



October 6, 2016

The Honourable John McCallum
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6
john.mccallum@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister McCallum,

On September 2, 2015 the body of Syrian toddler, Aylan Kurdi, washed onto Turkish shores, making international headlines and galvanizing the global community, including Canadians across this country, to respond to the plight of the Syrian refugee crisis. What resulted was a Prime Ministerial initiative that responded to the interests of Canadians as well as propelled Canadians into action. What has culminated as Canada's response to the plight of Syrian refugees, and by extension, refugees of many diverse nationalities, is nothing short of historical.

Please allow me to commend you and the Government of Canada for all actions that have been taken over the past 12 months to motivate, support and catapult the men and women of this country to become agents of hope and protection through Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP). Canada's identity as a humanitarian leader on the global stage has rightly been restored to the pedestal upon which it historically rested in years past. For this, I am grateful.

In parallel to the exciting expansion and rapid growth of Canada's sponsorship program over the past year, however, there have been clear and evident growing pains. I am writing to you now on behalf of diocesan constituents and sponsorship stakeholders across the country, to draw your attention to some persisting concerns. I hope you will take the following issues seriously and take immediate remedial steps to address the gaps that have arisen.

With respect to the processing of pending Syrian refugee applications, I draw your attention to the fact that many sponsoring groups that submitted applications long ago are still waiting for refugees to arrive. Canadians were called to action during a time when the Government of Canada was promising arrival timelines of less than two months (i.e., the Government's original goal of bringing 25,000 Syrians to Canada was expected to be met between November and the end of December 2015).

The expectations of Canadians were immediately framed in this short-term context and as such, decisions were taken accordingly. Settlement and integration planning, including arrangements for housing and accommodation, resulted in leases being signed and rent being paid in an applied context where arrival was expected to be imminent.

Processing delays have already resulted in significant financial losses for sponsoring groups and continued delays pose to undermine the prospect that sufficient resources will be in place once the sponsorship period actually begins, post-arrival. Needless to say, there has arisen a significant level of anxiety and concern within sponsoring groups, especially those with finite sponsorship resources at their disposal. Such delays are affecting the viability of pending sponsorship applications, many of which have now been put in jeopardy due to the additional cost associated with maintaining vacant accommodation.

The Government effectively capitalized on the kindness and generosity of the men and women of Canada for political gain. As a result, the Government succeeded in accomplishing its objective of welcoming 25,000 Syrians to Canada by the end of February 2016. This would not have been possible without the support of the Canadian public and the sponsorship community at large.

The Government of Canada must now be duly diligent and take immediate steps to respect and honour the Canadian interest by processing the cases that are still pending as quickly as possible.

Needless to say, delayed arrivals and the lack of clear and transparent communication about the status of pending cases, poses the risk of undermining the faith of Canadians in the Government's ability to follow through on its promises. These realities also represent potential to undermine the Government's ability to meet future immigration levels plans, as interest and confidence in the sponsorship program will continue to dissolve and wane as poor outcomes continue to manifest.

Ultimately, what I fear is that operational/procedural barriers and the lack of political will to ensure efficient processing will achieve the opposite of effectively building on the positive momentum that was born of the tragedy that was Aylan Kurdi's stolen youth. The fact that the IRCC Central Processing Office in Winnipeg is no longer expediting Syrian application is a further betrayal of the momentum that the federal government assisted to build, which it is now stifling.

I kindly ask that you please take measures to expedite in all possible ways the processing of Syrian applications, given the applied context in which Canadians have been galvanized to respond to this population in particular. Further, in the spirit of fairness and non-discrimination, your Department must expedite processing for Syrians in parallel to all refugee groups. It is neither reasonable nor fair for an Afghan family in Pakistan to wait 75 months, or for an Eritrean refugee in Egypt to wait 55 months, to have their sponsorship applications processed to completion: this is both cruel and counterintuitive to the nature of a life-saving program.

While the new Government has commendably taken steps to shift Canada's focus to humanitarian and family class immigration, I trust that the Government will take further steps to deepen the integrity of Canada's resettlement program by addressing the above concerns. The Government must also take action to more transparently manage sponsor expectations in future, ensuring clear communication for program stakeholders and implementing fair and efficient processing for all refugees, as well as working closely with provincial and municipal governments to ensure the necessary infrastructure and support systems are in place and adequately funded. This is the expectation that Canadians will hold this new Government accountable for and we will be waiting with hope to see such results.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas Crosby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI
Bishop of Hamilton and
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops