RESETTLING SYRIAN REFUGEES: A NATIONAL PROJECT

The Honourable **John McCallum**, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, was first elected to the House of Commons in 2000. He was re-elected in 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2015.

Mr. McCallum has previously served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, and member of the Standing Committee on Finance. He served as Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions) from January to May 2002. From May 2002 to December 2003, he served as Minister of National Defence and, in 2003, as Minister of Veterans Affairs. In July 2004, he was appointed Minister of National Revenue and Chair of the Expenditure Review Committee by Prime Minister Paul Martin. He recently served as the Critic for Citizenship and Immigration, Multiculturalism, and Seniors.

Before entering politics, Mr. McCallum was Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the Royal Bank of Canada. Mr. McCallum worked as a professor of economics at McGill University (1987-94), as well as at the Université du Québec à Montréal (1982-87), Simon Fraser University (1978-82), and the University of Manitoba (1976-78).

He is the author or co-author of eight books or monographs, and has written on fiscal and monetary issues, comparative macro-economic performance of OECD countries, Canada-U.S. economic integration, and other economic issues. A native of Montréal, Mr. McCallum obtained a Bachelor of Arts from Cambridge University, a Diplôme d'études supérieures from the Université de Paris, and a doctorate in economics from McGill University. Mr. McCallum and his wife, Nancy Lim, have three children.

Our national effort to resettle thousands of Syrian refugees in Canada has helped write a new chapter in Canada's history as a welcoming beacon for newcomers.

The resettlement and integration of refugees has been critical to building our nation, as refugees and their descendants have become contributing members of Canadian society.

We've seen that engaging Canadians, and giving them a chance to display their generosity in service of a national project, has led to an overwhelmingly supportive response.

Internationally, we have taken a leadership role in protecting vulnerable individuals, and are sharing our experiences and lessons learned.

As much as our national effort to resettle thousands of Syrian refugees in Canada over the past few months has been unprecedented in so many ways, it has also been part of a great Canadian tradition – one embedded in our country's DNA.

Since November, Canadians of all walks of life and in every part of the country have worked together to bring victims of a brutal civil war and vicious acts of terrorism to our diverse, peaceful and welcoming land, and to help them begin new lives here.

By doing so on such a scale and in such a short period of time, we have helped to write a new chapter in Canada's long history as a haven for people from around the world escaping persecution and violence.

It is a notably rich history.

Over the decades, many have sought and found refuge in Canada: Hungarians in the 1950s; Vietnamese in the late 1970s; refugees from Kosovo in the 1990s; and others from African and Middle Eastern countries, and countless other troubled places around the world, in more recent years.

Canadian history also helps to explain how and why this country became such a welcoming beacon for all newcomers, including refugees.

More than 125 years ago, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, one of our greatest Prime Ministers, said this of our nation:

> "There is no longer any family here but the human family. It matters not the language people speak, or the altars at which they kneel."

That positive outlook toward harmonious diversity still resonates today among Canadians of the 21st Century. It is reflected in our approach on refugee resettlement.

In contrast with the populations of many other countries, Canadians by and large believe that our tolerance, and our welcoming attitude toward those in need of protection, make our own country better and stronger.

We believe that the successful resettlement and integration of individuals and families fleeing war and persecution has been critical to building our nation. I would argue that we do not only believe these things, but that we have actually witnessed this particular nation-building effect over and over again throughout our country's history.

From the 37,000 Hungarians who came to Canada 60 years ago, to the 60,000 Vietnamese boat people who arrived almost four decades ago, to the thousands and thousands of refugees we have welcomed from different places around the world in the years between and since, we have consistently seen refugees and their descendants become tremendously productive and contributing members of our society and our economy.

That is one of the reasons we confidently and enthusiastically encourage refugees to apply to become Canadians citizens. Many do, as do many of their children, which means that citizenship is passed along from first to second generation refugees. Canada is quite exceptional in the world in that citizenship is an important part of our refugee resettlement process, not least because about 85 per cent of those who are eligible to become Canadian citizens take up that citizenship.

I expect that the Syrian refugees will be no exception to this notable phenomenon that has brought so many benefits to this country.

Canada fulfilled its commitment to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of February, and we continue to welcome refugees from Syria throughout 2016 and beyond. In addition, my department will make every effort to finalize the processing of the privately sponsored Syrian refugee applications that we received before March 31, by the end of 2016 or early in 2017.

As we do so, we also continue to learn important lessons from our historic national effort.

It has been an effort made possible only thanks to an unprecedented collaboration among different levels of government, NGOs, service provider organizations, the public sector, the private sector and, unique to Canada, private sponsors of refugees. This project has also been embraced with enthusiasm by Canadians in communities large and small across the country. I am glad to be the only immigration minister in the world with the major challenge of trying to deliver enough refugees quickly enough to satisfy the remarkable generosity of Canadians who want to sponsor them.

That enthusiasm speaks volumes about our country, and about the general view by Canadians of the Syrian refugee effort. I cannot overstate how inspiring it has been to witness both the generosity of Canadians in that effort, as well as the heartfelt expressions of gratitude from the resettled refugees toward Canada and Canadians. I have grown even more confident as I have met personally with many Syrian refugees in Canada that this gratitude will translate into a determination among these new arrivals and their descendants to give back to this country over the years and decades to come.

Indeed, there has been something of a "virtuous circle" in our experience of resettling Syrian refugees. We've see that engaging Canadians, and giving them a chance to display their generosity in the service of a national project, has led to an overwhelmingly supportive response.

In all stages of this project, we have embraced an open dialogue with Canadians, whose support in return has re-energized our sponsorship community. This has allowed us to do more as a government, which in turn has helped to reinforce, and even broaden, that ongoing public support for the resettlement of Syrian refugees.

The leadership, dedication and generosity displayed by Canada's private sector employers in this effort also deserves to be highlighted. So many employers deserve thanks and congratulations for the important and dedicated role they have played in our effort to welcome Syrian refugees, by giving them the opportunity to better integrate into Canadian society and to contribute to our economy.

They have done this by helping the newcomers secure housing, offering them jobs and training, mentoring newcomers formally and informally, providing direct material support, offering services at affordable rates, and providing time off or flexible work schedules to newcomers so they may attend the language training classes that are so critical for their integration into Canadian life.

We have also witnessed our Canadian private sector demonstrate great generosity with financial contributions to support refugees in communities across Canada, as many corporate donors have heeded our call to action and contributed millions of dollars so far to this cause.

Of course, the important work to help all Syrian refugees fully integrate into Canadian society is also ongoing through the efforts of federally-funded service provider organizations, community and charitable organizations, private sponsors, communities across Canada, and different levels of government.

In 2016-17, the government is allocating $38.6 million in additional funding to respond to the needs of Syrian refugees who will need settlement services to help them successfully integrate into Canadian society. Securing permanent housing for Syrian refugees has been a key priority. As of mid-May, more than 98% of government-assisted Syrian refugees had moved into permanent places to stay.

The great levels of energy and enthusiasm, not to mention the generous, open-hearted responses of Canadians toward our new arrivals, that have sustained this national project over the past several months are continuing, as our project focuses more and more on settlement and integration. Many programs and services are available to refugees to help them become participating members of Canadian society as quickly as possible. These federally-funded services, provided by specialized non-governmental organizations, include:

- assistance upon entering Canada;
- counselling and cultural orientation;
- information and orientation; referral to community resources;
- translation and interpretation;
- language training; and job-related services.

Through our Private Sponsorship of Refugee Program, which is unique in the world, many private citizens and organizations are stepping up to support our efforts. In our national effort to resettle Syrian refugees, private sponsors have been invaluable partners in welcoming and helping to integrate our new arrivals, and — even after only a few months in our country — so many of those newcomers speak of their sponsors as their Canadian family. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi recently said that our private sponsorship program could serve as a model for other countries around the world facing refugee resettlement challenges.

Indeed, one important thing that Canada has shown through our efforts in resettling Syrian refugees, is that we stand prepared to work together with our international partners, and all interested parties around the world, to take a leadership role in helping to ensure the protection of these vulnerable individuals, and to sharing our experiences and our lessons learned in this area.

As Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said:

> "Canada is committed to playing a positive and constructive role in the world in order to advance Canadian interests and make meaningful contributions to solving global challenges."

I am very glad that our ongoing national effort to resettle Syrian refugees has been a positive example of this commitment.