

Refugee Union Statement On The Death of Sivarajah Sivatharan and Slum Settlements

Refugee Union unites in protest for the avoidable death of our brother Sivarajah Sivatharan, a Sri Lankan refugee who needlessly died in a fire at the slum where he was settled by the Social Welfare Department contractor ISS-HK.

Refugee Union is greatly saddened by this tragedy that is man-made, and we hope responsible parties are brought to justice. We cannot but condemn in the strongest terms possible the heinous act of allowing refugees live in squalid, hygienically unsafe and deadly trapping unauthorized structures that pro-government propaganda suggests we choose in order to live with our friends.

It is rather the other way around. We live in slums because of inhuman practices and policy frameworks enacted against refugees to supposedly discourage unwanted travelers. Afforded with only \$1500 for rent we either are shown to or can find accommodation in slums, where we make friends. The death of our friend Lucky was as a result of impunity, negligence, malpractice and outright discrimination. This is normally duly exhibited, practiced and condoned by the Social Welfare Department. We have constantly complained about refugees who are housed in deplorable conditions for far too long. The refugee community documented and brought these ills to the limelight in letters, emails and blogs, unfortunately producing only minimal intangible change.

We are yet to see enforcement action or measures being undertaken to correct unlawful anomalies in the housing market for refugees. Further, responsibilities have been conveniently brushed off by relevant parties apparently unconcerned with our living conditions.

No refugee wants to live in slums. Were affordable alternatives available we would gladly move out of insanely dangerous structures paradoxically paid for from the public purse. Government officers knows it, but through their formulation and implementation of policy encourages unjust propaganda and disinformation to justify their very deterrent policy.

Refugee Union call the Government to:

- Speedily take disciplinary action against the responsible parties for Sivarajah Sivatharan's death.
- Investigate an apparent collaboration between purported landlords and caseworkers.
- Increase collaboration between departments to address the troubling problem of using public money to sponsor purported landlords taking advantage of refugee housing needs.
- Eliminate inefficient contractors and take full responsibility for the delivery of services to refugees.
- Allow Refugees to work to enable them support themselves fully, the current Welfare System is grossly inadequate and discriminative. It has failed miserably to address the basic human needs of all Refugees.
- With immediate effect close all the 69 Slums being habited by Refugees and provide alternative hospitable accommodation for them.

Refugee Union

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