

The Most Reverend Douglas Crosby, O.M.I., Bishop of Hamilton and President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), wrote on September 30, 2015, to the following national political leaders about the CCCC 2015 Plenary resolution on refugees. The text of his letter is provided below.

*The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
and Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada*

*The Honourable Thomas Mulcair
Leader of the Official Opposition
and Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada*

*The Honourable Justin Trudeau
Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada*

*The Honourable Elizabeth May
Leader of the Green Party of Canada*

*Mr. Gilles Duceppe
Leader of the Bloc Quebecois*

The Catholic Bishops of Canada during their recent Plenary Assembly earlier this month called on *the Government of Canada to expand, accelerate, and facilitate the private sponsorship of refugees during this time of urgent need.* Our discussion made it clear that this resolution is intended not only to encourage the present government in its ongoing efforts, but also to urge that such measures be continued and expanded by the next government with the collaboration of all the parties represented in the House of Commons.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops appreciates the attention that each of you personally and all your parties are giving to this issue in your discussions and debates on the refugee crisis during this current election campaign. The issue is admittedly complex, but at the same time the situation in Syria, Northern Africa and throughout the Middle East requires renewed and collaborative efforts in order to respond to the magnitude and urgency of the current humanitarian crisis. We entreat you, and the leaders of the other national parties – no matter which of you may be invited to form the next government and to serve as the next leader of the official opposition – to support efforts by the government and individual members of Parliament to ensure Canada effectively expands, accelerates and facilitates the private sponsorship of refugees. We particularly urge you to find more effective ways of reuniting refugee families, and to recognize the special urgency of the needs of children, single-parent families, and those minorities and individuals facing persecution.

I can assure you that Catholics across Canada, together with members of other Churches and faiths, are eager and willing to sponsor refugees. The Office for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT) is one of the nation's largest refugee agencies. Staff from other Catholic dioceses and eparchies have formed a special organization, the Catholic Refugee Sponsors' Council. Both ORAT and the Sponsors' Council are active in providing advice and information for groups wishing to initiate sponsorship or resettlement, or already involved in such efforts.

In addition, the Catholic dioceses and eparchies of our country are now involved in the second major fundraising campaign within three years to assist Syrian refugees. In the first fundraising campaign, Canadian Catholics, with the assistance of contributions from the Government of Canada, contributed over \$14 million. Just two weeks ago, the second major campaign for Syrian refugees was announced, which involves us as Bishops of Canada together with the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Aid for the Church in Need Canada, and CNEWA Canada (the Canadian section of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association). Although our Plenary resolution concludes by calling on the Government of Canada, most of it is directed toward Catholics across the country, urging and encouraging them in their efforts to assist the refugees (*cf.* enclosed resolution).

Your efforts and ours, those by the government as well as by our Church, must be based on recognizing that refugees, no matter their religious convictions, are our brothers and sisters in need. Solidarity, justice and peace can only be built by recognizing the dignity and worth of each human life. In the words of Pope Francis during his recent visit to our continent, we need to view the refugees "as persons, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal" (Address to the US Congress). To do otherwise means those "individual persons, our brothers and sisters, men and women, young and old, boys and girls who weep, suffer and die" risk being "discarded," if "our response is simply to draw up lists of problems, strategies and disagreements" (Address to the United Nations General Assembly).

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Canada, I assure you that we will do all we can to cooperate with you, as well as with provincial and municipal governments, in assisting, sponsoring and resettling refugees from Syria, from throughout the Middle East, and from other areas of the world that are experiencing conflict or persecution. Furthermore, we will continue to collaborate in providing humanitarian assistance to the millions of others throughout the world who have been displaced because of famine, poverty or environmental disaster.

Sincerely,

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