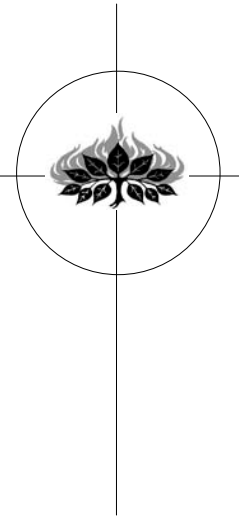


The Presbyterian Church in Canada L'Église presbytérienne au Canada



MODERATOR OF THE 141ST GENERAL ASSEMBLY
The Rev. Karen R. Horst, B.A., M.R.E., M.Div.

The Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1A 0A6

September 3, 2015

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

Greetings on behalf of the 141st General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, which was held June 4-8, 2015 in Vancouver, BC.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The church's commitment to assisting refugees goes back to the 19th century and was augmented after the Second World War with the creation of The Committee on Inter-Church Aid, Refugees, and World Service, which is today Presbyterian World Service & Development, our denomination's development and relief agency. Many Presbyterian congregations across the country welcome refugees, support refugee relief efforts and currently have sponsorship applications being processed.

There are over 19.5 million refugees worldwide. Syrians have overtaken Afghans as the largest refugee population, aside from Palestinians. We are seeing the dramatic consequences as millions of Syrians have fled their home country and millions more are internally displaced. We grieve with all who mourn the senseless loss of life as people flee violence and seek safe haven.

Canada must do more to respond to this crisis. The General Assembly adopted a motion "urging that the number of Government-sponsored refugees be increased to, at a minimum, match the number of privately sponsored refugees." The Church is concerned that Canada is not playing its traditional role in responding to UNHCR resettlement appeals, and thus is not fulfilling its international responsibilities. Rather, the government is putting too much of the onus of the Canadian response on to private sponsors. Meanwhile, there is no suggestion of a resolution to the crisis in Syria, and neighbouring countries are doing much, much more than their fair share to accommodate refugees. It is our hope that our government will act immediately and generously to upgrade its response to the UNHCR's resettlement requests.

Many Syrians in Canada are contacting our national office seeking private sponsorship for their relatives overseas. Some are members of Presbyterian churches; others are simply looking for any organization that will help. Action Réfugiés Montréal, who is implementing The Presbyterian Church in Canada's sponsorship agreement with the Government of Quebec, is responding to similar requests. Canada must implement special measures to allow for immediate reunification with family members in Canada. Syrian Canadians should not have to wait while their relatives perish or remain in dangerous and unsettled situations overseas.

Clerks of Assembly: The Rev. Stephen Kendall, The Rev. Donald Muir, The Rev. Dr. Tony Plomp

While the Syrian refugee crisis is continuing to unfold, we are acutely aware that there are refugees in many parts of the world and many of them are looking to Canada and Canadians for a future of hope. As Canada responds to the Syrian refugee crisis, it is important that our support to Syrians not displace efforts to resettle refugees from other world regions.

The number of refugees in the Middle East and worldwide continues to increase. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is struggling to meet the needs of vulnerable people, many of whom are women and children. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been responding through Presbyterian World Service & Development with humanitarian assistance in Syria and in neighbouring countries. The church is grateful that Canada has been supporting the UNHCR with record grants to help it meet the humanitarian needs of Syrian and other refugees. However, recognizing the needs, the members of the General Assembly resolved also to “urge that Canada increase its annual contribution to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.”

As Christians, we heed the call from Jesus Christ to seek ways to welcome the stranger, to protect the vulnerable and to affirm the dignity of all. This is the heart of the Church’s ministry with refugees. We are not asking Canada to deal with just one aspect of this crisis, but we are asking Canada to do significantly more in refugee resettlement and humanitarian assistance.

I look forward to your response.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rev Karen Horst".

The Reverend Karen R. Horst
Moderator of the 141st General Assembly

Cc: The Hon. Chris Alexander, Minister of Immigration
The Hon. Christian Paradis, Minister of International Development and La Francophonie