

October 4, 2021

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCC) congratulates you on your election victory and we look forward to working with you on several areas that we have worked on with the government of Canada for a number of years.

Today however, we want to address specifically the government response to Afghanistan and the role that NGOs can play. As you know there are many Canadian based NGOs that have worked on important projects in Afghanistan. MCC has worked with partners in Afghanistan on food security, education, and peace and conflict resolution. While the environment is certainly more challenging today, we hope that we can continue to help people in Afghanistan. Food security, related to climate change in particular is a concern and we know that it can be a multiplier in conflict and displacement situations.

MCC is also a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) and since 1979, we have helped resettle over 13,000 refugees in communities across Canada. We welcome the heightened awareness of the plight of Afghans who have been forced to flee. Their situation, which has been dire for more than 40 years, has only gotten worse in the last few months.

We want to make sure we keep this situation in the context of larger forced displacement globally. We are concerned that global forced displacement has doubled since 2013. We are grateful the government of Canada has taken a lead in resettling refugees. We are proud that Canada has been willing to resettle refugees referred by the UNHCR that few states have been willing to take, and we pray that will continue and even grow. Therefore, while the world has turned its attention to the plight of Afghan refugees, we must not lessen our commitment to other vulnerable refugee populations globally who are also in need of a durable solution that Canada can provide through resettlement. We believe the additional protection spaces offered to Afghans must not come at the expense of other resettlement places that the government of Canada has committed to provide. We hope that this will be reflected when the Immigration Minister tables the immigration plan for 2022-24 on November 1 and in the next federal budget.

We also feel some calling and some challenges as we look for ways to get involved as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder in the current context with a heightened public awareness around refugees and displaced Afghans in particular. In 2015 and 2016, we were extremely active in Operation Syrian Refugee (OSR). In 2016, we resettled over 1,800 refugees, a number eclipsed only by our efforts in 1979. Since then, the number of refugees we resettle has dropped off, but not to the levels before 2015. As a result of this sustained activity influenced by OSR, MCC is working at near capacity to oversee resettlement of refugees. We often receive new calls from our constituents and from Afghans in Canada who have family that are convention refugees. We want to respond to those requests, but we also want to make sure that we do not neglect the many other populations that have not been in the limelight. There are important issues of equity. We as a SAH hope that we

can work with IRCC to find ways to increase our capacity and maintain quality settlement outcomes for more refugees in this context of heightened activity.

We have heard the backlog of PSR applications is over 65,000 people, and we know this is going to be a huge challenge. The solution will undoubtedly involve higher landing targets for PSR refugees in the coming years given the pressure from the Afghan resettlement efforts, but also the many other displacement situations globally where sponsors are also passionate and engaged.

We believe that addressing this backlog should not come at the expense of Canada's commitment to UNHCR referred cases. UNHCR settled refugees and the PSR program, where refugees are nominated by people in Canada, both have an important role in Canada's humanitarian response to forced displacement and ensure that private citizens, Permanent Residents and the Canadian government are all actively engaged and committed to refugee resettlement.

Prime Minister, we hope you keep these points in mind as you work on drafting the mandate letter to the Immigration Minister and as you discuss these matters at the cabinet table. Know that as always, you and all in government as well as those on the opposition benches are in our prayers. We pray for wisdom; we pray for courage; we pray that together we can work for peace in Canada, for the people of Afghanistan and for all who have been forced to flee their homes.

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, Mennonite Central Committee Canada

CC:

Honourable Erin O'Toole
Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada
erin.otoole@parl.gc.ca

Jagmeet Singh
Leader of the New Democratic Party
Jagmeet.Singh@parl.gc.ca

Annamie Paul
Green Party Leader
leader@greenparty.ca

Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Minister@cic.gc.ca