

May 12, 2021

The Right Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
pm@pm.gc.ca

The Hon. Marco Mendicino, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Marco.Mendicino@parl.gc.ca

The Hon. Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health
Patty.hajdu@parl.gc.ca

The Hon. Bill Blair, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Public Safety
Bill.blair@parl.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Ministers Mendicino, Hajdu, and Blair,

I'm writing to express Mennonite Central Committee Canada's concern about the continued lack of travel possibilities for refugees to resettle to Canada. Currently, only those refugees with a permanent residence visa issued before pandemic travel restrictions were introduced in March 2020 are being admitted. There are more than 25 million refugees globally. Resettlement has been a small but important tool to provide a durable solution for some of these refugees and we encourage Canada to continue to play a leadership role in resettlement.

As the first organization to sign a Sponsorship Agreement in March 1979, MCC is proud to be a part of that work. Since 1979 we have helped resettle more than 12,500 refugees in many communities across Canada.

Last March, when arrivals of refugees were cut to almost none, it was devastating for the many sponsors we work with. In 2020, MCC welcomed 118 refugees through Privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR) and Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) programs. That is only 20% of the number we resettled the previous year.

We encourage the Canadian government to resume issuing visas for refugees approved for resettlement in Canada. While we understand and support the need for travel restrictions, restricting refugees from travelling is jeopardizing lives and keeping extended families apart. Travel by refugees is not discretionary travel and can be done safely. According to Paul Shetler Fast, MPH, MCC's public health expert leading our global COVID-19 response, "with proper quarantine procedures, testing, and precautions, resettled refugees pose a very low risk to the communities that welcome them."

We know from government statistics that 2,200 Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), 2,405 PSR refugee and 20 BVOR refugees were resettled in Canada in the last three quarters of 2020. Of the 72 people MCC helped to resettle during that time, there was no COVID-19 transmission. In all cases we worked with sponsors to develop quarantine and public health plans which we explained to the newcomers and impressed upon them the importance of following them. These plans were shared with IRCC and CBSA agents at the Point of Entry.

Let me tell you briefly [about our first arrival last summer](#) when travel was allowed. A Rohingya family of three living in Malaysia travelled to Winnipeg in early July. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) made sure that they had proper PPE for the journey. The two parents and young child arrived wearing masks and gloves. At the airport they were met by two people from the sponsor group, who took their photo to show the family in Winnipeg they had arrived. They then pointed them to the taxi stand at the airport and provided the driver with an address. The family moved into an apartment temporarily vacated by the brother of the principal applicant who had moved into the house of another family member. In the apartment they found everything they needed including a cell phone for them to stay in contact and a thermometer to monitor their temperatures. Family waved to them from the street and dropped off food and other essentials at the door. It was difficult for the family to stay apart after being separated for so long, but they did so for the entire quarantine period.

Shortly after the family completed their quarantine period, the expectant mother gave birth. The sponsors looked carefully at the public health regulations in Manitoba at that time and decided they could hold a limited size and physically distanced combination “Welcome to Canada” and baby shower in one of the sponsor’s backyards. The celebration highlighted the ways sponsorship groups can follow public health measures and uphold the dignity of newcomers.

We know of many more people who would like to welcome their family and friends living in dire situations as refugees to Canada. We also know people who want to sponsor refugees, even though they personally do not know any refugees, because that is what Canadians do.

Given the ongoing global refugee crisis, it is important for the government to restart issuing visas for refugee resettlement. The new international travel regulations put in place by the government provide an additional measure of protection. Canada is a leader in refugee resettlement and can play a leadership role in demonstrating that welcoming refugees can be done safely. Finally, resettling refugees is more than a humanitarian act. Many [resettled refugees continue to fill important roles](#) in the front lines as essential workers during this pandemic. We need the contributions newcomers bring to Canada.

We look forward to working with you and celebrating the safe arrival of many more newcomers to Canada.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Bauman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rick Cober Bauman, executive director

CC:

Mr. Joël Lightbound, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health

Mr. Peter Schiefke, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

The Hon. Erin O'Toole, Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, Conservative Party

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan, Official Opposition Critic for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Conservative Party

The Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner, Official Opposition Critic for Health, Conservative Party

Ms. Shannon Stubbs, Official Opposition Critic for Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Conservative Party

Mr. Jagmeet Singh, Leader, New Democratic Party

Ms. Jenny Kwan, Opposition Critic for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, New Democratic Party

Mr. Don Davies, Opposition Critic for Health, New Democratic Party

Mr. Jack Harris, Opposition Critic for Public Safety, New Democratic Party

M. Yves-François Blanchet, Leader, Bloc Québécois

Mme. Christine Normandin, Opposition Critic for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Bloc Québécois

M. Luc Thériault, Opposition Critic for Health, Bloc Québécois

Mme. Kristina Michaud, Opposition Critic for Public Safety, Bloc Québécois

Ms. Annamie Paul, Leader, Green Party of Canada