

ged war criminal ready to return home - Daily Telegraph, The/Sunday Telegraph, The/Sunday Style Magazine (Sydney, Australia)
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THE Federal Government yesterday welcomed home alleged war criminal Konrad Kalejs -- even though a growing list of countries has banned him.

The latest country to order him out was Britain, which last night served a deportation order on the alleged mass murderer.

Kalejs had planned to return to Australia this week from his recently discovered home in Britain to avoid prosecution by local authorities.

Australian Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone yesterday said Kalejs was innocent until proven guilty and would be welcomed back in Australia like any other citizen.

The response led to accusations Australia had become a safe haven for war criminals.

Kalejs, 86, is accused of being a member of Arajs Kommando, a Nazi death squad which, along with the SS, was responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent civilians.

He moved to Australia after World War II and now holds citizenship.

While Australia readily accommodates Kalejs, other countries are not so hospitable. The Latvian Government has written to many countries, including Australia, asking for evidence to help prosecute him.

The US banished him in 1994 after a protracted court case examined his wartime activities.

Similarly, in Canada, where he was deported to Australia in 1997 after a court case linked him to a Nazi slave camp in Latvia.

After living in a Melbourne retirement home, Kalejs went overseas in 1998 and was found last week living under a false name in Leicestershire, England.

The deportation order follows a British police inquiry into the circumstances leading to Kalejs living in England.

It is understood police advised that given the passage of time since World War II -- 55 years since it ended -- a prosecution for his alleged war crimes under British law in the courts would be difficult to achieve.

Kalejs told London's Mail on Sunday that he was innocent, insisting he was being unfairly hounded and that he just wanted to live in peace.

Senator Vanstone said there was not enough evidence to mount a prosecution, urging anyone with new information to come forward.

The former head of Australia's disbanded war criminals investigations unit Robert Greenwood said Australia lacked political will to prosecute war criminals.

Despite years of allegations and lengthy investigations, Australia has not convicted, extradited or deported any suspected Nazi war criminals.

Holocaust survivor Marika Weinberger, the **Sydney Jewish Museum** vice-president, said her fellow survivors would be bitterly disappointed if Kalejs returned

to Australia.

``As an Australian, I feel downright ashamed that we should be naive and so impotent and look so silly to the world that we are unable to do anything about it," she said.

The Latvian Society of Sydney has supported Kalejs' return, insisting he was not getting a fair go.

``No-one has, as yet, brought him to trial," said society spokesman John Duselis.

``He's not a war criminal until he's proven to be a war criminal -- unless we act like the Nuremberg tribunals."

Latvian Consul Vidvids Koskins said his government needed extra evidence before it could push for Kalejs to

be prosecuted. KEYS- CHRONOLOGY

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