

Submission to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
regarding the 2017 Immigration Levels, Settlement and Integration Roundtables

Submitted by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada

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I. Introduction and summary

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) regarding the 2017 Immigration Levels, Settlement, and Integration Roundtables.

MCC is a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. While our work began in 1920 with the distribution of aid to victims of famine in Ukraine, today MCC supports programming in roughly 60 countries in areas of humanitarian relief, community development, and peacebuilding.

Working with refugees and displaced peoples has been, and continues to be, a vital part of MCC's programming in Canada and around the world. In addition to working with internally displaced populations and those living as refugees in their first country of asylum, much of our international relief, development, and peacebuilding efforts aim to prevent people from fleeing their homes by building communities of justice and peace. And, as the first organization to become a Sponsorship Agreement Holder in 1979, MCC has an almost forty-year history of helping refugees rebuild their lives in Canada through the Private Sponsorship Program. In 2016 alone, we helped resettle over 1,843 refugees—a number only eclipsed by our resettlement in 1979.

MCC welcomes the government's desire to engage Canadians on issues of settlement and integration. The groundswell of support we have seen for Private Sponsorship over the last number of years illustrates that Canadians are committed to investing their personal time, energy, and resources for this important work, and value the humanitarian tradition Canada is known for.

As the government works towards addressing the particular needs of Canada's refugee resettlement program, MCC would like to make the following recommendations, articulated in further detail below.

To strengthen the capacity for humanitarian immigration, MCC encourages Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to:

1. Ensure that humanitarian immigration plays a significant role in Canada's overall immigration plan;
2. Strengthen support for the Private Sponsorship Program through sponsor training and the provision of good settlement support services; and
3. Ensure resettlement is part of a comprehensive plan to deal with the root causes of displacement.

II. Key recommendations

MCC is greatly encouraged by the leadership Canada has shown on issues of global migration and refugee resettlement over the last number of years. The recent resettlement of over 46,000 refugees; the launch of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative; the Prime Minister's co-hosting of the Leaders' Summit on Refugees in fall of 2016; and the engagement on the Global Compact on Refugees all illustrate the Canadian government's willingness to dedicate political and departmental resources to shaping the global response to the refugee crisis.

Countries around the world are looking to Canada's refugee resettlement efforts because of the unique ways in which it involves civil society through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program (PSR) and Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) programs. MCC has been honoured to work with IRCC both as an

implementing partner of these programs within Canada, as well as an advocate of these models abroad. Within the international context, MCC Canada's Migration and Resettlement Coordinator has been pleased to participate in the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative both as a consultant on developing materials and speaking to NGOs and states about the PSR Program. It has been humbling and inspiring to meet with people in other places who share our vision of sponsorship and the whole-of-society approach to resettlement.

MCC believes it is important that Canada continue serving as an example to other states by keeping its humanitarian immigration policy and programming strong. Indeed, we see resettlement as one important piece of Canada's international peacebuilding efforts.

To this end, MCC makes the following recommendations to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Recommendation 1: Ensure that humanitarian immigration plays a significant role in Canada's overall immigration plan.

For the past 24 years, humanitarian immigration in Canada has fluctuated between 9 and 14 percent of the country's total immigration. This year's target for the humanitarian stream sits near the top of this range, at 13.3 percent. MCC firmly believes that this baseline target for humanitarian immigration must at a minimum be maintained and, ideally, exceeded for Canada's resettlement efforts to keep pace with the realities of the global displacement crisis.

To strengthen the humanitarian stream within Canada's overall immigration plan, MCC looks to the government to ensure that levels of Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) keep pace with the increase in forced displacement and the UNHCR's call for more resettlement spaces. As you know, UNHCR says that there are about 1.2 million refugees in need of resettlement. Within this context, we believe that Canada's current commitment of 7,500 neither reflects the global need nor our ability to respond. Many organizations such as the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association, and the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance are calling for GAR targets be raised to 20,000. Such a commitment will send a strong signal to other countries that Canada desires to lead on resettlement efforts. The global crisis demands such an exceptional response, particularly at a time when there is a severe shortage of resettlement spaces, and countries like the U.S. have significantly reduced resettlement commitments.

Alongside an increase in GARs, refugee resettlement through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees and Blended Visa Office-Referred programs should continue to provide additional opportunities for civil society to be directly involved in this important work and, if they wish, in the selection of refugees for resettlement.

We recognize that within the humanitarian immigration category, it will be important to strike the right balance between GARs, BVORs, PSRs, and refugee claimants, as all have a unique role to play in Canada's commitment to addressing the global migration crisis. To this end, it is crucial that each of these programs functions efficiently and at full capacity. MCC applauds the government's commitment to reducing the PSR backlog so that all cases are processed within 12 months or less by 2019. We anticipate that this backlog reduction will lead to significantly more applications being accepted into the process and that these applications, then, need not come at the expense of UNHCR-referred cases.

Ultimately, MCC believes that Private Sponsorship should serve as but one part of a comprehensive set of resettlement programs. We encourage the Canadian government to explore "alternative pathways" to protection that fall outside of the humanitarian immigration path. MCC regularly receives pleas from

refugees who can bring skills that would make a contribution to Canada and we believe it would be best to adapt some of the economic categories so refugees with sought after skills can apply for or even be favoured for immigration to Canada. For example, it may be beneficial to adapt a stream of the Provincial Nominee Program that would help bring skilled refugees to provinces looking for specific skill sets, or who have close friends or family already in Canada.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen support for the Private Sponsorship Program through sponsor training and the provision of good settlement support services.

MCC is greatly encouraged by the increasing global interest in Canada's PSR program. With the spotlight on Canada, we want to ensure that this program remains strong so that refugees are welcomed and integrated safely and effectively into our communities. In this work, private sponsors and government-funded settlement agencies play an important role together.

We are grateful for the support offered through programs such as the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program as well as the ongoing open conversations IRCC staff have had with the Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association. Training support and ongoing government-civil society dialogue are important ingredients to ensuring the PSR program runs smoothly. MCC also wants to encourage continued support for immigrant settlement services. Our experience has shown that it is crucial for sponsors to be able to get professional guidance on issues such as language training and job search support—particularly given the severe challenges employment fit and language acquisition pose to successful settlement outcomes. Further, it is extremely important to have access to quality settlement services. In particular, making sure that there are agencies in place that can deal with challenging cases with a case management approach to problem-solving for complex cases. To this end, we look to IRCC to help forge strong links between sponsors and Settlement Providing Organizations. Having professional settlement workers and volunteers work together well needs to be nurtured where it happens and encouraged where it is lacking.

As private sponsorship has gained renewed prominence in Canada, churches, community groups, and private citizens have shown their commitment to welcoming refugees by investing their time, energy, and resources for this work. But there have been challenges. To sustain public interest, the government must ensure that the policies guiding the program are efficient and straightforward and that hurdles to private sponsorship are eliminated as best as possible. MCC is pleased to have had preliminary conversations with IRCC staff on how best to cultivate and sustain community interest in the BVOR program in particular, and we welcome further conversation with ministerial and departmental staff on how to ensure the public remains engaged in and supportive of refugee resettlement in general.

Recommendation 3: Ensure resettlement is part of a comprehensive plan to deal with the root causes of displacement.

Within the international context, much of MCC's long-term work aims to prevent people from needing to flee their homes by helping build communities of peace and well-being. In this way, we firmly believe that while resettlement is important for helping alleviate the burden for host countries and sharing responsibility for displaced persons, it is only one part of the solution to the global crisis.

In the last number of years, we have been pleased to see Global Affairs Canada place a strong focus not only on responding to humanitarian crises and the challenges faced by displaced populations but on the need to invest in longer-term, more integrated approaches to building peace. Throughout the 1990s, Canada was a champion of the human security agenda, making substantial investments in addressing the causes and

consequences of conflict. As the ten-year review of the UN's peacebuilding architecture recently concluded, the global community's over-reliance on costly, short-term responses for dealing with violence has addressed symptoms of insecurity rather than actual causes. As IRCC continues the important work of refugee resettlement in Canada, we strongly encourage the department to work with Global Affairs to strategically address the root causes of displacement around the world through concurrent investments in development, governance, health, education, social cohesion, and other causes of vulnerability.

III. Conclusion

MCC believes refugees and immigrants make extremely important economic, social, political, and cultural contributions that shape Canadian identity in positive ways. Since the beginning of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program almost four decades ago, we have looked for ways to collaborate with the government on refugee resettlement. Motivated by our Christian commitment to welcoming the stranger and building peace in a broken world, MCC is keen to continue building on this work—ensuring vulnerable peoples are welcomed to Canada and that resettlement is one important element of Canada's international peacebuilding response. Indeed, we believe that ongoing leadership in refugee resettlement is part of Canada's humanitarian commitment to dealing with conflict around the world.