



The Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association

10 November 2016

Dear Minister McCallum,

2016 has been a remarkable year for Canada's resettlement efforts. The Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) Association appreciates the large government commitments that were made and the efforts to meet them. It marked a reinvigoration of the resettlement programs in Canada at a time when this was sorely needed, not just because of the neglect of the programs in recent years, but also because of the state of the world's refugee crisis. We have been impressed with the Government's leadership at the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants and the Leaders' Summit on Refugees in September. Canada's call to re-energize the global refugee system and increase responsibility sharing has made us very hopeful about what we could expect from this Government going forward.

The SAH Council has been meeting with officials from your department since May of 2016 in preparation for the announcement of the next Levels Plan. We heard a commitment to reducing backlogs and restoring the integrity of the resettlement programs, over a three-year period to begin with. We have been discussing Canada's enhanced international presence, the essential role that the UNHCR plays in resettlement which requires countries to partner with it to achieve mutually defined goals, and the strong partnership of government and civil society in Canada through the three resettlement programs – Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) Program, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) Program (PSRP), and the Blended Visa Office Referred Program – a partnership that is unique in the world and sets a strong international example that the Government has been keen to promote.

It was, therefore, concerning to read the 2017 Immigration Levels Plan that was announced on Monday, October 31. While the planned admissions of privately sponsored refugees in 2017 is consistent with 2016, the very low number of government assisted refugees that the Government will admit to Canada in 2017 is troubling. It results in a reduction in the overall refugee resettlement landing number from 44,000 to 25,000. This was not the direction we expected the Levels Plan to go. We also expected there would be a three-year plan to help explain the Government's rationale and to provide a baseline for a much higher commitment over a three-year period. That rationale has not been provided.

It appears from the 2017 Levels Plan that private sponsors will bear a disproportionate responsibility for bringing refugees to safety in Canada. This sets a poor example internationally at a time when the global spotlight is focused on Canada. Many Association members also feel that it compromises the principle of additionality, an underlying principle of the PSRP, which holds that private refugee sponsorships will be in addition to government sponsorships and not instead of those sponsorships. We appreciate and hope that the 2017 PSR arrival level may address the backlog of PSR applications both in the sub-capped visa posts and in the Middle East. However, rather than committing the resources that are needed to maintain respectable levels of both GARs and PSRs and reduce the backlog, the Government appears to have chosen to put economic interests first, at the expense of government assisted refugees and Canada's humanitarian reputation.

As representatives of over 100 sponsorship agreement holders who themselves represent thousands of constituents, we would very much appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss:

- the Government's plans for subsequent years to see if 2017 will be put in a broader context that is more favourable to principles of refugee resettlement that Canada has recently been advocating around the world; and
- our position that the Government should accept 20,000 government assisted refugees annually while also responding to the high level of interest in private sponsorship.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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