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Centre commémoratif  
de l'Holocauste à Montréal

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## ABOUT THE REFUGEE CRISIS

*November 27, 2015*

The Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre has had several discussions on the refugee crisis as well as Canadian refugee policy in respect of our UN convention obligations, and our human and moral responsibilities. We believe the Centre should play a role in assuring that Canada acts to save refugee lives and opens its borders, in opposition to what was done during the Holocaust.

Although we appreciate that the attacks in Paris, in Beirut and Bamako last week have generated understandable fear in Canadians as around the world, it seems inappropriate to focus that fear on refugees who are indeed vulnerable and victims of the very forces which perpetrated the attacks. We are thus compelled to disagree with some of the largely emotional responses written from the perspective of security. Many promote fear and stereotyping and show a lack of comprehension of the rigorous screening of these refugees by the UNHCR before they are recommended to Canada, which screens again and can choose. The American model, touted by some who would have us wait (for years perhaps), seems increasingly incompatible with the Canadian perspective and opposed to humanitarian values or international responsibilities, as the days go by.

**Actually, before this program of 25,000, which is unlikely to be fully realised this year, it took or takes about 4 years for a Syrian refugee claimant (or an African one, or others who are being left out at this point) to get here if they were privately or collectively sponsored. Otherwise, they were and are not getting here at all. The people the Government of Canada is admitting through a planned process are not claimants or asylum seekers; they are officially recognised as refugees.**

Canadians had all sorts of supposedly good reasons not to take in Jews. They were accused of being communists, capitalists with the goal of world domination, of holding anti-Christian values, or incapable of adapting to Canada and of just being inferior. The backlash against the “boat people”, a variety of different peoples from several countries of origin, accused them of being communists, wanting to transform Canada, culturally, “racially” and religiously different, and just inferior. During the Holocaust, our immigration



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policy has been summarised as "None is too many". To quote Prime Minister Mackenzie King, as cited in our Museum: "The admission of refugees posed perhaps a greater menace to Canada than did Hitler". Is that how we think today?

We are not in the Holocaust period; however we are facing the greatest refugee crisis since WWII. We can sit back, once again, in the comfort of knowing that we are far away. But the horrific Paris attacks do not diminish the horror of life and death in Syria, or in the refugee camps. There are 2 million refugees in Lebanon, a country of four million. Can a developed and wealthy country like Canada, with a population of 33 million, which was named the most tolerant country according to the 2015 Prosperity Index, not accept 25,000? Our terrorist attacks in Canada have been homegrown by good native-born Canadians. Our security is being protected through UN and Canadian screening. We have gained much from the contributions of previous refugees to Canada. Our doors must be open.

Alice Herscovitch, Executive Director, Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre