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António Guterres
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Case Postale 2500
CH-1211 Genève 2 Dépôt
Suisse

Dear High Commissioner Guterres,

Thank you again for your visit to Ottawa in May of this year. It was a pleasure to meet you and to hear how Canada can assist the important work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, particularly with regard to the humanitarian and refugee crisis in Syria.

During your press conference on Parliament Hill, you noted that UNHCR was asking the international community to resettle 100,000 more refugees from Syria in 2014 and 2015. You emphasized that Canada had an important role to play in this multilateral effort, and that you had come in part to "sensitize Canadian authorities" to the gravity of the refugee crisis and the severity of the humanitarian need. In an op-ed published in the Globe and Mail, you "encourage[d] Canada to resettle a large number of Syrian refugees, helping to ease the disproportionate burden shouldered by neighbouring countries, and setting an example to the rest of the world."

As you may be aware, the latest figures produced by the government at my request indicate that as of last month the Government of Canada has only accepted 457 Syrian refugees, including just 294 government-sponsored refugees. The Government has still made no commitment beyond the 1,300 refugees it promised to accept over 2013 and 2014, the target in effect at the time of your visit over six months ago and one it appears far from meeting.

Of further concern, and the reason for which I am writing today, the Government of Canada is currently contemplating prioritizing refugee applicants of certain ethnicities and religious faiths while discriminating against others. Your office urges countries resettling refugees "not to use ... discriminatory selection criteria [such as] ethnicity and religion. Such discrimination undermines the protection and needs-based approach to resettlement." The Official Opposition of Canada agrees, and strongly believes that refugee applications should be assessed on the basis of need, not on the basis of religion, ethnicity, or any other characteristic.



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Canada has a strong and proud tradition of refugee resettlement. As you said in May, UNHCR “very much count[s] on the generosity of Canada.” The Official Opposition of Canada is very concerned that the Canadian record and values of generosity, diversity, and tolerance are being undermined by the policies of the current Government, not least with respect to the Syrian refugee crisis. I would appreciate any insight you can offer on the importance of non-discrimination in the consideration of refugee applications, and any advice you may have for the Government of Canada in considering further contributions to refugee resettlement.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul Dewar". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the main text block.

Paul Dewar, M.P.
NDP Foreign Affairs Critic