

**Statement of Guidy Mamann
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Toronto, Canada - February 3, 2016

Senator Johnson, distinguished members of this committee, ladies and gentlemen.

I want to thank you very much for inviting me here today to discuss the security implications and unanswered questions about Canada's recent plan to resettle Syrian refugees in Canada.

As I am sure you are aware from my biography, I am a Canadian immigration lawyer who has dedicated his entire career to bringing all kinds of newcomers to Canada including, thousands of refugees. I very much believe that all countries should do their utmost to help provide safe harbour to those in genuine need of protection.

You have not asked me here today to champion the cause of refugees but to address your concerns about the security implications of Canada's plan.

To understand the security risks associated with this plan, you must first understand the context in which this plan evolved.

Background

In the months prior to our federal election just this past October, Justin Trudeau and his Liberal party made it a major part of their election campaign to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by the end of 2015. He won the election and became prime minister on November 4, 2015. This left him only 57 days to process and land 25,000 refugees. I was asked on national television if this was doable and I expressed great doubt that it was. I knew that such applications normally take up to 62 months, and even longer, to conclude. Not surprisingly, the target was missed when only 6,000 refugees arrived in Canada prior to the December 31 target date. The date to complete the remaining 19,000 applications has now been extended by two months. However, the government has also announced that an additional 25,000 will be brought in by December 31st of this year. Accordingly, the initial plan for 25,000 has now doubled to 50,000 and the original estimated cost of \$100 million has now been revised to \$1.2 billion.

This is not a rescue mission. This is a resettlement mission. The people we are helping have already escaped the conflict zone and have already reached safety in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. We are only relocating them and offering them permanent resettlement. We are making no attempt, whatsoever, to rescue people who are actually in Syria and who are in imminent danger. Accordingly, there is no apparent urgency to the situation. Nonetheless, self-imposed deadlines have been adopted which will, undoubtedly, put tremendous pressure on our security personnel to complete their background checks by the target dates.

Let me address some of the main security issues arising from this plan.

1. The Liberal government has assured the Canadian public that no security steps will be skipped and that all applicants will be fully screened before arrival. The Canada Border Services Agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service all stated that they

are up to the task. This was affirmed by the Canadian ambassador to the US, Gary Doer, who wrote to this committee last week in response to the scheduling of this hearing. I have no reason to doubt any of them. I have worked opposite, but closely and co-operatively, with these agencies for my entire career and have no doubt that they will not intentionally cut corners in order to deliver a politically expedient result.

However, they will be under tremendous pressure to deliver an unprecedented volume of work in record time. The performance of overseas security checks is a highly specialized field and it is difficult, if not impossible, to grow that skill set in a short period of time. Our government has recently deployed 500 officials to Jordan and Lebanon to help with medical and background checks. However, it is unclear what expertise these people might bring to the table and what databases they may have reference to. Furthermore, Canada closed its embassy in Damascus in 2012 and the information we have is old, and many of the government offices in Syria that had reliable records have been destroyed or have been compromised. In any event, background checks cannot eliminate risk. They simply cannot tell us what will happen in the future.

2. To contain risk, the Canadian plan excludes single men. The plan is only open to families, women, and children. Again, this measure will certainly help to reduce security risks but won't eliminate them. Case in point, the Boston marathon bombing in 2013 was committed by two adult brothers who immigrated to the USA as refugees when they were just children. Also, women are increasingly becoming involved in acts of terror. Consider the case in point, Tashfeen Malik, and her husband who sponsored her to the USA on a fiancée visa, and who together killed 14 people in San Bernardino in December 2015.

3. I have been asked by your staff if Canada's private sponsors might help to mitigate security risks by providing monitoring of the families that they have sponsored. These private citizens are not trained nor selected for such a role. They are simply good Canadians looking to provide financial help and settlement assistance. They are not expected to play any surveillance functions.

4. I have also been asked about the access that this group of 50,000 might have to the United States. As permanent residents of Canada, they will not qualify for your visa waiver program but will qualify once they become Canadian citizens. They will be eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship after residing in Canada for four years. Like all other Canadian citizens, they will be able to present themselves at the US border and seek admission right at the port-of-entry. Having said all of this, as you may know, our respective borders remain quite porous. Our checkpoints are only effective with respect to people who choose to use them. Many successfully avoid our checkpoints everyday going in both directions.

5. Canada passed some very controversial legislation in 2014 known as Bill C-24. It currently allows our government to revoke anyone's Canadian citizenship for serious acts against Canada, provided that the person is a dual national and is convicted of offences related to spying, treason or terrorism. I do not believe that the US has similar legislation. However, Prime Minister Trudeau has promised to repeal those provisions once elected. I anticipate that this will be happening very soon.

6. The last, but certainly not the least, source of potential concern is the demographics of this particular group of refugees. When compared to other large groups of refugees, one could easily argue that this group represents a relatively higher-risk demographic. Syria is widely considered to be a major hotbed of international terror. Large parts of the country are controlled by ISIS which, sadly, enjoys

some considerable local support. Virtually the entire country supports one of the three warring factions, i.e. ISIS, the Assad government, or the rebels. All three groups have been associated with assorted atrocities and violations of human rights. By definition, refugees do not necessarily come to our country because they share our values. They come to our country because they often have no other choice. Whether or not they possess or adopt our values, is something that only time will tell.

I would like to address some unanswered questions for Americans to think about in relation to this particular plan. But for the sake of time, I will reserve comment until the question portion of this hearing, and only, if asked.

1. Does it make sense to impose strict timelines to complete background checks when dealing with people who have successfully fled the conflict zone?
2. How can Canada or the US ensure effective background checks in countries where we have no assets and have no reliable personnel on the ground to verify claims of identity, nationality, place of residence, family relationships, political affiliations, and any role in a particular conflict?
3. Should preference be given to those who are specifically targeted for persecution over those who face the normal dangers associated with a conflict?
4. Should we be taking in people from recent conflicts ahead of people who are still waiting in refugee camps as a result of earlier conflicts?
5. What impact will the reallocation of resources have on other immigration lines like family sponsorships, professional, and investor immigration?
6. Finally, is it time to rethink our international convention on refugees and start to consider temporary rather than permanent resettlement; regional solutions rather than international solutions; and perhaps recognition of refugees even if they have not been able to escape their country of persecution?

In Conclusion, the extent to which we help refugees, and those in need, defines who we are as a country. Canada has decided to accept 50,000 refugees from the millions displaced by the Syrian conflict. While I think there was a better way of handling some aspects this initiative, the cause of helping genuine refugees is a good one. Having said that, there are unavoidable costs and risks associated with this type of endeavour. Our government believes that those risks are manageable. I know that we have experienced and dedicated men and women in our security agencies who are working feverishly to meet our governments' time lines.

Whether or not our efforts will work out well in the end, only time will tell.

Thank you very much.

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