

November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

Hon. Chrystia Freeland  
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance  
House of Commons  
Ottawa,  
ON K1A 0A6

Hon. Marc Miller  
Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship of Canada  
House of Commons  
Ottawa,  
ON K1A 0A6

Cc: Toronto MPs

Dear Hon. Chrystia Freeland and Hon. Marc Miller,

There is no clearer call in the sacred scriptures of our collective faith traditions than to care for our neighbour in need and, for many months, we have called upon you and our elected municipal, provincial, and federal officials to provide adequate welcome to the African asylum seekers landing in record numbers at Pearson airport. While Toronto takes refugees by the thousands into our overflowing shelters, and offers humanitarian aid to thousands more, we have seen that the federal government is not meeting its responsibilities to thousands of other refugees it is obligated to protect. As faith leaders and leaders of faith-based organizations, from across the GTA and surrounding areas, we can no longer remain silent in the face of this cruel disregard for human lives. We request an urgent meeting to discuss humanitarian solutions, before winter claims the lives of any of our Black brothers and sisters sheltering in the alleyways of our city and floors of our places of worship.

The plight of asylum seekers in Toronto is alarming and warrants immediate attention. In the first half of 2023, Ontario experienced a surge in refugee and asylum claims, surpassing the entire number of claims in 2022 and exceeding those of any other province in Canada. This wave of refugees resulted in over 3,700 individuals staying in the City of Toronto's emergency shelter system. An additional 1,370+ are residing outside the city's shelter system, including first contact sites, Black-led churches and one mosque. Furthermore, over 300 callers each night are being turned away from Toronto Central Intake due to the lack of available shelter beds, with more than a third of them being refugee/asylum claimants. The current system is unsustainable, and the City of Toronto has repeatedly communicated to us that it lacks the resources to adequately respond to this humanitarian and immigration crisis.

Despite these challenges, faith communities, refugee settlement groups and goodwilled individuals in Toronto have demonstrated remarkable resilience and compassion by stepping in

to fill the gap. They have offered their support, resources, and spaces to aid these asylum seekers. This interfaith response highlights the profound role that society must play in caring for vulnerable people, strangers, and refugees, aligning with the teachings of various sacred texts and scriptures. Leviticus 19:34, a shared text for Jews and Christians, says, "The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." Similarly, the Quran emphasizes in Surah Al-Insan (76:8-9), "And they give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan, and the captive."

[Section 15](#) of our Charter ensures equality under the law, prohibiting discrimination based on "race, religion, national or ethnic origin." As signatories to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, we held out the promise of asylum and protection to people who now sleep on concrete. This is an unconscionable welcome.

For months, we have held press conferences, including one at the Deputy Prime Minister's constituency office. We have met with city officials and deputed at City committee meetings. We reject the morally bankrupt position that refugees are not "our responsibility" and ask that all three levels of government respond immediately to the crisis.

Of the Federal Government, we demand immediate action, which includes:

1. Opening and operationalizing federal armouries in Toronto for emergency accommodation for refugee/asylum claimants during the fall and winter season.
2. Increasing the number of spaces in federal hotel programs and other shelter programs for refugee/asylum claimants.
3. Establishing a Reception Centre at Pearson Airport, operated in partnership with the Red Cross and Ontario Coalition for Refugee Claimants, to provide support and settlement services for new arrivals.

There are precedents for these requests:

- Park Armoury and Fort York Armoury have been used four times previously to shelter unhoused individuals.
- In welcoming refugees from Ukraine, the Federal Government quickly established Reception Centres to connect new arrivals with settlement services. In Quebec, new arrivals at land border crossings were similarly connected to federal services upon entry.

Once our beloved siblings are sheltered, the Federal Government must turn its attention to the longer-term welcome. This can be done by:

- a) matching the investments made by the City and the Province in the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit to help refugee/asylum claimants secure permanent housing.
- b) reimbursing the City of Toronto for the full \$200 million in costs incurred for providing emergency shelter to refugee/asylum claimants in 2023.
- c) committing \$250 million in dedicated funding for the City of Toronto in 2024 to cover the estimated costs of providing shelter to refugee/asylum claimants.
- d) Supporting the delivery of the updated Housing TO Plan and the National Housing Strategy.

We note that, until this year, the Federal Government annually compensated the City of Toronto for costs associated with providing shelter to refugee/asylum claimants. This year marks a deviation from that practice. We implore the government to fulfill its responsibility to safeguard the basic human right to housing for the refugees and asylum seekers who have sought refuge within our borders.

In closing, we urgently request a meeting with you, Hon. Chrystia Freeland and Hon. Marc Miller, in the coming week to discuss how faith communities can collaborate with the federal government to support the growing number of asylum seekers. We emphasize that all three levels of government—municipal, provincial, and federal—must come together to find an immediate resolution. Lives depend on our collective actions, and we appeal to your sense of humanity and justice in addressing this urgent obligation.

Sincerely,

1. Dominion Church International
2. Miracle Arena
3. Ethiopian Association in the GTA and surrounding Regions
4. Shahid Akhtar and Dr. Barbara Landau Co-chairs, Canadian Association of Jews and Muslims
5. Janice Hong - Matthew House
6. Manny Wong, Executive Director, Christie Refugee Welcome Centre
7. Loly Rico, FCJ Refugee Centre
8. Susan Eagle, Social and Ecological Justice Commission, Shining Waters Region, United Church of Canada
9. Anglican Diocese of Toronto
10. Interfaith Coalition to Fight Homelessness
11. Pax Christi, Canada
12. Cari Kozierok, Executive Director, Ve'ahavta
13. Rev. Bri-anne Swan, East End United Regional Ministry
14. Rev. Alexa Gilmour
15. Crisis in Our City Working Group
16. Milliken Wesleyan Church
17. (Rev) Michael Van Dusen
18. Maple Grove United Church
19. Gregory Gillis
20. Barbara Sheffield
21. Peter Haresnape
22. Rev Angie Hocking
23. The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton
24. Lyne Webb
25. Angela Gauthier
26. The Rev. Canon Kate Merriman
27. Lynne Bullock-Stephen Minister
28. Rev. Dr. Michelle Voss
29. Marilyn Legge
30. the Rev. Jim Houston
31. Martha Asselin
32. Trinity St Paul's United Church
33. Rev. Maria Christina Conlon, President, Shining Waters Regional Council, United Church of Canada

34. Don McLeod
35. Rev. John Malo CSB
36. Member of Catholic Sunday Community
37. Helen M. Cameron
38. Frances Brady
39. Michael Bourgeois
40. Ursula Witkowska, IBVM
41. Congregation of Edmund Rice Christian Brothers
42. Rob Schellenberg, pastor High Park Meeting House in West Toronto
43. Janet Fraser
44. R Lons
45. Lynn (Catholic)
46. Lois Anne Bordowitz FCJ
47. Rosemary Williamson
48. Joan Missiaen
49. Rev. Dr. Elaine Boone
50. Cathy Lacroix
51. Marie Clarkson
52. Toronto Counselling Centre for Teens
53. The Rev. Maria Ling
54. Mark Aitchison
55. Lanadee Lampman
56. Jeannine Landry
57. Pax Christi Toronto
58. Angela Orellana Schwalm
59. Lucille Corrigan
60. Néstor medina
61. Craig Hincks
62. Dr. Nicholas Athanasiadis
63. Sister Yvonne Steffler
64. Mary-Ellen Francoeur
65. Emma Latham
66. The Do way Covenant United Church
67. ASM Music Foundation/Toronto CA
68. Rev. Daniel Benson
69. Rev. Stephen Milton
70. Maria Di Nicolantonio
71. Jacky Tuinstra
72. Rev. Dr. Harris Athanasiadis, lead minister, Armour Heights Presbyterian Church, Toronto
73. Rev Dr Pamela McCarroll
74. David Armour
75. Rabbi Yael Splansky
76. Rev. Dr. Cameron Watts
77. Rev. Ruth Noble
78. Myra Trainor OLM
79. Amy Herskowitz
80. Anna DiStefano
81. Laura Caprara
82. Sarah Rudolph, ibvm
83. Kimberly Curry
84. HyeRan Kim-Cragg
85. Elda Simonetto
86. Rabbi Ryan Leszner
87. Rabbi Lori Cohen
88. Rabbi Bill S. Tepper
89. Rabbi Shalom Schachter

90. Rabbi Michael Stroh
91. Rabbi Sean Gorman
92. Jon Brooks
93. Rev. Konnie Vissers
94. Marisol Davila
95. Rev. Hilla Lahtinen (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada)
96. Ian Wilgus
97. Karen Wishart (Emmanuel College)
98. Rada
99. Tom Reynolds
100. Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl, C.M.
101. Farheen Khan, Imama, Women's Mosque of Canada
102. Erin Stone
103. Hannah Athanasiadis
104. Fraser Elsdon
105. Dr. Mona Tokarek LaFosse
106. Nazila Isgandarova, PhD
107. Sisters of St. Joseph
108. Rev. Dr. Kristin Philipson
109. jessica haberman-contreras
110. Rev. Russell Daye Bloor Street United Church
111. Ann McGill, FCJ
112. John Carten
113. Colleen Young SOS
114. Justin Appler
115. Rev. Roberta Howey
116. Pax Christi, Sr. M-E Franceour
117. Richard H Sims
118. K. Anna MacQueen
119. The very Rev. The. Hon.Lois:m wilson
120. Rabbi Jennifer Gorman
121. Rev. Jason Meyers
122. Iman Ali
123. Lawrence Park Community Church (United Church of Canada)
124. Jim and Lynne Bullock
125. Susan James
126. Rabbi David Seed
127. Sister MaryAnne Olekszyk
128. Kathleen Bull
129. HyeLim Yoon
130. Phyllis Creighton
131. Rev. Ted Grady
132. Ayodele Moffett
133. Rabbi Stephen Wise, Shaarei-Beth El congregation of Oakville, executive member  
Interfaith Council of Halton
134. Mhairi Godley
135. Peter Hartmans
136. Rabbi Noam Katz
137. Rev. Jordan Smith
138. Rev. Dr. Trevor Brisbin (Humber Valley United Church)
139. Mary-Lou Collins
140. Margaret Needham
141. Mary Mallany IBVMf
142. Pastor Annika Klappert
143. Rabbi Irit Printz
144. The Rev'd Canon Andrea Budgey

145. The Rev'd Dr. Alison Falby
146. Rev. Brian McIntosh, Bloordale United Church, Etobicoke
147. Rev. Tuula Van Gaasbeek
148. Rabbi Eliza McCarrroll
149. Lawrence Gordon
150. Ange Bitwayiki
151. Marilyn Raymond
152. Lynda Lange
153. Rev Michiko Bown-Kai
154. Rev Joanna Manning
155. Rabbi Tina Grimberg
156. Rabbi Alisa Zilbershtein
157. Rev Jim Keenan Pastor, Saint Luke's United Church
158. Kizito Musabimana
159. Isaac Oppong
160. Rev. Adam Hincks, S.J.
161. Jan O'Hearn
162. Cathy Crowe RN, C.M
163. Melina Bondy
164. Rev. Peace Nakayima
165. Rafi Aaron
166. Patricia Longmore
167. Romero House
168. Rev. Lauren Hodgson
169. Ministry for Social Justice, Peace, and Creation Care
170. Allyce Mutungi
171. Amy Herskowitz
172. Rev. William Dyck
173. Rabbi Michal Shekel
174. Rabbi Audrey Pollack
175. Saleh Sheihk