

The Honourable Chris Alexander, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
The House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
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January 7, 2015

Minister Alexander:

Late last year we joined in an interfaith initiative concerning the plight of Syrian refugees. The joint statement, signed by 25 faith leaders to date, is as follows:

As representatives of organizations of different faith traditions we join together to call on the Canadian government to resettle Syrian refugees without discrimination based on religion.

All of our religions teach the fundamental worth of every human being. A person should never be excluded from refugee protection or resettlement on the basis of his or her religion.

In responding to situations of conflict where people are divided by religious affiliation and persecuted for their religion, it is all the more important that Canada assert that our humanity unites us all and that discrimination based on religion is unacceptable.

Refugees must be selected for resettlement based on need.

We draw your attention to this statement here to underscore our ongoing concern with the urgent humanitarian and refugee crisis in Syria. We are well aware that religious freedom of minorities in the region is a major concern. However, as a first principle, we urge you to deepen Canada's response in a way that enhances refugee protection and is commensurate with our practice of welcome and generosity *to the most vulnerable* in similar crises of the past.

Minister Alexander, perhaps you recall that, on Human Rights Day 2013, our communities wrote to you encouraging a refugee system "*framed by overarching ethics of hospitality and compassion for vulnerable people.*" And based on that framing we asked you to work with the refugee support community and civil society for a constructive dialogue on the refugee system.

We continue to believe in the urgency of this dialogue. Through the past year we have been troubled to hear: the terms *cruel and unusual* attached to judicial rulings on cuts to refugee health services (IFHP); and that there are growing risks to social assistance accessibility for refugee families. We are concerned that these policy trends will deepen the vulnerability, and hinder the

integration of refugees. Our partners in the refugee support and SAH (Sponsorship Agreement Holder) communities tell us that this current policy context is deepening the strain and stress of already stressed refugees and the agencies that seek to support them. Therefore we again urge you, to work for a constructive policy dialogue that emphasizes the protection of refugees, compassion and hospitality with due diligence on cost efficiency and the security of Canada.

We wish you God's blessings of wisdom and discernment for your important role in 2015.

Sincerely,

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