture in this region, home to a multi-ethnic, direct democracy. At stake are the human rights not just of those in the camps but of the more than four million people living in NES.

Having defeated the scourge of ISIS, at great cost in dead and wounded, the people of NES should surely receive the world's gratitude – sadly this isn't so. Where is the international support needed to properly manage the camps and their inhabitants? As well as defeating ISIS, NES has advanced women's rights, pluralism and ecology, despite constant attacks by the autocratic Turkish regime. Where is the recognition of NES as a region which has become a beacon of hope for others in the Middle East?

The international community, including Australia, must play its part in solving the problem of ISIS prisoners and their families. An international tribunal should be established under UN mandate to try the accused according to recognised legal standards. Those convicted should serve any sentences handed down by independent judges at institutions funded by the international community. The burden of guarding ISIS prisoners and caring for their families, while they remain in NES, should be shared by all nations.

By all means let's repatriate Australian citizens from NES; truly just and rights-based solutions to NES's complex problems require more.

Fionn Skiotis
Co-Chair
North and East Syria Solidarity