

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

Dear Secretary,

Re: Anti-Terrorism Bill (No. 2) 2005

My name is Abha Devasia and I am writing in on behalf of my family of Indian migrants, up to 36 of us, all of who have made Australia their home for over twenty years. Our children are all born here and are taught to be proud of this country.

I wish to voice my and my family's strenuous objection to the proposed bill. We challenge the Government to explain to us, as voters and citizens, why the proposals in relation to anti- sedition, detention or control orders are necessary? Whilst the Government urges us to trust that their proposed anti-sedition laws will not silence dissent, can the Government also provide us with the security that when we speak our minds in relation to the Government policy, foreign affairs or our views on political ideology we will not censor ourselves? If I, a private citizen is to begin doing that, then what of those in our community whose role it is to challenge and bring the Government to account on our behalf, such as artists, journalists, students, academics and political parties? Will the Government be able to assure me that anti- sedition laws will not subvert the role of the free press (and the defiance of the internet) in Australia to report on and challenge the action of Govt, whomever they may be?

Our family has lived in regimes where the silence of the press, the silence of playwrights, students and opposition were never keenly felt until we came here. I have taught my children that they have and will continue to have the right to challenge what they believe is unfair through the democratic process and we are shaken that parliament has committed such a fundamental breach of trust as to deny this right to us.

We strongly protest any moves of Government to silence views on issues. The offence relating to "advocating terrorism " is far too subjective and open to abuse. We have very strong views on international affairs and it is our right to speak them openly in our home, in our streets and in our community. We demand that we be allowed to retain the right to speak out against our government's actions, or to oppose a war (which terrorizes and kills innocents) or to oppose the actions of my country on the world stage.

Control Orders/ preventative detention

We oppose, the idea that people should be subject to control orders without the chance to know what the alleged charges are and be subject to a detention order - being judged guilty and punished without due process.

We strongly believe that every person has the right to be free from arbitrary detention. We are concerned that preventative detention measures allow a person to be detained for up to 2 days and it concerns us that the basis of the laws are aimed at vulnerable and attacked members of our community. Those members of our community who are asked questions in a language they are not familiar with, who answer stumbingly with interpreters, subject to human prejudice - who are challenged as to their views and politics and religious belief deserve the most protection. Power when arbitrary can be inhumane and parliament MUST

guarantee the rights of citizens to have a chance to address the charges against them. Detention orders that place a person under house arrest, without being able to work and provide for a family are an extension of powers we do not need or want.

We are deeply worried that as an ethnic minority in this country, the time will come when it is our family that will be the subject of racial profiling.

Random stop and search powers

It is clear that the current wave of arrests in relation to people suspected of terrorist related activity means that this country already has a vast array of powers and instruments through which to provide for the security of our people without jeopardising our freedoms. We oppose the callous widening of these powers without regard to a person's privacy and to the impact it will have on a community living under fear. What of those immediately identifiable members of the community who fall under immediate suspicion? Will young women wearing hijab (headscarves) or men wearing fashionable beards be stopped and searched on a mere suspicion? What of the terror that flows on that? Can the Government assure us that these are powers that will not be abused?

We believe that the proposed laws will only incite those in our community who feel betrayed by a Government that promises a "fair go". My family and I appreciate greatly the opportunity to raise our children in a land that is devoid of the sectarian violence and blood sport in the name of caste, religion or ethnicity that is the scourge of other parts of the world. We truly believe Australia is a unique country that can embrace the best of democracy and the best of cultural and racial harmony. These laws are a direct threat to that possibility. If these laws come into action it will create a climate where in twenty years we will see ghettos in our cities of a discontented and marginalised group of Australian people where the Government is the cause of hate. We will see a democracy devoid of compassion for those members of our community that are the marginal. They may be the Muslims now but who knows which group will be targeted next? We urge the committee to reject this bill in its entirety and act in the best interest of the Australian people whichever colour or race they may be.

Yours faithfully,

Abha Devasia

Arun Devasia

Alinah Devasia

Mathew Devasia

Mathew Devasia