

University-Rosedale Town Hall: Syrian Refugees

Office of the Hon. Chrystia Freeland

December 22nd, 2015

On December 22nd, 2015, we hosted our first town hall in University-Rosedale on Syrian refugees. We had a lively discussion that showed how engaged and interested the community members of our riding are. It was inspiring to see the compassion and concerns over their well-being and integration into our country. This document shares the main concerns and questions discussed, as well as information and contacts that can help you make a difference.

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Panelists:

Aleksandra Kotyk, Lifeline Syria

Arif Virani, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Citizenship and Refugees

Huda Bukhari, Arab Community Centre of Toronto

Mohammad Naseem, Arab Community Centre of Toronto

Muhammed Aboura, Recent refugee and community member

Questions and Answers

This portion of the document is a condensed summary of the main dialogue discussed at our town hall. Please note they are not verbatim, nor a transcript.

What does accepting 25, 000 Syrian refugees mean for Canada, and our refugee intake process?

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Arif Virani outlined that Canada's accepting of refugees is a reflection of our values and commitment to helping others around the world. Canada has a long history of accepting refugees who have made great contributions to our country, and we will continue to do so.

Allowing Syrian refugees into Canada is not a detriment to Canadians, nor the current immigration processes. The intake stream for Syrian refugees has not "turned the tap off" on other avenues for refugees or prospective immigrants, but an additional allocation of resources was used to meet the commitments our Government has made. While some may believe 25, 000 is a small number, it is symbolically significant and we have seen overwhelming support for helping vulnerable people.

While the Government and private sponsors are bringing the refugees to Canada, how are the refugees finding integration into Canadian society to be? What problems are they facing in integrating, and what can be done to help?

Alexandra Kotyk, Project Manager at Lifeline Syria discussed that the refugees are vulnerable people, who have had their lives disrupted. Now in Canada they are looking forward to working, going to school, getting back on their feet and making contributions to society.

Huda Bukhari, the Executive Director at the Arab Community Centre of Toronto outlined that a key component of ensuring successful integration is ensuring that the refugees are connected to the resources they need. Whether it be connecting refugees to members of the Canadian Syrian community, or answering the questions of sponsors and hosts about what foods are appropriate to serve, it is vital to connect each other to more information or an organization who can provide answers.

For example, depending on where in Syria they lived they may not know English or French, and now are unable to seek help for their medical needs, or emotionally as they face a significant change in lifestyle. For some men who may have been the 'head of the household' or primary provider for the family now find themselves unemployed, and often children may also feel weighed down by tensions, pressures or burdens.

The Arab Community Centre can help with this. Language barriers are difficult barriers to overcome, but possible. Ms. Bukhari encourages those who would like to help to not only donate, but encourage the use of the Arab Community Centre.

Muhammed Aboura, a community member in our riding and recent Syrian refugee also pointed out that it is important to understand that Syrians are grateful for the hospitality of Canadians and want to integrate as soon as they can, but encourages that we note this can be a very difficult time as they must become independent again.

Mr. Aboura noted that, "In Syria, I had my own apartment, career, car, family, friends, favourite streets and restaurants. It [Syria] was home, and nobody wants to leave home. We [Syrians] are proud people who wanted to contribute".

Mr. Aboura also pointed out that many problems often are bureaucratic, and require patience and understanding. He recalled as an example, when he wished to enroll in university courses, it was challenging, as documents that were requested from him could not be produced as they were damaged in the conflict.

The unfortunate, but harsh reality that settlement efforts by sponsors can dismantle was also something that was noted. As Ms. Kotyk established, there often is a 'honeymoon phase' after the refugees' arrival when the relationship between sponsors, hosts and refugees are positive. However, small issues may arise and sponsors may give up their efforts. It is important to realize this, and make efforts to ensure that refugees will enjoy their own autonomy while still receiving support from their sponsors, and addressing concerns early.

Can you address the rumor that is that the government is not accepting single men from refugee camps into Canada?

The Government wants to ensure that efforts are concentrated to helping the most vulnerable. While some may include single men who are members of the LGBTQ community, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has determined that families, women, children and sexual minorities face greater risk. Single men who are part of a broader family where they are children or siblings apart of a greater family unit are also accepted.

Can you address security concerns, i.e. extremism, ISIS, and how the Government is addressing this?

MP Virani stated that it is a core belief of our Government, that Syrian refugees are the first victims of ISIS and extremism. They have suffered much, and should be cared for as victims, not terrorists. It is understandable if Canadians have security concerns, but they should find reassurance in the fact that our intake process and screening process, that begins in Syria is rigorous and exhaustive of all 'red flags'. It is important to note that extremism should not be painted as being of one religion, and that Syrians are

being welcomed by all religious facets in Canada – a beautiful reflection of the country we live in.

How can we help?

As discussed at the town hall, bringing in and welcoming refugees is a massive operation that requires mobilization. There are multiple ways of helping and all efforts are appreciated.

Sponsoring refugees is costly, and it is a growing practice to partner with friends, family members, neighbours, religious organizations or community members. Volunteering with welcoming efforts and donating to organizations that help settle refugees are also great ways to get involved. As MP Virani encouraged, be creative too! Organize a community skating date, or as the Hon. Chrystia Freeland suggested, a trip to the Aga Khan museum to showcase Islamic art in Canada would be very nice as well.

Please find below a list of organizations that have attended our town hall, as well as resources for more information.

Organizations present at our town hall:

Name	Brief Description	Contact Information
St. Peter's Catholic Church – Seaton Village Resettlement Group	St. Peter's Church is organizing resettlement groups and sponsorship	830 Bathurst Street (Parish Office) Toronto, ON M5R 3G1 P:416-534-4219 F:416-534-2328 E:contactus@stpeterstoronto.ca
Christie Street Refugee Centre	CRC works to welcome refugees and respond to refugee claimants who are homeless.	general@christiestreetrc.com 43 Christie Street Toronto, ON M6G 3B1 T: 416-588-9277
COSTI Immigrant Services	COSTI is a community-based multicultural agency providing employment, educational, settlement and social services to all immigrant communities, new Canadians and individuals in need of assistance.	info@costi.org 1710 Dufferin Street Toronto, Ontario Canada M6E 3P2 P: 416-658-1600 F: 416-658-8537
Bloor Street United Church Refugee Sponsorship Group	Bloor Street United Church is organizing the sponsorship of refugees	300 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1W3 416-924-7439 fax: 416-924-1889
Rosedale United Church	Rosedale United Church	159 Roxborough Drive

	is organizing the sponsorship of refugees	Toronto, Ontario M4W 1X7 T: 416-924-0725 churchoffice@rosedaleunited.org
Saint Thomas' Church	St. Thomas' Church is organizing the sponsorship of refugees	383 Huron Street, Toronto, ON M5S 2G5 T: 416-979-2323
Friends of Syria	FOS is a not-for-profit group established in Canada that is aimed at helping refugees who have been affected by the dire conflict in Syria.	Peter Jermyn PO Box 81008 Harbour Square, Toronto ON M5J2V3 t: 416-844-3638 e: michael@friendsofsyria.org
Central Neighbourhood House	CNH provides settlement services and is working to sponsor refugees.	349 Ontario Street Toronto, ON M5A 2V8 Tel: (416) 925-4363 Fax: (416) 925-1545 Email: central@cnh.on.ca
Lifeline Syria		T: 647-827-1428 Email: info@lifelinesyria.ca Mail: Address: Lifeline Syria C/O COSTI Immigrant Services 760 College Street Toronto, Ontario M6G 1C
The Arab Community Centre of Toronto	The Centre is a not-for-profit organization that in non-political and non-sectarian that provides settlement services Arab and non-Arab communities.	555 Burnhamthorpe Road, Suite 209 Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2Y3. (Head Office) Tel:(416)231-7746 Fax:(416)231-4770 Email:info@arabnewcomers.org

The following information was kindly provided to us by MP Virani's office :

1. Donating money

UNHCR Donations

To assist the UNHCR mandate to support Syrians in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq you can donate online to:

UNHCR CANADA / HCR CANADA

280 Albert Street, Suite 401

Ottawa, ON Canada K1P 5G8

https://donate.unhcr.ca/index_custom.php?page_id=syria

Please note that only gifts of \$10 and above are eligible for tax receipts

LifelineSyria | Welcoming Refugees to Toronto

To assist Syrians heading to Canada and Syrians refugees in Canada you can donate to Lifeline Syria by:

CHEQUE: Please make your cheque payable to Lifeline Syria Fund at Toronto Foundation. Please mail cheques to 33 Bloor Street East, Suite 1603, Toronto ON M4W 3H1

CASH: Please drop cash off at Toronto Foundation, 33 Bloor Street East, Suite 1603 Toronto ON M4W 3H1

Online: <https://torontofoundation.ca/fund/lifeline-syria-fund>

Please note that only gifts of \$25 and above are eligible for tax receipts

2. Donating items

Habitat For Humanity, the Furniture Bank, the Salvation Army, Goodwill and other organizations like the Arab Community Centre of Toronto, are able to take household items and clothing immediately to assist Syrian Refugees in Canada. Once a Syrian refugee family arrives at a settlement organization, they are given vouchers that allow them to pick up the items they need free from places like Salvation Army and Goodwill. Any excess items would still be used to benefit others in need within our community.

Friends of Syria is collecting donations both for refugees arriving in Canada, and those at the Zalah refugee camp overseas in the Beqaa valley of Lebanon.

Furniture Bank

<http://www.furniturebank.org/furniture-pickup-request/>

Habitat for Humanity

www.habitat.ca

Salvation Army

www.salvationarmy.ca/Donations

Goodwill

<http://www.goodwill.on.ca>

Arab Community Centre of Toronto

www.arabcommunitycentre.com

Friends of Syria

www.friendsofsyria.org

3. Volunteering

There are a number of organizations looking for volunteers. SPARK Ontario has a current list of multiple organizations such as COSTI Immigrant Services, Catholic Crosscultural Services and CultureLink that serve Refugee Assistance Agencies and are seeking volunteers.

Find My Spark

www.findmyspark.ca/

Catholic Crosscultural Services

<http://www.rstp.ca/>

COSTI Immigrant Services

www.costi.org

CultureLink

www.culturelink.ca

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/volunteer.asp>

A useful general resource for all manner of information on Syrian Refugee assistance is also:

www.welcomeontario.ca

4. Sponsoring a Syrian Refugee family

To assist those who want to start, or have already begun, the process of sponsoring a Syrian Refugee family privately to move to Canada, a number of organizations will be helpful.

First, the critical resource can be found at “Refugee Sponsorship Training Program”. This site includes information on what is involved, the amount of money needed to be raised (to pay for a family for one year, or to do a “blended government-private sponsorship), and how to match up with a current SAH (Sponsorship Agreement Holder) in order to expedite your ability to sponsor a family:

<http://www.rstp.ca/>

A useful site for private sponsors who need linguistic assistance, in order to communicate about settlement issues (like finding work, obtaining healthcare, registering for school) with their new Syrian families they have just sponsored is: www.inmylanguage.org

For a full list of all the current SAH (Sponsorship Agreement Holders) in the Toronto area, please see immediately below:

<p>Afghan Women's Counselling and Integration Community Support Organization 789 Don Mills Road, Suite 700 Toronto, ON M3C 1T5</p> <p>Anglican Diocese of Toronto Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Toronto / Anglican United Refugee Alliance (AURA) 2723 St. Clair Avenue E Toronto, ON M4B 1M8</p> <p>Berhan Semay Church of Toronto 345 Bloor Street, East PO Box 72616 Toronto, Ontario M4W 3S9</p> <p>Canadian Unitarian Council 100-344 Dupont Street Toronto, ON M5R 1V9</p> <p>Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada 30 Carrier Drive, Suite 100 Toronto, ON M9W 5T7</p> <p>Christie Refugee Welcome Centre Inc. 43 Christie Street Toronto, ON</p>	<p>His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Council for Canada/Focus Humanitarian Assistance Canada 789 Don Mills Road, Suite 201 Toronto, ON M3C 1T5</p> <p>Jewish Immigrant Aid Services Toronto (JIAS) 4600 Bathurst Street, Suite 325 Toronto, ON M2R 3V3</p> <p>Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto 115 Simpson Avenue Toronto, ON M4K 1A1</p> <p>Northwood Neighbourhood Services 1860 Wilson Avenue Unit 400 Toronto, ON M9M 3A7</p> <p>The Presbyterian Church in Canada 50 Wynford Drive Toronto, ON M36 1J7</p> <p>Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec 100 - 304 The East Mall Etobicoke, ON</p>
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<p>M6G 3B1</p> <p>Ethiopian Association in the Greater Toronto Area & Surrounding Regions 1950 Danforth Avenue Toronto, ON M4C 1J4</p> <p>Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Toronto 746 Pape Avenue Toronto, ON M4K 3S7</p> <p>Governing Council of the Salvation Army 2 Overlea Blvd Toronto, ON M4H 1P4</p> <p>Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation for the Diocese of Toronto in Canada Office for Refugees, Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT) 371 Old Kingston Road, Unit A Scarborough, ON M1C 3Y2</p> <p>Spiritans, the Congregation of the Holy Ghost 34 Collingsgrove Road Scarborough, ON M1E 3S4</p>	<p>M9B 6E2</p> <p>The United Church of Canada 250 Bloor Street West # 300 Etobicoke, ON M8X 2Y4</p> <p>Welfare Committee for the Assyrian Community in Canada 964 Albion Road, Suite 102 Etobicoke, ON M9V 1A7</p> <p>Armenian Family Support Services 920 Progress Avenue Lower Level, Scarborough, ON M1G 3T5</p> <p>Islamic Foundation of Toronto 441 Nugget Avenue Scarborough, ON M1S 5E1</p> <p>Afghan Association of Ontario (AAO) 130 Bridgeland Avenue, Suite 202 North York, ON M6A 1Z4</p>
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5. Hosting an event for newcomers

Many NGO's (non-governmental organization) aim to integrate Syrian refugees and are looking for citizens to host events in their local communities. Entities exist to help in this effort. For example, Local Immigration Partnership - West Downtown Toronto is one of approximately 20 Local Immigration Partnerships across Ontario designed to facilitate the successful integration of newcomers to Ontario.

The Toronto West Immigration Partnership
<http://torontowestlip.ca/>

The Toronto South Immigration Partnership
<http://www.torontolip.com/>

Settlement.Org is a website that provides information related to immigrating, settling and living in Ontario. The Discussion Forum feature allows you to pose questions and receive responses:

Settlement.Org
www.Settlement.Org

6. How you can help with lodging and employment for Syrians refugees.

Many private organizations have created websites to offer spaces in their homes to Syrian Refugee families. One example is AirBnB, which has created a website called: We Host

<http://wehostrefugees.org/>

The City of Toronto is requesting potential property owners and employers to contact them at:

Toronto Newcomer Office
nwatson4@toronto.ca

Another useful municipal site for housing assistance with newcomers is:
City of Toronto Refugee Resettlement Program

www.toronto.ca/refugees

7. Matching willing donors/volunteers with groups/organizations in need:

A key contact at the City of Toronto for matching donors with groups/agencies in need is Vera Dodic. She can be reached at:

Vera Dodic
Project Manager
Toronto Newcomer Office
Social Policy, Analysis and Research
Social Development, Finance and Administration
14th Floor, East Tower
City Hall, 100 Queen St. W.
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2
vdodic@toronto.ca

The Canadian Arab Institute is also working on creating an interactive portal to facilitate such matching. The portal is not yet live, but the Canadian Arab Institute can be reached at:

Raina Younes

www.Canadianarabinstitute.org