



Call for a resettlement plan reflecting equity for all regions

At a time when the numbers of people forcibly displaced worldwide are reaching record levels, the renewed warmth of Canada's response to refugees is a much-needed sign of hope.

Countless Canadians have added their efforts to the government's massive operation to resettle more than 25,000 Syrian refugees. Communities continue to mobilize to support those who have arrived. Many Canadian private sponsors are still waiting impatiently for Syrians, having worked hard to raise funds and to organize themselves to provide the assistance that will be needed.

We have the opportunity now to renew and reinvigorate Canada's response to refugees, and more particularly Canada's private sponsorship program. More Canadians than at any time in recent decades are learning about the complexities of the private sponsorship program, including its barriers and challenges. Many are also deepening their understanding of the global refugee crisis, including the majority of the world's refugees who are not Syrian.

It is estimated that today 60 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced, almost 20 million of them refugees. The Syrian conflict has added dramatically to the scale of the crisis, but Syrian refugees are still outnumbered by other refugees.

Many of the situations forcing people to flee are protracted, leaving millions of refugees stuck in camps or surviving without status in cities for years, if not decades. Although some sponsors would like the processing of Syrian refugees to be faster, compared to other refugees it is relatively quick and easy to sponsor Syrian refugees. Africa hosts fully a third of the refugees in need of resettlement, but they routinely wait as long as five years for Canada to process their application. Over 6,000 people in Africa are currently waiting for an answer from Canada.

The government announced a greatly increased target for privately sponsored refugees in 2016. The plan was to make a significant effort to reduce the backlogs in Africa and other regions. More resources would be allocated and extra visa officers sent to do the processing.

However, these plans are now in doubt. In response to pressures, the government is re-allocating resources to the expedited processing of more Syrians. While this is obviously good news for Syrians, it likely means that there will be fewer resources and fewer spaces for African refugees.

The CCR urges the Government of Canada to uphold the principles of fairness and equity in responding to refugees around the world. The CCR commends the government for significantly increasing the immigration targets for refugees and for the mass resettlement of Syrian refugees. In the interests of justice, this needs to be complemented by a commitment to eliminate the backlogs in Africa and other regions, within a clear timeline.

The CCR is ready and willing, along with the private sponsoring community, to assist in developing a new plan to achieve balance between refugee populations.

We believe that such a plan is needed in order to reflect Canadians' solidarity to all refugees, without discrimination.