

## **Australia PM makes no promise to repatriate ISIS man's family from Middle East**

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**Canberra:** Australia's prime minister said Wednesday he felt for the five children of an Australian man in the Islamic State who became notorious last year for posing for photographs while clutching the severed heads of Syrian victims.

But Prime Minister Tony Abbott would make no promises that his government would help repatriate the young family from the Middle East following the father's reported death, saying that keeping Australia safe was his first priority.

Reports that the children's Australian father Khaled Sharrouf and his Australian friend Mohamed Elomar had been killed in airstrikes in the Islamic State-held city of Mosul in Iraq have intensified calls from relatives for Australian help to bring the family home.

Sharrouf slipped out of Australia in late 2013 and his Muslim-convert wife, Tara Nettleton, followed him to Syria with their children soon after.

Sharrouf's 7-year-old son horrified the world a year ago when he was photographed holding the severed head of a Syrian soldier by the hair. Sharrouf's eldest child was married to Elomar at the age of 13.

Nettleton's Sydney-based mother Karen Nettleton said in a media statement late Tuesday that her daughter had "followed her heart and has paid an enormous price."

"My daughter has made the mistake of a lifetime," she said. "Today she is a parent alone in a foreign and vicious land looking after a widowed 14-year-old and four other young children."

"Mr. Abbott, I beg you, please help bring my child and grandchildren home," she said.

Asked if he felt for the children, Abbott told Nine Network television: "I suppose at one level, yes." "But on the other hand, we have to appreciate the scale of the evil which has been practiced here, and that's the thing," Abbott said.

"We will act to protect our country, the safety of our community is the first concern of government," he said. The government has said that verifying Sharrouf's death would be the first step before any possible talks with the family on repatriation.

But Abbott said that that step had not yet been taken, saying there was a high degree of confidence that Elomar was dead, but "we don't have any such certainty as to the other individual."

Sydney-born Sharrouf, who was also a Lebanese national, was a prime target of legislation introduced to Parliament on Wednesday that would allow terrorists who are dual nationals to be stripped of their Australian citizenship.

Australia will block the return of dual citizens suspected of terrorism based on security advice and deport court-convicted terrorists under new citizenship laws.

The government estimates that up to half of about 120 Australians who have traveled to Iraq and Syria to fight for the Islamic State movement are dual citizens.

The government has also passed contentious new laws that make it a criminal offense to even visit Mosul or the Islamic

State movement's Syrian stronghold of al-Raqqa province, where the Sharrouf family was thought to be based.

- AP