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## **Contributions to the 44th UPR session (October - November 2023)**

### **The discriminatory treatment of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees in Canada based on their ethnicity is deeply concerning.**

**Submitted by:** A not-for-profit Association “[Justice for All International / Justice pour Tous Internationale](https://justice-for-all-international.business.site/)” is registered in Geneva (CHE-226.634.549). The Association has no profit purposes, including combating injustice and human rights abuses worldwide; promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, with a particular focus on the protection of entrepreneurs, human rights defenders, political activists, bloggers, and journalists at risk of persecution; and strengthen developing civil societies and democracies in the countries engaged. The Association offers *inter alia* free-of-charge assistance in preparing and submitting human rights violation complaints to the UN protection mechanisms.

#### **Canadian discriminatory special provisions for Ukrainian refugees underscore the racial disparity in treatment between Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, while both groups are fleeing conflict and persecution.**

According to the Government of Canada, as of February 28, 2023, Canada has committed to welcoming over 40,000 Afghan refugees, including interpreters, locally employed staff, and their families. However, when compared to the response towards Ukrainian refugees, there are some significant differences in the level of support provided by the Canadian government.

According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) data, the Canadian government has set a target to resettle only 40,000 Afghan refugees as per the above-stated criteria above by the end of 2023. In contrast, the government has announced plans to welcome an unlimited number of Ukrainian refugees in response to the crisis in Ukraine. This stark difference in target numbers highlights the disparity in treatment between these two groups.

Moreover, the Canadian government has established a dedicated program, the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET), to facilitate the entry of Ukrainian nationals into Canada. This program enables eligible Ukrainian citizens and their immediate family members to apply for a temporary resident visa or an electronic travel authorization to come to Canada. The processing fees for temporary resident visas have also been waived for Ukrainian citizens under this program. No such special program has been established for Afghan refugees, who must navigate the depleted resources and significantly delayed refugee application process.

Additionally, the Canadian government has made significant financial commitments to support Ukrainian refugees. The government has pledged \$10 million in humanitarian assistance to support Ukrainians displaced by the conflict, along with an additional \$500,000 in funding to support local organizations assisting refugees arriving in Canada. While the Canadian government has also provided support to Afghan refugees, the urgent response and prioritization of resources for Ukrainian refugees highlight the disparity in treatment.

The **discriminatory treatment of refugees based on their country of origin** is deeply concerning. All refugees, regardless of their nationality, deserve equal access to support, protection, and opportunities to rebuild their lives. It is crucial for the Canadian government to address this discrimination and ensure that their refugee policies and programs are applied fairly and equitably to all individuals fleeing conflict and persecution.

Our Association expresses its grave concern about these special provisions for Ukrainian refugees, which underscore the **racial disparity in treatment between Afghan and Ukrainian refugees**. While both groups are fleeing conflict and persecution, the Canadian government has provided additional support and resources to Ukrainian refugees, including expedited processing and fee waivers, which are not extended to Afghan refugees.

We would also like to highlight that this discrepancy raises **questions about the equitable treatment of refugees and why such differences exist in the support provided to different groups**. The Canadian government must ensure fairness and equal treatment for all refugees, regardless of their country of origin. Discrimination in the provision of resources and support undermines the principles of social justice and human rights that underpin Canada's refugee resettlement program.

We would like to draw attention to the **disturbing assertions that the Canadian government has also diverted resources to assist Ukrainian refugees**, such as deploying additional personnel to help process applications, waiving certain application fees, and providing financial support to communities hosting these refugees. This preferential treatment is not extended to Afghan refugees, who continue to face significant barriers to accessing support and resources in Canada.

The unequal treatment of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees raises important questions about the fairness and equity of Canada's refugee policies. While it is understandable that the Canadian government may want to respond quickly to the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, it is crucial to ensure that all refugees are treated with equal respect and dignity. **Discrimination in the treatment of refugees undermines the core principles of humanitarian assistance and sends a message that some lives are valued more than others.**

#### **Recommendations:**

The Association "Justice for All International / Justice pour Tous Internationale" calls on the Canadian government to address this discriminatory treatment. We believe that it should strive for a more balanced approach to refugee resettlement, ensuring that resources and support are allocated equitably among all refugee populations, regardless of their country of origin. This may involve revising current policies, implementing more inclusive programs, and increasing the number of refugees accepted from other countries facing humanitarian crises, such as Afghanistan.

We affirm that by taking these steps, Canada can work towards creating a more just and equitable refugee system, one that upholds the fundamental human rights of all individuals fleeing conflict and persecution, irrespective of their nationality.

In this regard, our Association call on the Members States of the United Nations to take necessary actions to ensure that Afghan refugees receive the same level of support and opportunities as Ukrainian refugees. To address this the Canadian government can implement the following recommendations:

1. **Establish a dedicated program for Afghan refugees:** The Canadian government should create a program similar to the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) for Afghan refugees. This would enable eligible Afghan citizens and their immediate family members to apply for a temporary resident visa or an electronic travel authorization to come to Canada, streamlining their immigration process.
2. **Waive processing fees:** In line with the special program for Ukrainian citizens, the Canadian government should waive processing fees for temporary resident visas and other relevant application fees for Afghan refugees. This will help reduce financial barriers for Afghan families seeking safety in Canada.
3. **Expedite application processing:** The Canadian government should allocate additional resources to expedite the processing of Afghan refugee applications, ensuring that they are not subjected to undue delays and have timely access to resettlement opportunities.
4. **Increase resettlement target:** Canada should raise its resettlement target for Afghan refugees, demonstrating its commitment to providing equal support to both Afghan and Ukrainian refugees.
5. **Collaborate with NGOs and local communities:** The Canadian government should work closely with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local communities to provide targeted support for Afghan refugees, including language training, employment assistance, and housing support, as well as cultural orientation programs.
6. **Engage the private sector:** The Canadian government should encourage and facilitate private sponsorship of Afghan refugees by individuals, community groups, and businesses, providing additional resettlement opportunities and fostering connections with local communities.
7. **Launch public awareness campaigns:** The Canadian government should initiate media campaigns and public events to raise awareness about the situation faced by Afghan refugees, counteract discrimination, and promote inclusivity.
8. **Advocate for equitable treatment:** Canada should lead by example and advocate for equitable treatment of Afghan refugees on the international stage, urging other countries to adopt similar policies and programs to support Afghan refugees.
9. **Monitor and address discrimination:** The Canadian government should closely monitor any instances of discrimination against Afghan refugees and develop strategies to address and prevent discriminatory practices. This could include establishing a dedicated hotline for refugees to report discrimination and providing targeted training to service providers and employers on cultural sensitivity and inclusion.

By implementing these recommendations, the Canadian government can provide Afghan refugees with the same level of support and opportunities as Ukrainian refugees, recognizing their equal rights and dignity as human beings fleeing conflict and persecution.