

My name is Fariborz Birjandian and I am the CEO of the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS). CCIS is a non-profit organization that has been providing settlement and integration services to immigrants and refugees in Southern Alberta for 40 years.

Since our inception, CCIS has been the primary agency in the Calgary area responsible for delivering Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) services to Government Assisted Refugees. Over the past 18 months, CCIS has welcomed and resettled 3,000 Syrian refugees. As a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH), CCIS- in partnership with the Calgary Diocese- is responsible for the sponsorship of 75% of the Privately Sponsored Refugees in Calgary and surrounding communities. CCIS has sponsored and landed 2,000 Privately Sponsored Refugees in the past 3 years.

CCIS has been actively involved and, in most cases, has acted as the lead agency in developing and implementing approaches to settling and integrating large influxes of refugees (including the Vietnamese, Khmer Cambodians, Kosovars, Karens, Yugoslavians, Tibetans, Syrian etc.) Our approach to the resettlement of large numbers of vulnerable refugees is evidence-based, timely, and comprehensive and many of our methodologies have been recognized as desirable practices locally, nationally, and internationally.

As a provider of RAP services for 35 years, and as a SAH directly involved in assisting PSRs and the individuals and groups that support them, CCIS has developed extensive expertise related to the resettlement and integration of refugee individuals and families. By working in close partnership with school boards, the healthcare sector, the private sector, and other service providers and community services, CCIS has helped to create a collaborative and holistic approach to ensuring the mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing of refugees, and has engaged Calgarians in facilitating their successful integration into our schools, workplaces, and the community at large.

As you are aware, Calgary has been named as one of the 4 centres to receive and resettle Yazidi refugees. The Yazidis are a particularly vulnerable population who are facing many complex issues including language barriers, cultural differences, and severe emotional and psychological trauma. Despite these challenges, I can say with confidence that this group has been showing great resilience and progress, thanks to the resources and guidance provided by IRCC and the hundreds of hours contributed by volunteers, and the collaborative partnerships developed between CCIS and other stakeholders. In order to holistically address the multiple barriers these clients are facing, at least 300% more planning and effort has been put into service provision for each and every Yazidi family compared to other Government Assisted Refugees. It is important to note that although it is hard for this population to relocate from a community they were destined to, we had 2 families (total of 14 individuals) who relocated to Calgary. This is a good indication of first impressions the Yazidi refugees experience in their resettlement to Calgary.

I was therefore disappointed to learn of Ms. Shannon Smith's witness account of the Yazidi resettlement experience in Calgary. Ms. Smith's involvement with Yazidi refugees has been with only 1 out of the 53 families that have arrived in Calgary since February. As Ms. Smith herself acknowledged, her engagement with this particular family (the Murad family) was also quite limited.

While I greatly appreciate that the Standing Committee is committed to ensuring that the needs of this vulnerable group are being effectively addressed, I feel that Ms. Smith- although well-intentioned- has painted a picture that is very different from what we are seeing at the frontline of these resettlement efforts.

Our Settlement team and our Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) staff have been working closely with members of the Murad family since their arrival on February 22, 2017. In addition to our frontline staff members, 5 Canadian family volunteers (who have undergone thorough screening and training specific to working with Yazidis) have been supporting this family in their resettlement and integration process. Despite the multiple, complex barriers this family is facing, they have shown resilience and have made significant headway thus far.

I sincerely hope that, if the committee decides to make any recommendations on the future of the resettlement of Yazidis, that you take into consideration testimonies from key players who have been closely involved with this project. In the meantime, I am happy to share a detailed list of the services received by the Murad family thus far in order to demonstrate the comprehensive and timely approach that CCIS and our community partners have taken to address this groups' needs.

I cannot emphasize enough that the levels of disparity, violence, and trauma this group has experienced has made them the most high-needs refugee population ever to be resettled in Canada. The concerns voiced by the Murad family are among the first to be formally brought to IRCC's attention; however, I can assure you that there will be more to come given the loss, trauma, culture shock, and long road to resettlement and integration that these newcomers face. It is understandable that they are dealing with feelings of anger, helplessness, and frustration. It is important to recognize that in addition to the individual and family challenges in resettlement and integration in the local community in Canada, this group is also suffering from having loved ones still in Da'esh captivity or are seeking family reunification. In the case of the Murad family, the only living male member of the family is still in Iraq and the family is desperately seeking to reunite with their brother in Canada.

CCIS and our partners within the community are continuing our work in addressing these feelings and concerns among the Yazidis, and supporting them as they overcome their challenges. This is the most significant and complex undertaking of resettlement of the most vulnerable population in Canada and that is why I am disappointed that we are currently being distracted by unnecessary politics.

I have been trying to connect with the Honourable Michelle Rempel and Honourable Tom Kmiec to discuss this issue and provide them with the information of the successes

and challenges this group is experiencing, but I have been informed that they will not be available to meet until January.

I would very much appreciate if you could clarify how a community volunteer with limited access and experience has been identified as the sole witness and the only individual from Calgary to speak to this issue, while the entire team of experts who have been involved in the actual resettlement have not had an opportunity to share our experiences or insights.

In conclusion, I would like to draw your attention to the following points:

1. Calgary and area is a major destination for immigrants and refugees. (20-23,000 annually)
2. Due to the large arrival of immigrants and refugees to Calgary, Calgary has developed a comprehensive community and agency collaboration in partnership with public institutions to provide high quality settlement and integration services.
3. Calgary has one of the best refugee health clinics in the country, which is specialized in addressing refugees mental and physical health.
4. Recent study done by University of British Columbia shows that Calgary's refugees have the highest home ownership in the country. (Dr. Daniel Hiebert, U of BC).
5. The experience of a volunteer with limited understanding of the complexity of settlement and integration should not be the foundation for any decision making.

Please see attached a brief list of services provided for this particular family in their initial settlement services, physical and emotional health support, as well as recreation and broader community connections.