



20 October 2020

The Honourable Marco E. L. Mendicino, P.C., M.P.
365 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 1L1

RE: Refugee family reunification

Dear Minister,

Recently you announced commendable measures to enable more families to reunite in Canada, despite the pandemic, with new commitments to expedite **spousal sponsorship** and to **allow entry to extended family members**. Thank you for taking these steps.

Today, we are writing to ask you to extend these important gestures further and to introduce measures to allow refugee families to be speedily reunited. As you are well aware, refugees experience all the hardships of other families, and more, since family members are often themselves victims of persecution while they wait, or may be living in precarious situations having been forced to flee their homes.

As you also know, people who are accepted as refugees by the Immigration and Refugee Board face long delays before they can be reunited with family members abroad, in some cases after waiting years for their own refugee hearing. First, they must apply for permanent residence. Once they have received permanent residence (a more than two year wait according to IRCC's published processing time), then they must wait for finalization of the applications of their family members abroad. The processing times for refugee family members are not published by IRCC, despite repeated requests from the CCR and promises by IRCC to provide them – we can only presume that your department considers the statistics too embarrassing to publish. Parents miss years of their children's lives because we fail to prioritize reuniting them.

We were recently informed by your officials that there are 45,000 people in the “inventory” of Protected Persons waiting for permanent residence. 45,000 lives delayed and denied the comforts of family. Based on the current immigration levels targets, it will take more than two years to finalize these applications, without considering the new applications being added each month.

The pandemic has of course meant IRCC offices in Canada and around the world have suspended or slowed their operations, including processing of applications by Protected Persons and their family members. While we understand this, to those who cannot move ahead, it means little without answers from our government.

The long family separation has a tremendous impact on those affected and indirectly on the communities where they live. The economic burden is heavy: many are sending money, from the little income they have, to support their family overseas. The toll on mental health is devastating. Having waited with no movement on his application for a year and a half after being accepted as a refugee, one father said, "For the last year I have had a depression and a feeling of loneliness. Canada is a beautiful and amazing country but I feel nothing but sorrow and disappointment."

In some cases, family members abroad are in very dangerous situations. The CCR is fortunate to have a longstanding relationship with IRCC that allows us to identify cases involving separated children, which then benefit from expedited processing. But even among the cases which receive special attention, delays are sometimes unconscionably long. Some examples of the situations in which children find themselves include minors in the care of acquaintances who are negligent or even abusive, adolescent children outside their home country with no one to care for them, children in war zones, children showing pronounced signs of psychological distress, children living in hiding because of risks from the persecutor, and children who had been staying with a parent or grandparent who has now died, leaving them homeless as well as bereaved.

Attached are two examples of affected families, to illustrate the acute agony caused by family separation. While many people who are separated from their families by immigration rules can draw attention to their situation through public calls and through the media, most refugee families must avoid any publicity that might identify them or their family members, because of the risk of persecution. It is therefore all the more important to be attentive to these voices that cannot be raised publicly.

Part of Canada's obligation towards refugees is to ensure timely family reunification. It is to our shame that we are not living up to this obligation. We, I ask you to take urgent measures, today, so that speedy family reunification for refugees is a reality.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "D. Blumczynska".

Dorota Blumczynska
President