

SUSPECTED Australian Nazi war criminal Konrad Kalejs would be ``welcomed" back to Australia, Justice Minister Senator Amanda Vanstone said.

Mr Kalejs would be regarded as any other Australian citizen if he returned to Australia from Britain, she said in Adelaide yesterday. ``This is simply a situation where an Australian citizen is coming back to Australia," Senator Vanstone said.

``The Australian Government's attitude toward any citizen is that they are innocent until they are proven guilty.

``It is no secret that Mr Kalejs was the subject of an investigation and sufficient information wasn't found to proceed with the prosecution.

``Provided he is travelling on a valid Australian passport, he will be welcomed back."

Latvian-born Mr Kalejs, 86, was discovered living in a nursing home in Leicestershire, England, last week and said his best option was to return to Australia. He has been accused of involvement in the deaths of up to 30,000 civilians in Latvia in collaboration with the Nazis in World War II.

He has lived in Britain on an Australian passport since July last year. Britain's Home Office said while investigations by Scotland Yard police were proceeding, there was still no legal way of holding Mr Kalejs in the country.

Mr Kalejs told a British newspaper he was planning to leave before any action was taken, and that his best option for avoiding prosecution was to return to Australia. ``I've been hounded around the world for 15 years and now I want to be left alone," Mr Kalejs said.

``The police cannot hold me. Again I am looking for a place where I can be with my wife away from these people who are hounding me. There's no peace for me here now."

The Israel-based Simon Wiesenthal Centre which tracks old Nazis around the world said Mr Kalejs was a lieutenant in the infamous Araj's Kommando.

Sydney Jewish Museum's vice-president Marika Weinberger, 70, said she was bashed so badly in Latvia, allegedly by Kalejs' men, she developed meningitis. She said she felt ``ashamed" nothing was being done to stop his return. However, Latvian Society of Sydney spokesman John Duselis said Kalejs wasn't getting a fair go. ``No one's as yet brought him to trial," he said.

Kalejs entered Australia in the 1950s, allegedly posing as a refugee, and after gaining citizenship moved to the US. In 1994 he was deported over allegations about his past. Three years later he was deported from Canada to Australia.

Senator Vanstone said she had not been contacted by UK authorities about seeking an extradition order for Mr Kalejs.