

Yet again Australia destroys the very notion of our nation — and leaves others to pick up the pieces

By refusing to take responsibility for its citizens, Australia is refusing to take responsibility for itself. The fate of one 'Isis bride' is just the latest example.



SUHAYRA ADEN, RIGHT (IMAGE: YENI SAFAK)

The Coalition government's assault on citizenship has been one of the more ironic badges of honour worn by this ostensibly conservative and patriotic collective. You'd think that if anything was to be held sacred, the indissoluble tie between sovereign and citizen would be it.

However, that bond of nationality has proved as pliable as any of the other fundamentals of society in this government's hands, honoured for nothing more than its usefulness as a weapon in the wars of ideology.

So the great citizenship clearance sale, the only thing Peter Dutton really, actually achieved in his long reign as minister of Home Affairs. Stripping people of their citizenship and deporting them is electorally popular, the type of vindictive authoritarianism that people always love until it's being used against them.

Here's an example, one that's made news overseas as a metaphor for the increasingly stark difference between Australia's international reputation and that of our closest neighbour:

Suhayra Aden was born in New Zealand but moved to Australia with her family at age six, becoming a dual citizen. In 2014 she flew to Syria to become an "ISIS bride". That was a bad idea, one made by a sadly large number of young women from around the world. Aden ended up marrying two foreign jihadis and had two children. The defeat of Islamic State rendered them detritus of a godforsaken war.

In February, Aden tried to cross the border into Turkey but was detained as a suspected terrorist. Whether she had engaged in any terrorist activities herself, or been a passive participant on the wrong side, is simply unknown. Whether she remains an adherent of radical Islamic ideology or presents a danger to society is also unknown. That's not to say she doesn't, nor that she does. Uncomfortable, but important to record.

Australia has revoked Aden's citizenship, refusing to contemplate allowing her to ever return to the country in which she has spent most of her life and to which she is most obviously attached.

Our *Citizenship Act* allows for discretionary revocation by the minister in cases where the person has engaged in war or terrorist activity against Australia, or committed serious crimes. Under Dutton, that power has been exercised almost uniformly whenever possible.

There have been frequent pushes from within the Coalition to extend the revocation power to all citizens, but for now it can only be used on people who have a second citizenship (so they do not become stateless).

With Aden having had her Australian citizenship removed, eyes turned to New Zealand, the country of her birth. This week Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern confirmed she will be taken in there: "New Zealand has not taken this step lightly. They are not Turkey's responsibility, and with Australia refusing to accept the family, that makes them ours."

Ardern's closing words are a statement of both the obvious and of an axiom of conventional international law. It has always been mostly accepted by most countries that each is responsible for its own citizens, for better or worse. The status of statelessness is treated as an unacceptable (albeit not infrequent) outcome and, as members of the global community, each nation must look after its own messes.

In the case of Aden and her children, New Zealand is honouring the convention, picking up the pieces of the tragic — and potentially dangerous — prospect that she presents. By contrast, Australia has refused to take up its own burden.

From a foreign perspective, it looks like nothing more than childish selfishness. Of course, Aden is a risky proposition for whichever country takes her in; it would be foolish to make a blithe assumption about her either way. However, taken in she must be. She is a human being. Her children are too.

No question of blame attaches to this equation. It doesn't matter why Aden became a fan girl of IS and made the terrible choice that will define the rest of her life. By refusing to take responsibility for her now that she needs to come home, Australia has refused to take responsibility for itself.

It's quite a thing to look back at Australia's remarkable history as an advocate for human rights on the international stage, then consider how assiduously we have been trashing that legacy in more recent times.

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