



RESETTLING SYRIAN REFUGEES IN CANADA

A REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BY

ONE FREE WORLD INTERNATIONAL

**INCLUDING A PROPOSAL FOR THE
RESETTLEMENT OF YAZIDI GIRLS AND WOMEN
ESCAPED OR FREED FROM ISIS**

SUBMITTED BY

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TO THE

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

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I. Introduction

One Free World International (OFWI) is honoured to present this brief to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and to present our perspective on how we, as a nation, can best help the refugees fleeing conflict in Syria. We are grateful that the Canadian government and other members of the international community have responded in this matter and are taking measures to help resolve the situation through expediting the resettling of refugees. However, as we all know, there is no simple solution to this crisis.

Statistics are inadequate; they are both meaningless and bursting with meaning at the same time. In a span of only five years millions of Syrians have been displaced including almost five million fleeing the country as refugees. Five million people is an enormous number yet at the same time it is no more than the population of a single urban metropolis – we cannot comprehend the significance of such data. On the other hand, we have all seen news reports with images of thousands of people flooding the borders of Europe; of barely seaworthy vessels bursting at their seams with a desperate cargo of humanity; of the bodies of men, women, and children washed up on beaches in a failed bid for peace and freedom. These images speak to us in a way that statistics cannot and it is no wonder that they have provided the impetus for the international community to take action.

Our hearts go out with compassion because we can see the pain and suffering of a father, a mother, a child... We want to do anything we can to help but simply opening our doors wide is not the solution; it does not help the refugees nor does it solve the underlying issues – in fact, doing so will create much greater problems in the long run. We must help, but any action we take must be conscious, deliberate, and prudent. We must ensure that our actions as a totality, including our decision to resettle refugees, help to move forward the process of finding a solution to the underlying problems and do not inhibit that process. Certainly we must focus our immediate efforts on helping the most vulnerable, like the Yazidi girls and women who have escaped from sexual slavery under their ISIS captors. On the whole, our actions must strengthen and support local and regional efforts for protection and resettlement and not hinder them. And finally, our actions must ensure the speedy and successful integration of the refugees into Canadian society by meeting their physical, emotional, and psychological needs.

II. About One Free World International

OFWI is a Toronto-based international human rights organization that focuses on protecting the rights of religious minorities and educating the public and decision-makers about violations of religious freedom around the world. Rev. El Shafie was himself detained and severely tortured by Egyptian authorities after he converted from Islam to Christianity and began pursuing equal rights for Egyptian Christians. After he was sentenced to death, he was able to escape from Egypt and finally settled in Canada where he established OFWI to share a message of freedom, hope, and tolerance for religious differences and to promote human rights in this area through advocacy, humanitarian aid, and public education.

OFWI has advocated on behalf of religious minorities and individuals regardless of creed, including Christians, Jews, Ahmadiyya and Uyghur Muslims, Falun Gong, and Bahá'ís, among others. Rev. El Shafie has also led delegations on fact-finding missions to countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba,

Israel, India, and Bangladesh, where he has met personally and addressed these issues with government and opposition leaders and local human rights advocates.

Rev. El Shafie has appeared several times before parliamentary bodies in Canada, from the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development to its Subcommittee on International Human Rights and the Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism in Canada, and before the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Committee of the United States Congress. He has also provided expert testimony for numerous courts and tribunals on behalf of individuals seeking protection in Canada and the United States. He has developed relationships with members in the Canadian Parliament and the American Congress and addressed these issues directly with cabinet ministers and officials in the Canadian government, including the Prime Minister's Office, in order to help educate decision-makers about the on-going issue of religious persecution around the world. For his efforts he was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012 and recently received the inaugural Raoul Wallenberg Citation for Moral Courage. Further information about his background and work can be found in Appendix A.

III. Context

It is difficult to find an accurate description for the situation facing the global community in the Middle East and on the doorsteps of Europe. The Syrian crisis becomes intermingled with issues affecting the broader region and they all tend to meld into one amorphous "migrant crisis". However, the common adoption of this term by the media is unfortunate because while it tries to reflect reality by encompassing the diversity of the issues, in effect it obscures this diversity and the fact that many of the "migrants" are legitimate refugees. By glossing over the varying factors motivating people to leave their homes and countries it prevents us from appropriately addressing the underlying issues that are causing this crisis, or more accurately, these crises. The response to those fleeing violence and conflict in Syria must be different than the response to those merely leaving behind difficult circumstances in search of a better life.

ISIS forces in Syria and northern Iraq are systematically eliminating all religious minorities from areas under their control – whether by expulsion, forced conversion, slavery, or killing. Syrian government forces continue to battle the multitudes of rebel factions with callous disdain for human life and innocent citizens are caught in the middle. There is no question that the conflict is affecting all sectors of Syrian society, including Sunni and Shi'a Muslims as well as religious and ethnic minorities. However, where minorities are concerned it is also clear that if the international community does not take effective action immediately there is no long- or even short-term future for minorities in Syria and the implications for minorities in the broader region are similarly ominous. Moreover, the prospect of a vastly destabilized region will inevitably have serious impacts on the peace and stability of the international community reaching Canadian vital interests both in the region and at home, and demands an immediate and effective response.

Canada's pledge to accept 25,000 refugees from Syria last year and more this year was an important step. For those individuals whose lives we will be saving, this decision means everything and it must be implemented correctly to ensure that we are successful in improving lives rather than causing further pain and suffering. On the other hand, as far as the broader crisis is concerned, this same decision resolves little and leaves hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people no better off than they were before.

IV. Assisting Syrian Refugees

The issues involved in assisting Syrian refugees to resettle and integrate in Canada seem simple enough: housing, language skills, jobs, and access to education and health care. In reality, the process of successfully resettling Syrian refugees is much more complex and begins long before the refugees even board a plane to come to their new home in Canada. One might suspect it begins with the way in which we select the refugees to resettle, but this would be an incomplete perspective. We cannot and must not accept refugees without also dealing with the source of the problem they are fleeing and pursuing other, more effective, solutions than resettling Syrian refugees in Canada. Each of these decisions are mutually interdependent and cannot be taken in isolation of the others.

It would be a mistake to think that by resettling 25,000 refugees we have met our responsibilities. Our responsibility is much broader than the one we have undertaken toward 25,000 refugees who happen to be lucky enough to be chosen by a Canadian official; our responsibility is to the hundreds of thousands of refugees we must leave behind, both in Syria and in other conflict zones in the region and around the globe, as well as to the 35 million Canadians who will accept these refugees and welcome them to our home. To ignore these responsibilities would be to fundamentally fail the very refugees we profess to want to help.

In this regard, our refugee resettlement process begins with what we do about the root causes compelling these people to become refugees. It encompasses what we do about ensuring effective local and regional options for the less vulnerable and only then does it consider how we choose those we will help. The logistical and practical issues of finding homes and jobs and securing educational and health resources for the candidates that we have identified are important. They can only begin to be addressed successfully, however, as long as the other issues are being satisfactorily dealt with.

1. Dealing with the Source of the Problem

It is trite but the unfortunate reality is that even if we had the implausible ability to accept and accommodate hundreds of thousands or millions of refugees it would not solve the refugee problem. As long as we do not deal with the source of the problem the flows of refugees will continue. In this regard, the refugee process is not and never was intended as a permanent solution, but as a temporary measure to relieve immediate pain and suffering while the causes of that misery were dealt with. However, in a world accustomed to simple solutions and quick fixes, we have turned to the refugee process as the final solution. Yet the reality is that we need to resolve the underlying problems that are causing these people to flee their homes and countries in the first place.

Natural disasters as a cause for displacement and a source of refugees are one thing and are very much beyond our control; man-made disasters such as the conflict in Syria are a completely different story. There is no excuse for human beings killing and slaughtering other human beings or forcing them to leave their homes. We must find a way to end such conflicts that respects the rights of all those affected. That way families can stay in their homes and the refugees who have already fled will be able to return home to rebuild their lives in safety and security. This is how the refugee system is supposed to work and this is how we will continue to have the capacity to help those who will need our help in the future.

Solving the underlying problems is not as easy as we would like it to be, however, and it is not the purpose of this brief to delve into the complexities of that issue. We may not be able to prevent the parties from continuing to try to solve their conflicts through violent means, but we must do all we can to protect the

innocent. The refugee process and related measures are critical in achieving this goal and we must ensure that, where we must invoke it, we are implementing it in the most effective way that will help the greatest number of people with the least amount of resources. As a result, our resettlement of refugees in Canada starts with enforcing green zones and supporting efforts at regional resettlement.

2. Green Zones

The first line of defence must be support for the establishment of so-called “green zones”. These are safe zones within the region that are secured by international forces where people can go about rebuilding their lives close to home and within a geographical and cultural context that is familiar to them. Such green zones are not refugee camps and they are not an effective solution for everyone. However, they are critical for those who are less vulnerable and thus able to take advantage of them in order to continue their lives with dignity and a sense of normalcy. They also serve a broader purpose, however, in that they can establish a focal point and a strong local base from which to begin rebuilding efforts once conditions are appropriate.

3. Regional Resettlement

Beyond green zones, local and regional solutions are the next best option and should be pursued before any efforts are made for overseas resettlement. The countries around Syria have made a herculean effort in the face of the tidal wave of humanity leaving Syria. Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq (which is simultaneously dealing with its own ISIS problem), Egypt, and Turkey are hosting almost five million refugees between them.

OFWI would like to ask: what about the other Arab and Muslim countries, those which are in the best position to help? Where is Saudi Arabia? The Gulf countries? Morocco and the countries of northern Africa (Libya is the only country in the region other than the five mentioned above to have taken any Syrian refugees)? What about Iran and the non-Arab Muslim countries like Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia among others? Granted some of these countries are not ideal in terms of cultural, linguistic, or economic contexts. But the oil-rich countries of the Gulf and, especially in light of the example set by Iraq, even those facing their own challenges in North Africa have no excuse. At the same time, even those non-Arab countries that are not ideal, are still closer to home and more familiar, both geographically and culturally, than our western secular societies and while they may not be able to help much, the fact that they are not even making an effort is of serious concern.

These countries should be stepping up and resettling all but the most vulnerable, those who truly cannot stay in the region. Cultural and linguistic familiarity will make the process more comfortable for the refugees and their geographic proximity makes it easier for the refugees to access these countries and to return home once the conditions allow. If these countries were shouldering their share of the responsibility, we would be able to focus on supporting those truly vulnerable, those for whom leaving the region is the only option. As a result, OFWI would like to pose the question: what is preventing these countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries that have resources and space, from receiving and helping their own people? Do they not care? Are they afraid, and if so, afraid of what?

4. “The Chosen Ones”

The 25,000 we have chosen and the others who will be selected over this and coming years will have access to substantial advantages and how we choose them will be extremely important. Every candidate

we select for resettlement represents thousands of other Syrians who will be denied the opportunity to obtain safety in Canada or elsewhere. They also represent thousands of refugees from other conflicts or situations whom we otherwise might have been able to help but will not because we are helping these Syrians. As a result, we must make sure that our choices count – we must take the time and necessary measures to choose carefully, even if this means a delay in moving the process forward.

If immigration authorities select the wrong people, those who are not truly the most vulnerable or who may not have the will or intention to adjust to life in Canada, the repercussions will be far-reaching. The Canadian government will be giving them a benefit they do not deserve, it will be committing fraud and possibly worse on the taxpayers who are funding this program, and, most importantly, it will be condemning the truly vulnerable ones to the fate from which they rightfully hoped we would save them. In a very real sense, our responsibility and the success of our endeavour is not defined by those we accept, but rather by those we leave behind.

a. Accepting the most vulnerable

When we choose refugees for our resettlement program it is clear that we must take the most vulnerable. If we are careless and take those who are not most vulnerable, we leave the task of caring for the most vulnerable on the local and regional parties who have the least ability to shoulder this burden. But by taking the most vulnerable we will be freeing up those same resources to deal with those who are not as vulnerable and whom they are better suited to help.

But who are the most vulnerable? This question is very complex and it does not have a straightforward or easy answer. On some level everyone in the affected regions is equally vulnerable and using criteria like religion or ethnicity or other minority status to choose candidates for resettlement is not appropriate. On a superficial level this argument is quite attractive. As with so many things, however, the truth is not so simple.

OFWI certainly does not advocate selecting resettlement candidates on the basis of their minority status, for example, choosing Christians simply because they are Christians or Yazidis because they are Yazidis or likewise for others, Druze, Kurds, Shiite sects, lesbians and gays, etc. Doing so distorts the perception of our efforts and is harmful to those belonging to these minorities who are left behind. It supports the narrative that these communities are foreign elements, despite their ancient presence in the region which, for some, predates the existence of the current Muslim majority. By doing so it places an even greater target on the backs of minorities. It also plays into the extremists' ultimate goal of ridding these areas of their minorities which we do not support as this result will be damaging to the region as a whole. Finally, it denies the fact that there are others who may be equally or more vulnerable regardless of the fact that they do not belong to a minority.

However, OFWI does expect that our government not ignore the very real vulnerability of these communities in an understandable attempt to be “neutral” or “politically correct”. While we should not be giving these minorities special status, they do require special attention just to be treated equally. Yet for many complex reasons these communities are currently vastly under-represented among registered refugees and Canadian government-assisted refugees. This reality ought to provoke questions and prompt measures to address this issue.

Many, if not most, mainstream Muslims will be able to return to their homes after the conflict is over and conditions return to some degree of normalcy. Many of those belonging to minorities will not, and yet

they are often not able to obtain the assistance they need. Fear of extremist activity in refugee camps housing Muslim majorities and distrust of international organizations employing locals belonging to the majority mean that minority refugees often do not have access to mainstream refugee resettlement processes. At the same time, they do not have militias that would enable them to provide even some modicum of protection for their own communities.

As a result, the Canadian government must take the time to work with representatives of these minority groups to locate and assist those who are most vulnerable and not simply rely on the UNHCR to determine who needs assistance. There are numerous organizations, such as the Office for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT) to name only one, that are experienced in refugee and resettlement issues and that work directly and through their international partners with refugees of all communities on the ground. In fact, OFWI has joined forces with ORAT to present a proposal to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to resettle Yazidi girls and women who were abducted by ISIS into sexual slavery but have managed to escape and are unable to seek refugee resources through standard channels. A summary of this proposal is included in section b, below, and a draft of the full proposal can be found at Appendix B.

It is very important that the government work with organizations like ORAT and others that are experienced in the practical aspects of refugee resettlement, in addition to the UNHCR and other agencies, in order to identify the most vulnerable and those who will benefit most from resettlement to Canada. On the other hand, we must also work with the UNHCR to resolve the problems at existing refugee camps and to establish safe options for minority refugees to access the services of the UNHCR.

b. Yazidi Girls and Women

One of the many atrocities committed by ISIS in Syria and northern Iraq is the kidnapping of women and girls, specifically from among minorities, to serve as sex slaves. It has been estimated that some 3,000 girls and women remain in ISIS captivity. Others have managed, through various means, to escape or be rescued and find their way back to their communities in northern Iraq where they are living in camps for the internally displaced. Horrifically abused and traumatized, some girls are only young children and the horrors these women and children have experienced have affected them such that some can no longer even speak.

On returning to their communities they continue to be vulnerable, both to continuous external threats from ISIS or other extremist groups and to internal threats from within their own communities. Some are fortunate enough to be accepted, to varying degrees, by their families and communities, while others find themselves alone in the world. Their family members may have been killed or they are rejected by their families and communities in a conservative culture that views them as damaged goods rather than as victims who deserve an opportunity to rebuild their lives. Yet even those who have the support of their families will not be able to reintegrate into their society in the short or long term. They desperately need our help.

Through our local sources, OFWI has identified four hundred individuals who are among the most vulnerable and are ready to accept Canada's help if only we will open our doors. Together with ORAT, we have prepared a proposal for a group resettlement program for these girls and women, who truly are some of the most hopeless victims of the ISIS onslaught. Our proposal lays out a plan for successfully accomplishing their resettlement in Canada, together with their families, through a cooperative effort with IRCC. An updated draft of the proposal is reproduced at Appendix B to this report.

These girls and women are a discrete population whose needs are very specialized and whose plight the Canadian public can readily understand and rally behind. For all of these reasons, the OFWI/ORAT proposal is an important focal point from where we can start making our efforts more intentional and more effective, in order to truly benefit the most vulnerable victims of ISIS. Nonetheless, it is only a starting point and we must not convince ourselves that we have done our part and there is nothing more for us to do. We have a continued responsibility to the 25,000 we have already selected as well as to the others, those most vulnerable, whom we still have the ability to help.

c. Screening and Security

The humanitarian crisis in Syria is very real and we all share the desire to help. However, as we have said multiple times, the situation is not as simple as it seems and helping and accommodating these people must be in complete and absolute balance with security concerns. It does not help us and it certainly does not help the refugees for us to be “politically correct” in this regard. If even one of the 25,000 refugees we have selected is affiliated with an extremist group and later takes action directly or indirectly against Canadians on Canadian soil, the decision to admit that person will be responsible for Canadian lives lost or at least ruined and for the life of one legitimate refugee who should have had that spot. It will also be responsible for our failure to help countless numbers of other refugees when the false refugee’s actions turn public opinion against accepting refugees.

A person who travels often by air soon becomes accustomed to the flight crew’s announcement that if the oxygen masks release, you must place the mask on yourself first before helping those around you, including children. Although it seems counter-intuitive, the reason for this is simple: if you are not able to help yourself you will not be able to help others. The same principle requires us to apply appropriate and effective security measures to screening those we bring to Canada so that we can protect our country and our continued ability to help others. If we in Canada do not succeed in protecting ourselves, we will end in chaos and will not be able to help anyone.

It may take more time, but we must be informed about the camps from which we choose candidates for resettlement. If we are going to choose candidates from camps that are known to be centres for extremist activity, we must exercise particular caution. In any event, the candidates themselves must be put through rigorous and effective screening on location, before they are selected or allowed to come to Canada. This must be done in order to weed out those with extremist ties and with cultural norms that are fundamentally incompatible with Canadian values and we cannot delegate this responsibility to the UNHCR or other international organizations.

As Canadians we celebrate our diversity and multiculturalism and our acceptance of people from all different cultural backgrounds and rightly so. However, this approach only works as long as those we are dealing with are willing to reciprocate. As much as we would like to think that people share our acceptance of others, there are some – particularly in the region we are concerned about – who do not. We cannot ignore this fact and expect to run a successful resettlement program.

Prime Minister Trudeau wants to honour his campaign pledge to bring 25,000 refugees to Canada and we respect him for trying to fulfill his promise. However, in accepting the Office of Prime Minister of Canada, he also assumed certain other, unspoken responsibilities toward the people of this great country. The foremost of these responsibilities is to manage the affairs of our country in such a way as to ensure our safety and security for this and future generations. This responsibility trumps any campaign pledge and

any responsibility we may have to anyone else and must guide our actions in the task of helping to solve the Syrian refugee crisis.

V. Moving Forward: Challenges for Resettlement

The Canadian government is in the process of resettling refugees in Canada; some 25,000 have been chosen and others are yet to be determined. OFWI expects that the broader issues discussed above will continue to be wrestled with on an on-going basis and that the government will make the right choices to ensure that we are protecting the most vulnerable. The immediate challenge then becomes the practical and logistical one of resettling 25,000 refugees. How do we assist those, who have now arrived or will soon be arriving in Canada, in making their homes and establishing their lives so that they can become fully productive members of our society?

In order to ensure a successful resettlement process we must not only pay attention to answering the obvious physical questions, such as appropriate communities, shelter, language, food, and clothing. We must also pay attention to the intangible factors of culture, education, and values. A resettlement process that takes care of the physical needs but does not address the needs of the heart and mind is doomed to failure.

Identifying appropriate communities is an important starting point on many levels. From a purely practical perspective, the refugees must be settled in communities where they can find jobs. It will not be helpful to anyone if they are located in communities where unemployment is high. Shelter, food, and clothing are absolutely necessary, especially in a country with a climate such as Canada's. As a result, some form of resettlement assistance will be necessary in the beginning. However, we must be careful not to create incentives against financial self-sufficiency but rather assist the refugees to stand on their own. Another issue that we must review is how we recognize foreign professional credentials and allow for foreign qualifications to be upgraded – it is important for the Syrian and other refugees that we find ways to facilitate their contributions to Canadian society to their fullest potential. If we are going to resettle anyone in Canada, the goal must be successful integration and the sooner the refugees find jobs and are able to support themselves by contributing to Canadian society, the faster and more successfully they will integrate.

On the other hand, communities are important on the emotional and psychological levels as well. Culture shock will be a challenge and it will be important for the refugees to have access to the moral support of those who share their background and understand the challenges they must face, especially those who have already successfully integrated into Canadian society. At the same time they must not be located *en masse* in areas where they can isolate themselves within their own communities and away from Canadian society. Occasions requiring the refugees to interact with broader Canadian society on a social and occupational level will be critical for successful integration.

Education is important and while language education is the most obvious issue, we must pay equal or possibly even greater attention to the education of both the current and future generations in Canadian values. This is not a paternalistic exercise in cultural superiority. It is merely the necessary acknowledgement of the reality that these people come from a region and culture whose values are fundamentally incompatible with Canadian values.

As discussed above, we must ensure that our selection procedures result in the resettlement of those who are most willing and able to adjust to Canadian norms. Even so, our selection procedures so far have demonstrated room for improvement and the people we are welcoming come from a background which does not subscribe to the values that we take for granted, such as multiculturalism, religious freedom and pluralism, tolerance, women's rights, gay and lesbian rights, among so many others. Criminal Code provisions about polygamy, domestic abuse, underage marriage, and others, are foreign concepts to many. We do the refugees and ourselves a disservice if we fail to address these issues adequately because of a fear of offending.

One other controversial area that we must address as a society is the fear of extremism. In the midst of our desire to help, we cannot avoid this issue – we cannot sweep it under the rug as if these fears do not exist in a vain attempt to be politically correct. We have seen the impact of extremism in the Middle East and among refugees in Europe. As a society we want to help but we are not naïve. If we try to pretend the issue does not exist, we will only make things worse and feed distrust of the newest members of our society.

As we go forward, we must address the issue of extremism head-on from the very first stage in the process, that of selecting our resettlement candidates, right to the very end of the integration process and at every step along the way to ensure that Canadians have confidence in the system. As indicated above, we must start by ensuring that we do not select candidates with extremist ties or sympathies and then we must discuss the issue openly so that the Canadian public can judge for themselves. In the meantime, decisions have already been taken as a result of which the government needs to take measures to ensure that home-grown extremism does not become the legacy of the Syrian refugee resettlement program. Canadians deserve better. And those Syrians we could have helped if we had taken the time and adopted appropriate selection processes definitely deserve better.

VI. Conclusion

As human beings, we have a moral duty to help our suffering brothers and sisters whenever we are able. However, the Canadian government's primary duty is to current and future generations of Canadians, to ensure their safety and security and to ensure that the conditions are in place to enable them to live in peace and prosper. If we fail in this, we fail in everything.

The Canadian government's refugee resettlement process for Syrian refugees begins in Syria long before we select candidates for resettlement. It begins with our support for local and regional protection and resettlement efforts to ensure that those who are less vulnerable are looked after and not competing for scarce resources needed to help the most vulnerable. It begins also with ensuring that minorities can access international refugee support programs without fear and that refugee camps do not become breeding grounds for extremism. Only then can we focus on identifying those who are truly most vulnerable in order to give them our assistance.

Choosing candidates for resettlement is no easy task, but if we are going to do this at all, we must do it right. We cannot delegate this task – not even to the United Nations. We must choose those who are most vulnerable and ensure that we do not unwittingly select people with extremist ties or those who will not be willing to adjust to life in Canadian society according to Canadian values. We must account for factors that would prevent certain groups, for example minorities, from accessing standard refugee support programs. Unquestionably some of the most vulnerable of ISIS' victims are the Yazidi girls and women

who have succeeded in escaping from their ISIS abductors and whom OFWI, together with ORAT, is proposing to resettle in Canada. They desperately need our help and as a discrete group with similar, highly specialized needs, whose plight the Canadian public can rally behind, their resettlement can be accomplished relatively efficiently and successfully.

Once we have chosen the most vulnerable candidates, we must ensure that we plan and provide for their physical as well as their emotional and psychological needs. Communities where jobs are available and where they can access moral support from relationships with people of their own background but where they will also interact with Canadian society in a comprehensive way are critical. The need for language education is obvious, but education in Canadian values and in what is and is not acceptable in our society is also necessary. We must also have an open and honest discussion within our society about the fear of extremism. Failure in this area will only serve to exacerbate fears and to breed distrust and animosity toward the refugees, which will ultimately hurt us all.

Finally, the Canadian government has a definite role to play in refugee resettlement and should take this responsibility very seriously; however, it also has an important role to play in supporting and facilitating private sponsorships. In this regard, it should make every effort to ensure that government-assisted resettlement efforts do not get in the way of ordinary Canadians getting together and demonstrating their compassion directly to Syrian and other refugees. In the midst of it all, as a nation through our government or as individuals, we must not allow our compassion for the crisis of the moment to take our focus away from the others who are suffering in this region and elsewhere and who need and deserve our concern and assistance just as much or, in some cases, more than the Syrian refugees.

VII. A Final Personal Word from Rev. El Shafie

The purpose of this brief is in no way to seek to limit or discourage Canada's desire to help the refugees from Syria. OFWI is not anti-refugee or anti-Syrian – quite the opposite. Our hearts beat with compassion for refugees in general and for those from Syria and the surrounding regions in particular. I was one of them – I AM one of them – I ate and drank and breathed and bled as one of them and I continue to feel their pain every moment of every day. And after all I have been through I am exceedingly grateful to Canada for giving me a new home and allowing me to build a new life here, in this great country. It is for this reason, and because I believe in the good that our refugee procedures can do, that it is of utmost importance to me that we bring to Canada only those who truly need our help and that we take all necessary precautions to ensure that we do not unwittingly compromise our security in the process. It is only by doing so that we can continue to help more refugees who desperately need our help.

My dream is a world without refugees – but until that dream is a reality we must continue fighting on behalf of the most vulnerable.

OFWI Recommendations Summary

The Syrian refugee crisis has caught our attention and, as Canadians, we want to do anything we can to help. The Canadian government's pledge to accept 25,000 refugees from Syria last year and more this year was an important step. However, we must ensure that we implement this decision in a conscious, deliberate, and prudent manner so that our efforts to help do not end up making the problem worse. The goal of a speedy and successful integration of the refugees into Canadian society begins with our actions in Syria and includes meeting their physical, emotional, and psychological needs.

1. Dealing with the Source of the Problem
 - refugee resettlement is not, and must not be treated as, the ultimate solution
 - without addressing the root causes that are contributing to the refugee crisis, our efforts to resettle refugees are important but ultimately inconsequential
 - the goal of all our efforts, including our refugee resettlement programs, should be to work toward conditions under which the refugees can return to their own homes in peace and security
2. Green Zones
 - we should support the enforcement of protected areas where the displaced can stay near their homes and continue their lives with as much normalcy as possible so that they do not need to leave
3. Regional Resettlement
 - countries in regional proximity that are culturally and linguistically familiar to Syrian refugees, such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, should be pressed into resettling all but the most vulnerable
4. Choosing Carefully
 - we must accept only the most vulnerable so that scarce resources can be directed most effectively
 - the government must work with representatives of minority groups and organizations that work directly with those refugees who, for a variety of reasons, cannot access mainstream refugee support programs in order to help identify the most vulnerable and must not simply rely on the UNHCR and other mainstream agencies
 - OFWI and ORAT are proposing Canada assist Yazidi women and girls who have escaped from ISIS
 - proper screening and security measures are required to protect our country and the integrity of our refugee resettlement procedures so that we can continue to help those who most need our assistance
 - we must ensure that we do not select those with extremist ties or sympathies, or who will not be willing to adjust to Canadian society and our norms and values
5. Challenges for Resettlement
 - we must provide for the obvious physical needs, such as jobs, shelter, language, food, and clothing, but also for the needs of the heart and mind, such as culture, education, and values
 - we must promote the fullest potential of these and other refugees by facilitating the recognition of, or upgrading of, foreign credentials and avoiding incentives against financial self-sufficiency
 - the refugees should have access to their own communities for moral support but must also be interacting on social and occupational levels with Canadian society to ensure successful integration
 - education of the current and future generations on language and Canadian values is critical
 - as a society we need to have an honest and open discussion about extremism and address fears that the refugees will bring extremist sympathies with them by ensuring our procedures are sound

Appendix A

BIOGRAPHY OF REV. MAJED EL SHAFIE

FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT

ONE FREE WORLD INTERNATIONAL

Rev. Majed El Shafie is a human rights advocate and founder of One Free World International (OFWI). His human rights journey started in his native Egypt that he was later forced to flee after he was severely tortured and sentenced to death for his conversion to Christianity and bringing awareness to human rights violations related to religious persecution. Belonging to a very prominent legal and political family in Egypt, Rev. El Shafie had tried to work within the Egyptian system to reform the country's human rights regime. Between the challenges he faced in these efforts, his firsthand experience as a survivor of religious persecution, the work he has engaged in since by advocating for religious freedom, confronting governments that violate this fundamental right, and conducting fact-finding missions and humanitarian/rescue operations, he has obtained significant knowledge and insight into the dynamics of persecution of religious minorities by religious extremists and totalitarian governments alike.

Rev. El Shafie has established two effective human rights organizations including One Free World International (OFWI) which is one of the leading organizations advocating for religious minorities globally and has 28 branches around the world. He has organized and led delegations of parliamentarians and religious leaders to address minority rights and humanitarian issues with government leaders, including several cabinet ministers and other high-level officials, opposition leaders, and religious leaders among others in countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Cuba, India, and Bangladesh. Rev. El Shafie has developed excellent relationships with members of the Canadian House of Commons, Senate, and Cabinet, and has built bridges with the US Congress in order to educate decision-makers about violations of religious freedom around the world. He has had the opportunity to testify numerous times before parliamentary bodies including the Subcommittee for International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, United States Congressional subcommittees and commissions, and the Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism in Canada. He has advocated on behalf of Christians, Falun Gong, Jews, Bahá'í's, Ahmadiyya Muslims, and China's Uyghur Muslims, among others. Leading North American and international news media have featured his work which has also been the subject of an award-winning feature-length documentary.

HONOURS AND AWARDS

2016 Raoul Wallenberg Citation for Moral Courage

2012 Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal

HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERTISE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Provided expert testimony of conditions facing religious minorities.
- Relied on in numerous cases in the Refugee Protection Division (Ontario) and Immigration Board (Florida).
- Created an underground human rights organization to pursue equal rights for Egyptian minorities and built organization to 24,000 members in just two years.
- Created and developed one of North America's most effective international human rights organizations focused on the rights of religious minorities around the world.
- Conducted fact-finding missions, rescue operations, and humanitarian interventions in countries where religious minorities are being persecuted and intervene directly through in-

person meetings with high-level politicians and government officials regarding human rights concerns.

- Organized conferences and human rights events that attract thousands of participants every year to educate the public about religious persecution and human rights issues.

PARLIAMENTARY AND CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

Testified by invitation before parliamentary committees in Canada and congressional committees in the United States on issues related to minority rights, including:

- 27/11/2014 *The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE), Parliament of Canada*
ISIS and Religious Minorities
- 30/9/2014 *The Sub-Committee on International Human Rights (SDIR, previously SDEV) of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Parliament of Canada*
Iraqi Minority Refugees in Kurdistan
- 25/6/2013 *Joint Session of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa of the United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs*
Religious Minorities in Syria: Caught in the Middle
- 21/3/2012 *The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, United States Congress*
Religious Freedom in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- 22/11/2011 *SDIR, Parliament of Canada*
Religious Freedom in Egypt and Iraq
- 17/11/2011 *The Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights of the United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs*
Religious Freedom in Egypt and Iraq
- 30/11/2010 *SDIR, Parliament of Canada*
Recommendations with Respect to Certain Issues Pertaining to the Human Rights Situation in Afghanistan
- 30/11/2009 *Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism in Canada, Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism*
- 16/6/2008 *SDIR, Parliament of Canada*
Canadian Policy Regarding Religious Minorities: Iraq, Egypt, and Pakistan
- 2/12/2004 *SDEV, Parliament of Canada*
The Persecution of People of Faith

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Television: Whistleblower (CTV National News), W5, Canada AM, The Arena, The Source, and others
Radio: CBC Radio and others
Print: National Post, Ottawa Citizen, Toronto Star, Toronto Sun, and others
International: Israel (Haaretz, Jerusalem Post, Maariv, Yediot Aharonot), Denmark, Germany, France

Feature Documentary:

C. Atkins (Dir.), (2012) *Freedom Fighter* [Documentary], United States: Destiny Image.

M. Himel (Prod.), *Persecuted Christians* [Television Broadcast], March 14, 2012, Toronto: VisionTV.

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M. Coren, "Par for the Course" on *The Arena*, July 25, 2012, online: SunNews
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M. Maslanik, "Torture spurs man to fight for religious freedom" in *Finger Lakes Times*, October, 2006, online: Living Testimony <<http://living-testimony.blogspot.ca/2006/10/rev-majed-el-shafie-egyptian-ex-muslim.html>>, accessed July 21, 2012.

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SPECIAL GROUP RESETTLEMENT OF YAZIDI WOMEN IN NEED
A Proposal
Updated June 30, 2016

Background

At present in the Middle East, a long standing crisis revealed new atrocities and horrendous war crimes.

To date it is one of the most horrific occurrences of events for the world to hear.

In Iraq, countless Yazidi girls and women have been captured, tortured and forced into sex slavery. The torture these vulnerable girls and women have faced is beyond one's capacity to imagine.

The Yazidis are a religious minority who have experienced severe trauma due to unforeseen circumstances. We are thus proposing to provide assistance to these groups of girls and women who were able to escape from the horrible captivity.

Kurdistan, which is in the northern part of Iraq, has numerous internally displaced persons seeking refuge. Among the most vulnerable and in desperate need of help are the Yazidi girls and women who have been able to escape from their captors in ISIS/ISIL (also known as "Islamic State").

The focus of this project therefore is solely based on the premise of aiding these tortured victims of severe abuse. According to community resources on the ground, there are about 400 girls and women (from the age of 8) who underwent ill treatment and torture in Iraq. They have been and continue to be kidnapped, raped, tortured and sold for sex work. If they manage to escape they are viewed as infidels because of what they have experienced and the torture they have experienced is so horrendous some have lost the ability to communicate by speaking. They are an extremely neglected and abandoned special group of people with extra needs. These girls and women are currently residing in IDP (Internally Displaced People) camps in Kurdistan. Due to the conditions that arise if they do escape their captivity, these people have no means of any kind to find a durable solution through local integration. Also, voluntary repatriation is not possible for them.

Follow up to meeting on June 17, 2016

Please find below a summary of our response to the questions and concerns raised by your office during our meeting on June 17, 2016.

We have divided the points raised under the following headings. We are addressing each point below in the updated "Methodology" section.

1. Process for Identifying Candidates for Resettlement

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2. Screening Process to Identify the Approximately 400 Dossiers Presented to IRCC
3. Preparation of Dossiers and Files for Referral
4. Processing Assistance and Support for IRCC Officers
5. Resettlement Plan

Updated Proposal

With the assistance of community organization and referral agencies we will identify, interview, and refer these **400 women** along with their family members to IRCC for processing. It is recommended they be placed in the **JAS (Joint Assistance Sponsorship)** program upon arrival after arrival to Canada they would need special attention and extra care. When considering all of these factors the **estimated total number of individuals to be resettled arises to approximately 1,600 people.**

UPDATED METHODOLOGY:

Process for Identifying Candidates for Resettlement

1. Building on previous missions to the region, in July 2016 a delegation led by One Free World International (“OFWI”) and ORAT with the help of the Yazidi community in Canada (approximately 50 families), will travel to northern Iraq. ORAT (“Office for Refugees Archdiocese of Toronto”) representing the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto and linked with other resettlement agencies, will represent the civic sponsors who are willing to assist in the process [See Budget Item “A”]. This mission will further the process of **identifying** the pool of potential resettlement candidates, prioritizing those most in need within the parameters identified above.

Screening Process to Identify the Approximately 400 Dossiers Presented to IRCC

2. The **selection and screening** process (to narrow down the pool to the final dossiers that will be presented to IRCC) will begin with a delegation of Yazidi community members, domestic abuse counsellors, and staff from ORAT travelling to the refugee camps. The selection mission trip will identify potential clients for the program and will provide initial counselling and assessment.
3. As noted during the June 17, 2016 meeting, due to legal difficulties associated with guardianship and custody, we will not be including unaccompanied minors in the initial cohort of dossiers. We acknowledge that some of these persons are among the most vulnerable. We will be providing local protection and accommodation to these persons on the ground until a long-term solution can be found.

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4. Due to security concerns, we are also not including unaccompanied male Yazidi victims at this time. Once again, we recognize that some of the most vulnerable will be males. However, in order to expedite security screening and alleviate security concerns, we will prioritize vulnerable women and girls (with their families) – who are far less likely to pose a security risk.
5. That said, we are committed to make this program fully inclusive. Therefore, should we identify vulnerable boys, members of the LGBTQ community, or other vulnerable persons among the Yazidi community they will be duly considered for inclusion in accordance with the principles outlined herein. Our aim is not to exclude any group of persons. Our goal is to prioritize those who are most vulnerable and whose processing can be expedited to the greatest extent.

Preparation of Dossiers and Files for Referral

6. A group led by ORAT, with assistance of **IOM** (International Organization for Migration) and/or **ICMC** (International Catholic Migration Commission), will conduct detailed interviews in the refugee camps. During these interviews, the necessary forms will be completed. The project would require at least 3 English speaking Yazidi community members to participate in this process. ORAT has a stringent methodology to screen potential candidates. ORAT has developed sophisticated methods to screen applicants (eligibility, admissibility, credibility and adaptability). The interviews and forms help to filter out cases where security concerns might arise. Also, in order to promote successful integration, ORAT conducts a “managing expectations” review which includes mapping of relations for potential secondary migration. **For your reference, we have attached the following template forms that illustrate ORAT’s methodology and process:**
 - i. Annex A: ORAT Interview form;
 - ii. Annex B: ORAT – Interviews with refugees – Report Writing Notes;
 - iii. Annex C: ORAT – Interview Question Prompts;
 - iv. Annex D: ORAT – Refugee Registration Form.
7. ORAT, with the assistance of IOM, ICMC, volunteer Yazidi community members, and Canadian immigration lawyers as needed, will prepare and compile the final dossiers for presentation to IRCC. These dossiers will be standardized and organized to include:
 - i. Duly signed and reviewed immigration forms; and
 - ii. Organized copies of all relevant identity documents.

We are suggesting that IRCC provide the team with any additional questionnaires and/or information sheets that can be filled in advance in order to assist the processing officers in conducting their background checks. We will ensure that all relevant information and documents are organized and ready for the officer to review so as to minimize processing times and the administrative burden on IRCC staff.

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Processing Assistance and Support for IRCC Officers

8. Once the dossiers are completed and checked with UNHCR, IOM, or local refugee agencies, IRCC would assign one or two **temporary duty visa officers**. We are proposing that the processing of the cases take place in Erbil. This would ensure that the officers would not be exposed to the risks involved in traveling to the refugee camps. We are suggesting that IRCC follow the model employed in processing the Syrian refugee population in centres like Beirut – where temporary processing centres were set up in secure hotels.
9. We are proposing to arrange for the transport of small groups of 10-15 refugees at one time from the camps to Erbil. The refugees will be housed in temporary accommodations in Erbil, and will be able to travel in small groups to the temporary processing centre. The small scale of the group size will reduce the chance that the increased Canadian presence will draw unwanted attention. While in Erbil, we will arrange to have each person complete their medical with one of the panel physicians operating there. Once the interview and medical has been conducted, we will transport the individuals back to the camp. We will also arrange for transportation back to Erbil for visa issuance and travel to Canada.
10. The girls and women in question will need to be given waivers on humanitarian and compassionate (H&C) grounds from the following statutory requirements:
 - i. The requirement for the individuals in question to be outside their country of residence;
 - ii. The requirement for the individuals in question to have registered with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (“UNHCR”) – which they are unable to do as they are unable to leave Iraq

Resettlement Plan

11. Prior to travel to Canada, each applicant would be matched with a sponsor. As noted below, ORAT will be coordinating the resettlement to ensure that no fewer than 20 individuals are placed in any given community. Arrangements will be in place to provide moral, emotional and logistics support by way of pre-arranged referrals to settlement agencies, reception centers and **domestic violence counselors** (Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, Catholic Family Services, and others).
12. As a significant number of the applicants may be pregnant, the process should be **expedited** and upon arrival all women and girls should receive full choice counseling to ensure they make an informed and voluntary decision related to the pregnancy. Provincial government health services should provide counseling and refer clients based on their need and decision to different healthcare facilities and agencies. Neither ORAT nor any other sponsor will be permitted to exert any influence or pressure on moral or religious issues – save those issues that are dictated by Canadian law. The involvement

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of any religious counseling agencies will be at the choice of the individual, and will in no way be a requirement.

13. Most of the cases are expected to be settled in the GTA, Ottawa, London area. However, this project is a **national** project. ORAT has been in contact with potential sponsoring groups across the country, from B.C. to Nova Scotia. ORAT's experience is that if we settle at least 20 community members together, then they can successfully form a new community and secondary migration is dramatically reduced. In the same way, ORAT works hard to train and prepare the sponsors so as to reduce drop out/break down numbers. ORAT uses detailed profiles in the matching process to ensure a good match between refugee and sponsor. The estimated term for this phase is 8-10 weeks. [See Budget item "C"]

In order to ensure a successful program and resettlement of these targeted individuals, we will develop a system to record the progress and/or setbacks that have transpired. Thus it is recommended that every quarter year stakeholders and participants should have **evaluation meetings** and acquire updates about the program.

As these Iraqi citizens are still considered to be in their country of origin according to international law (as Kurdistan is still part of the Republic of Iraq), **this program would require that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship approve this community for special processing under ministerial priority (temporary designation of source country).**

As noted above, Kurdistan is within the Iraqi state. However, the women in question are not able to leave to a safe third country to initiate the refugee process. **Therefore, as noted above, IRCC would have to exercise its humanitarian and compassionate (H&C) discretion under s. 25 of the IRPA to waive the following statutory requirements:**

1. The requirement for the individuals in question to be outside their country of residence;
2. The requirement for the individuals in question to have registered with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees ("UNHCR") – which they are unable to do as they are unable to leave Iraq.

Revised Estimated Budget

- A. Fact Finding (Preparatory) Mission by OFWI & ORAT: (for 2 ppl: cca **\$9,000**)
 1. Travel preparations (visa, photos, medical, etc.): \$200
 2. Travel: \$1700
 3. Accommodation for 5 nights: \$600
 4. Local transport: \$500
 5. Per diem: \$560
 6. Communication, documentation: \$300
 7. Volunteers, interpreters, cost: \$600
- B. Processing – cost of service, 5 people for two months (ca **\$55,000**)

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1. Travel preparations (visa, photos, medical, etc.): \$200
 2. Travel: \$1700
 3. Accommodation for 1 month at camp: \$700
 4. Local transport: \$500
 5. Food, miscellaneous: \$1,000
 6. Communication, documentation: \$300
 7. Volunteers, interpreters, cost: \$1,100
- C. Specialized integration and settlement services, domestic violence and trauma counselors on the ground in Iraq while processing concludes and in Canada. Additional housing and employment services (\$100,000).
- D. Facilitating the project, matching cases, coordinating sponsors and stakeholders in a 2 and a half year term (\$15,000).
- E. Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) funding for an estimated 1,600 people RAP support
- F. PR education and training for diverse Resettlement Groups and service providers (\$40,000).

With these things considered it is clear that there is a great need to help this severely abused population of girls and women. We believe this solution provides a targeted and realistic means to assist women and girls who have been exposed to the traumatic inhumane experiences that were forced upon them. The purpose of the selection will be to provide the best and safest environment for those affected.

We have endeavoured in this proposal to reduce the processing and resettlement burden on the Canadian government as much as possible by leveraging the resources of experienced agencies like ORAT.

All of which is respectfully submitted by:

Dr. Martin Mark

Director, Officer for Refugees of the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT)



Rev. Majed El Shafie

President and Founder, One Free World International



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