



John Pathinathan

7 January 1944 – 31 January 2021

Source – Hansard, Parliament of Victoria

18/2/2021

Ms Lily D’AMBROSIO (State Member for Mill Park in the Parliament of Victoria - & Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (09:40): I rise to honour the life of Jegarajasegaram Pathinathan, a very dear friend of mine and an inspiring community leader in the Tamil community. He passed away late last month, aged 77. Also known as John, he was born in Uduvil near Jaffna, Sri Lanka, and came to Australia with his wife and three children in 1984. The decision to come to Australia was forced upon him due to the civil war that erupted in his homeland in 1983. He worked as a quarantine officer at Melbourne Airport until he retired.

As if raising a young family in a new country was not enough of a task, John’s community spirit and caring nature did not allow him to only do that. He got involved with the Tamil community with the sole purpose of helping those in need. He founded and presided over the Tamil Catholic Association of Victoria and through his life volunteered his services in many charitable organisations. After his retirement, he founded and presided over the Tamil Seniors Social Club, a community group that to this day supports elderly Tamil Australians in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, including in my electorate of Mill Park. Days after the devastation caused by the tsunami in Sri Lanka, John established the Consortium of Tamil Associations to raise funds from the Premier’s tsunami fund, Caritas Australia and others to assist in his homeland’s reconstruction efforts. He raised enough money to build the Vic-Jaf Fishnet factory in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. To this day, this factory provides employment to the war-affected people, including women, and stands as a testament to John’s passion in supporting those in need. He was awarded an Order of Australia Medal in 2007. I thank him for being an amazing human being, and my sincere condolences to his family.

Source- House Hansard, Federation Chamber, Parliament of Australia

15/2/2021 – Statements by Members

Hon. Andrew Giles (Member of Parliament - Scullin) (16:33): I rise to remember two constituents—two good friends of mine—who made extraordinary contributions to community life and deserve to be remembered in this place. I am proud to have known John Pathinathan and Donato Polvere, and to have been associated with them and been able to

witness the profound difference they made to their community and the Australian Labor Party. I am in their debt, and so are, I know, many others.

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John Pathinathan was a dear friend who gave so much to the Tamil community, to the Catholic Church, to the Australian Labor Party and to Melbourne's northern suburbs. He was always there with advice for me and my colleagues on any number of policy matters. He lived a life that was characterised by selflessness and generosity. To all in his family and to all who knew him, I say, vale, rest in peace.

Tribute to Late Mr John Pathinathan by Mano Manickavinayagam, Chairman - Australian Tamil Congress (ATC)

4 February 2021

Australian Tamil Congress (ATC) would like to pay tribute a great man Mr John Pathinathan. On behalf of the Australian Tamil community, ATC expresses its profound sadness and condolences to his family & friends.

After coming to Australia in 1984, John and his family lived in Bundoora, Victoria. To help the new migrants and refugees from Sri Lanka, John worked very closely with the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office. John worked tirelessly, headhunted talented men and women to form the Tamil Catholic Association in Victoria in 1987.

His mission was a religious one and to harness the political power of the Australian Catholic community to advocate for the struggle of the Tamil people. John was the first President of the Victorian Tamil Catholic association. During his presidency, he successfully united the Tamil community and organised several fund-raising events and community development projects. John also became a member of the Australian Labour party.

Due to John's commitment to his community and motherland, he worked very closely with State government ALP member Hon Ms Lily D Ambrosio and the Federal ALP member Hon Mr Harry Jenkins (Former Speaker of the House of Representatives). John was instrumental in passing several motions in the Federal Parliament, favouring our struggle through his very close friendship with many ALP federal members.

John was involved in Caritas Australia-Project Compassion to help the vulnerable Tamil community in Tamil Eelam. One of John's most significant achievements was to fund the building of a fishnet factory in Tamil Eelam with aid from the Victorian Government Tsunami relief aid program. Providing fishing nets and boats to members of the coastal area saved their livelihood. His thoughtful, noble act helped reduce unemployment and keep the war-affected families from starvation. The passing of John Pathinathan is a significant loss to the Tamil Community.

John was instrumental in forming the Australian Tamil Interfaith Committee (ATIC) in early 2009. ATIC united the different religious denominations for the common cause of urging the

Australian Government to intervene to stop the impending human calamity during the latter stages of the civil war in Sri Lanka.

The Multicultural Awards for Excellence (MAE) – awarded by the Victorian Government - formally recognise people and organisations who have fostered cross-cultural understanding and supported those with migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds to fully participate in all aspects of Victorian life. John Pathinathan was one of the award recipients in 2007.

John's achievements and contributions will be remembered forever. We pray for his soul to rest in peace.

Margaret Samuel (John's sister) writes

John was the fourth child in a large family of nine children. He was affectionately called Joe. Two years later our late brother, Rev. James was born. Both John and James grew up like twins, playing and doing things together, and sharing their clothes, toys and food.

John had his primary education at Uduvil Girls College close to our house. After his primary education, he joined St. Patrick's College, Jaffna. While there, he joined St. Martin's Seminary with the intention of becoming a Catholic priest. After some time, he realised that becoming a priest was not his vocation and left the seminary. After high school, he proceeded to continue with his education and became an Agriculture officer.

He went up the ranks and became an Assistant Director in the Department of Agriculture. He also earned a Government Scholarship from Japan to travel to the country and acquire more knowledge. While John was working in the Agriculture Department, he married Theresa Ranji and was blessed with three children, a son and two daughters, and now with five grandchildren.

Even though John was offered a job in British Guyana, he continued to work in Sri Lanka. However, when the civil war broke out in Sri Lanka in July 1983, he decided to leave for Australia - the Government of Australia having announced its intention to accept affected people from Sri Lanka as migrants. He found a safe haven for his family in Australia. He worked as a Quarantine Officer mainly at the Melbourne Airport till he retired.

Joe was a very loving and caring husband and father and was very devoted to his family. He even worked 3 jobs for quite some time to send his children to good schools and colleges in Melbourne. He cherished his wife Ranji, taking care of all her personal needs, making sure that she gets proper nourishment, and every need was taken care of. We have watched him doing all the chores in the house to keep it clean. Our late brother Fr James admired and talked about his love for Ranji, and he mentioned he has never met a man who loved his wife so dearly.

Joe was a people's person who enjoyed being with other people. As an immigrant he strongly believed that he had a responsibility to give back to Australian society that nurtured

him and his family. He was involved in many associations and clubs. He liked politics, especially the Victorian Labor Party Politics and enjoyed his time in the party activities.

In addition, he was also the Founder-President of the Tamil Catholic Association of Victoria (TCAV). TCAV was inaugurated in April 1987. He served six terms as President of TCAV over the years and worked with Caritas Australia, Australian Catholic Relief Services, Victorian Government and other donor organizations, along with fellow Tamils in Victoria to establish the Vic-Jaf Fishnet Production Factory in Jaffna. This venture continues to provide employment and fishing nets to the war affected people in Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

John was one of the original 20 Patricians who met and signed up to establish the St Patrick's College Jaffna, Old boys' Association, Melbourne on February 9, 1992.

He was instrumental in forming the Tamil Seniors Social Club and served as its President in 2019~2020. The club incorporates the Victoria Tamil Senior Citizens Benevolent Society (VTSCBS) and is one of the premier groups for Tamil seniors in Victoria that strive to promote and retain Tamil language and cultural traditions as essential components of multiculturalism in Victoria. They hold regular meetings and activities at the Mill Park Community Centre. John devoted long hours to support the Tamil Community until he became ill. Even though he was critically ill, he still found the energy during that time to establish a trust fund in Vanni Sri Lanka - in honour of our late brother Fr James – to help those affected by the war.

In the Souvenir published to mark the Silver Jubilee of the Tamil Catholic Association of Victoria (TCAV), John Pathinathan (as the Founder President) wrote:

The main aims of the TCAV are:

- a) To foster and promote spirituality, friendship and understanding among Tamil Catholics
- b) To participate and assist with projects designed to improve the welfare of all Tamil Catholics
- c) To assist newly arrived Tamil Catholic immigrants and others seeking assistance in their settlement

Note: Rev. Fr. James Pathinathan (along with John), Bishop Thomas Savundaranayagam, Bishop Rayappu Joseph, Bishop Justin Gnanapragasam and Rev Fr A. I. Bernard were all colleagues in the 1950's at St Martin's Seminary. All "fought the good fight" making endless representations on behalf of the Tamils displaced and affected by the civil war in Jaffna. Fr James passed away on July 11, 2019 – on the 49th anniversary of his Sacerdotal Ordination.

John Pathinathan passed away in the early hours of January 31, 2021. Due to lockdown caused by the pandemic and the limited number of participants allowed to attend gatherings at the time, his funeral was privately held. John is buried at the Yan Yean Cemetery, Whittlesea.