



MAY 30 2017

MAYOR'S OFFICE

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VICTORIA, B.C.

Her Worship Lisa Helps
Mayor of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria BC V8W 1P6

Dear Madam Mayor:

The Office of the Prime Minister has kindly forwarded to the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, a copy of your letter of May 10, 2017, concerning Canada's refugee policies and the processing times for privately sponsored refugees. I apologize for the delay in responding.

The concerns of the Victoria City Council and the sponsorship groups have been noted and I understand your reasons for writing. In the world of refugee resettlement, 2016 was a phenomenal year that saw an outpouring of generosity from Canadians who responded to the Government's call to support efforts to resettle Syrian refugees. It has been amazing to see citizens from coast to coast offer incredible acts of generosity.

The Private Sponsorship of Refugees program is, and will remain, an integral part of Canada's immigration program. Changes have been introduced to the intake of new applications that will ensure its long-term success. These measures are expected to improve typical wait times for privately sponsored refugees to approximately 12 months by 2019 (although wait times could vary by mission).

The current reality is that privately sponsored refugees experience long wait times at many overseas missions. More than 45,000 persons are waiting to be processed with a large number having waited for more than three years. While awaiting a decision on their applications, their lives are often disrupted.

In November 2016, the *2017 Immigration Levels Plan* was announced, which has a target of 25,000 spaces for resettled refugees. This target doubles the average number of resettled refugees admitted to Canada prior to 2015, reflecting the importance the Government of Canada affords to refugee resettlement, and demonstrating our commitment as a global leader on the issue of refugee protection.

In an effort to lessen the impact on those refugees who have already been waiting for years to start a new life, the *2017 Immigration Levels Plan* places priority on the privately

sponsored refugee category. The target of 16,000 privately sponsored refugees more than triples the average number of privately sponsored refugees admitted prior to 2015, and will allow Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to make significant strides in reducing the long wait times for this program.

However, additional measures are still required to reduce the backlogs and long wait times that have grown over the past several years. The following measures have been introduced to enhance the long-term effectiveness of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program:

- establishing a global cap of applications for 7,500 persons for Sponsorship Agreement Holders (outside of Quebec);
- eliminating mission-specific sub-caps; and,
- limiting the number of applications that may be submitted for Syrian and Iraqi refugees by Groups of Five and Community Sponsors. As of December 19, 2016, a new public policy exempted the refugees from certain regulatory requirements. This public policy was set to expire in a year or once we have received applications for 1,000 persons, whichever comes first. I regret to inform you that the cap was reached on January 25, 2017. For more information, please visit our Website at:
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/departement/media/notices/2017-01-25.asp>.

The Government of Canada is thrilled by the enormous and increasing support from Canadians for private sponsorship in 2016. Unfortunately the interest outpaces the number of available admission spaces and so a difficult balance needed to be struck to ensure the long-term success of the program by:

- offering more timely protection to refugees;
- processing the large majority of cases submitted prior to 2015 by 2019;
- being more responsive to new humanitarian crises as they emerge; and,
- providing private sponsors and stakeholders that offer services to refugees with greater certainty on when to expect refugee arrivals.

To continue to harness the goodwill of Canadians, IRCC will be looking at ways to facilitate more opportunities to support the settlement needs of refugees in Canada. Sponsoring a refugee is just one way to help; Canadians can also donate to organizations that are helping refugees or volunteer their time to help newcomers adjust to life in Canada.

IRCC also continues to encourage sponsoring groups to work to ensure that privately sponsored refugees have the benefit of understanding the full range of settlement supports available to resettled refugees such as access to language training and employment related services. For sponsors, training and resource materials are also available through the IRCC-funded Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP).

Sponsors with cases pending are also encouraged to get involved with organizations who are helping refugees in their community. This will help sponsors gain experience now which will later help their sponsored refugee(s) adjust to life in Canada.

The Government of Canada appreciates all of the hard work and dedication that partners do to offer protection to refugees, and appreciates their efforts working to promote the private sponsorship program. The Government of Canada is keenly aware of Canadians' willingness to do more for refugees around the world and looks forward to continued collaborative efforts to further this mutual interest.

Thank you for writing. I trust that this information will be of assistance to the Victoria City Council and to the local sponsorship groups.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Charbonneau', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

S. Charbonneau
Ministerial Enquiries Division