



Archdiocese
of Toronto

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UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL DELIVERED

Remarks from Cardinal Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Toronto

Press Conference - Launch of "Project Hope" - September 8, 2015

Good morning.

I would like to thank you all for being here today. It is very much appreciated.

The heart-wrenching images we have seen in the last number of days have put the refugee crisis on the front pages of our papers and the lead stories in newscasts around the world. I also hope it has stopped us in our tracks, to allow us to take stock of what is going on in the world. Sadly, this isn't a recent epidemic. It is a story that has been unfolding for years, as hundreds of thousands of people have fled their homeland due to unrest, persecution and violence. Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Darfur...the list goes on and on. While we watch from afar, families are torn apart forever.

We should all be disturbed by what we see. When a family feels their only hope is to flee their homeland to join hundreds on small, drifting boats; sliding a child beneath razor wire or packing into cargo trucks, we should not only be disturbed but also ashamed.

In the words of Pope Francis, "Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity." The situation is intolerable and we must do all that we can to implore our political leaders to adopt generous strategies of sponsorship and outreach to focus on the human suffering taking place worldwide. I fully recognize we are in the midst of a federal election campaign in our own country. Let us not politicize this issue but, rather, take legitimate steps. The human suffering will not disappear after October 19. It is an issue that must be a priority for years to come.

Many faith communities have mobilized to effectively welcome refugees seeking a new beginning in our country – we are grateful for their efforts. Our own archdiocese has been committed to helping those fleeing oppression since the heroic ecumenical effort led by our first bishop, Michael Power, welcoming the Irish refugees in the summer of 1847. Our first bishop ultimately gave his life in service to those Irish immigrants, contracting typhus and succumbing to his sickness.

We also recall the Vietnamese refugees of the 1980's, the "boat people" who came to Canada and now make so many wonderful contributions to our community, including our Auxiliary Bishop, Vincent Nguyen. Ours is a society of immigrants. We celebrate Mass each week in the Archdiocese of Toronto in more than 30 languages, a true testament to the diverse gifts present in Toronto and the surrounding area.

In 2009, the archdiocese launched the Office for Refugees with a mandate to champion and facilitate refugee sponsorship. Since that time, 160 of our parishes, under the leadership of Dr. Martin Mark (present here today), have initiated sponsorship welcomed families and individuals fleeing persecution. I am eternally grateful for the efforts of our people, working quietly without fanfare to welcome the stranger. Our churches have initiated resettlement of more than 2,500 refugees, many from Iraq and Syria. I am told we are among the largest private sponsor of refugees in Canada. If we are able to use our experience and expertise to help others, we will do so in whatever way we can.

Today, we are here to announce a special humanitarian relief appeal above any beyond any efforts we have been engaged in to date. I am inviting the Catholic community of the Archdiocese of Toronto and all people of goodwill, to financially support those who are fleeing war, violence and persecution. Our goal is to raise \$3 million over the next 100 days so that we may bring 100 families to Canada and the Greater Toronto Area as soon as possible.

While we have particular concern about Christians facing persecution in the Middle East, with images of ISIS executing men, women and children because they believe in Jesus Christ, we will open our doors to those most in need, regardless of their religious background.

I also appeal to the parishioners of the Archdiocese of Toronto. More than 160 churches have already sponsored refugee families, and many parishes have already sponsored three or four. With the funds raised, we will also require a supportive community that will assist these newcomers with housing, language, employment and most importantly, friendship.

On Sunday, Pope Francis appealed to churches in Europe to sponsor refugee families. This December we will begin a Year of Mercy worldwide in the Catholic Church as promulgated by the Holy Father. May this initiative on the eve of the Year of Mercy, spark a particular culture of care, love and mercy in our community. To welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and feed the poor is at the heart of our faith. Let us put these words into action.

As today is also the beginning of a new school year, I encourage our schools and families to participate in this campaign and also to talk about how we foster friendship and ongoing relationships with those new to our country. I would also like to express my gratitude to a number of individuals who have already come forward with significant financial gifts to support this campaign. We are most grateful.

So once again, we thank you for your presence here today. The media play a critically important role in highlighting these issues and making the public aware of these tragic situations thousands of miles away. Yet let us remember these people beyond the headlines that will fade away over time. There is always a stranger among us. We must always stand ready to welcome them.

May God bless all those who are suffering so terribly around the world. Thank you.