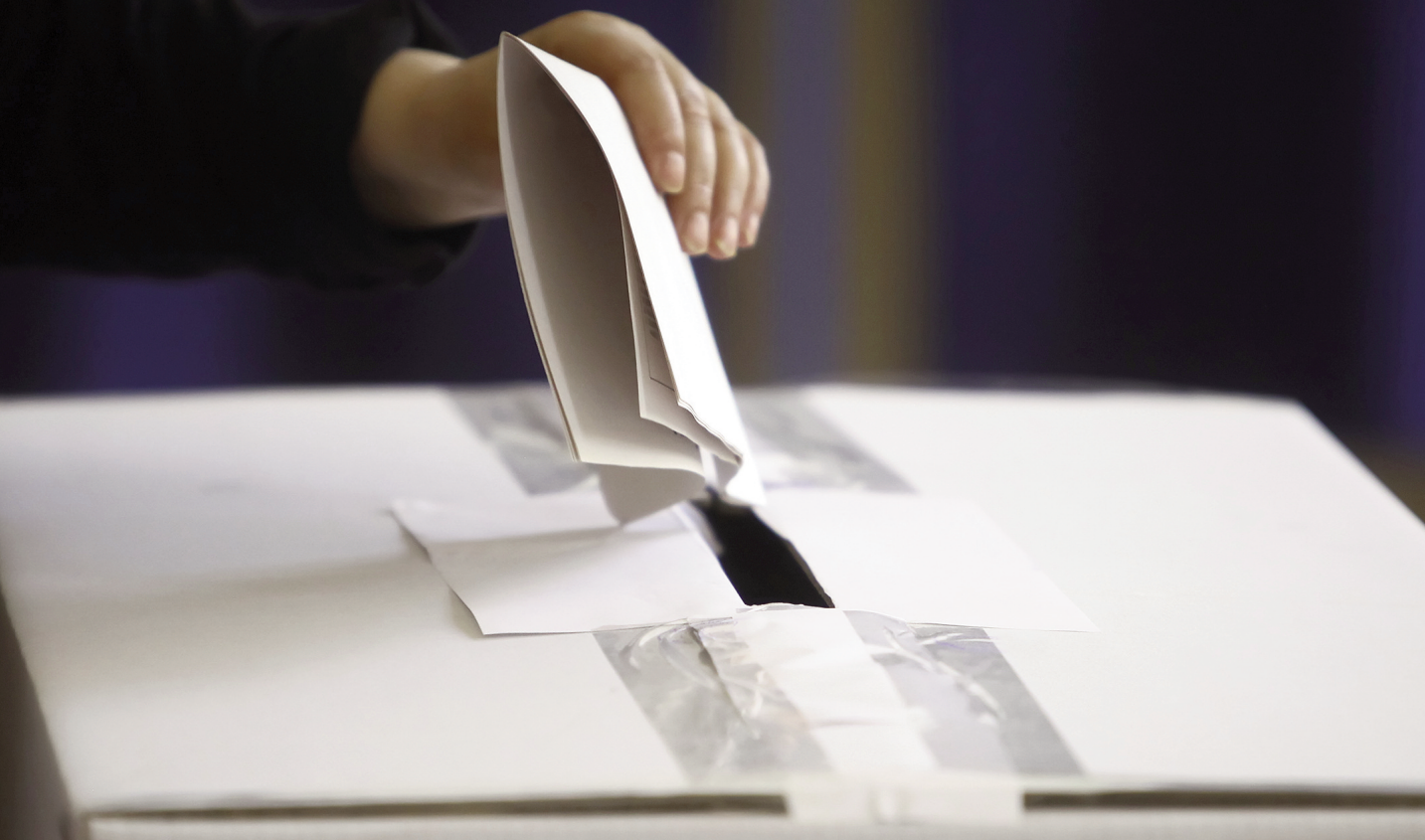


# the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice Fall 2015



## **2015 ELECTION BULLETIN: EXERCISING FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP**

When Canadians consider the meaning of democracy, we envision a country in which all citizens have the right to participate in making decisions that affect them. Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) has encouraged reflection on this theme for over 50 years, mirrored in our own name.

Each of us has certain rights and responsibilities. This includes the right to live in dignity, to be respected by others, and to have access to resources needed to live out God's calling. But we also have a duty to act justly and work for equitable relations within society.

By exercising these rights and responsibilities we achieve public justice. This means that when the rights of others are infringed upon, we have a responsibility to ensure that justice is restored.

Faithful citizenship demands that we design, debate, and promote policies and practices which reflect God's call for love, justice, and the flourishing of Creation.

At CPJ, we believe election campaigns should be forums to raise important issues, propose significant commitments, conduct meaningful debates, and hold prospective office-holders to their promises.

**This election bulletin is intended to help us to do exactly that.**

Throughout this Election Bulletin you'll find questions that you can raise at local debates or when candidates come to your door.

CITIZENS FOR  
PUBLIC JUSTICE





## A BETTER DEMOCRACY FOR ALL CITIZENS

At election time in Canada, citizens choose representatives for government. That's why we call it representative democracy! Elections are good moments to reflect on whether or not our ability to participate in our democracy is fair and equitable. What might we do to increase meaningful participation, especially of those whose voices may be prevented from being heard? The reinvigoration of democracy is always a healthy activity.

A simple marker for gauging the vitality of democracy is to calculate the number of Canadians who vote. Regrettably, in the last federal election in 2011, just six in 10 eligible voters cast a ballot. People are often discouraged by the lack of transparency, accountability, and true representation of their concerns by politicians. Election campaigns in particular can turn people off if advertising is based on "attack ads" and negative messaging.

But democracy is more than a quick trip to the polls. After elections, democracy (and citizens with democratic values) cannot take a vacation. It's important to engage in political activities year-round.

Christians have always debated political issues and options. In Romans 14, for example, people from various religious backgrounds argued over holy days and the issue of meat sacrificed to idols. The admonition in Romans 15:7 shed important light on how we engage each other in civil and respectful discourse: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ has accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

Differing gracefully with another person is a trait of faithful citizenship. With humility we may be more open to imagining ourselves in another person's shoes, and be more willing to learn from their ideas and experiences. As Ephesians 4:15 suggests, Christians should always attempt to "speak the truth in love."

The current political climate is too often characterized by negativity and fear so it is critical that citizens approach public forums with civility. CPJ also recognizes that our leaders can undertake reforms that would go a long way to increase voter trust and promote participation and healthy engagement in civic affairs.

### LEARN MORE

One important way we contribute to our democracy is through paying taxes. In May 2015, CPJ released "*Taxes for the Common Good*" a collection of fact sheets designed as a primer on tax issues. They cover issues including the high cost of low taxes as well as corporate taxes, carbon taxes, and public services. It is available at [cpj.ca/taxes-common-good](http://cpj.ca/taxes-common-good).



## Omnibus Legislation

One method of enhancing democracy would be for governments to severely limit the use of omnibus bills in the House of Commons. Omnibus bills put several measures on a diverse array of policy areas up to one vote by parliamentarians. Ten omnibus bills have been presented to the House of Commons since the 2011 election, amending hundreds of Acts.

For example, 2012's budget implementation bill, Bill C-45, included controversial changes to environmental assessments and regulations for natural resource development, heavily impacting the rights of Indigenous peoples. The 2014 budget bill (C-43, tabled in Fall 2014) amended twenty non-budget related acts, such as the Patent Act, Criminal Code, Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, and the Hazardous Products Act among others.

The use of omnibus bills prevents MPs and Canadians from properly scrutinizing and approving legislation.

**QUESTION: Will you restrict or eliminate the use of omnibus bills in the House of Commons?**

## Truly Fair Elections

A public justice framework calls for everyone (both citizens and leaders in society) to contribute to the common good. This requires accountability, dialogue, and fair representation. Since the very beginning of its work, CPJ has advocated electoral reform that ensures that everyone's vote counts. For these reasons, CPJ recommends that proportional representation or a preferential ballot system be studied with a view to future use in Canada.

Bill C-23, the "Fair Elections Act," came under severe criticism from academics and electoral experts. CPJ also questioned several aspects of this legislation that hinder democratic development and more fair electoral rules. Instead, we propose strengthening Elections Canada's investigative and enforcement powers. This would help to create a level playing field and limit the power of big donors to buy political influence.

**QUESTION: Do you propose moving to a preferential voting system and/or proportional representation?**

## Evidence-based Policy-making

Our public policy-making should always be informed by evidence. Senior researchers in the civil service need to have their opinions heard and government research should be made widely available to the public. CPJ's own ability to provide insightful research on poverty trends has been harmed by cuts to Statistics Canada and the elimination of the long-form census. Our government has a responsibility to act transparently and ensure efficient access to information and government documents.

The decision to shut the National Council on Welfare limits the public's access to data and analysis on welfare rates across Canada and the cost of poverty. When the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy was shuttered, Canada lost a credible and powerful voice on climate change and ecological concern.

**QUESTION: Would you reinstitute the long form census, the National Council on Welfare, and/or the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy?**

"How we arrange our common life is central to a healthy spirituality. Politics is simply the means we use to organize our shared lives. It is how we express responsible solidarity."

— Alan Jones

## Charities and "Political Activity"

Many Canadians support the work of charities, which together comprise over eight per cent of the national GDP. Recently, concerns have surfaced about audits undertaken by Canada Revenue Agency targeting charities' perceived political activities. According to press reports, a "chill effect" on democratic charitable activities has resulted. The Canadian Council of Churches, of which CPJ is an affiliate member, has raised this substantial concern in a letter to government.

**QUESTION: Would you consult with the charitable sector in clarifying Canada Revenue Agency's definitions of "political activities"?**



## ENDING POVERTY IN CANADA

In this age of fear and anxiety, we can often forget the call to love our neighbours. We focus our attention on ourselves and our “loved ones.” But our loved ones are far more than just our family and friends. We are part of a wider, beloved community.

A biblical perspective on poverty starts with the recognition that all people are created in the image of God. Our love for God therefore requires that we respect our neighbours' inherent worth and care for their well-being. The Bible also calls us to practice justice, providing support and opening our hearts to those most marginalized.

**“Community means communion of heart and spirit; it is a network of relationships. But this implies a response to the cry of our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest, the weakest, the most wounded, and a sense of responsibility for them.”**

— Jean Vanier

Poverty impacts every part of a person's life. It makes it difficult for people to live in dignity and to respond to God's calling in their lives. Today, roughly 4.8 million Canadians struggle with poverty. This takes a heavy toll on society through negative health impacts and high economic costs.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Policy changes can reduce inequality and make a meaningful difference in the lives of low-income people. The federal government has the tools to create positive, measurable change to significantly reduce poverty. Progress since the early 1990's – specifically significant reductions in rates of children's and seniors' poverty – confirms this.

There are powerful voices at work in our democracy. In a world where public justice is prioritized, those voices would not drown out the impoverished and the vulnerable. As faithful citizens, we must pray and work for a world where all can live in dignity.

### LEARN MORE

*“Living Justice: A Gospel Response to Poverty”* is a CPJ worship and action guide on poverty in Canada. The book provides engaging reflections and workshop activities that encourage faith communities to explore how they can participate in creating social and economic justice. It is available at [cpj.ca/livingjustice](http://cpj.ca/livingjustice).



“Canadians of all faiths, from all walks of life, from all parts of this great country are awakening to the unacceptable levels of poverty, inequity and homelessness, and acknowledging that this injustice must change.

But we cannot do this in isolation. Committed to doing all we can, we call upon our government to partner with us in ending poverty.”

— **Interfaith Declaration on Faith and Poverty**, signed by the Canadian Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Canadian Interfaith Delegation, and *Dignity for All: The campaign for a poverty-free Canada*.

## A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada

Canada needs a national anti-poverty plan with a sustained affirmation of the dignity of all people in Canada. We have been called on repeatedly both internally (by Senate and House of Commons committees) and externally (by the United Nations) to develop such a plan. Many other developed countries have national anti-poverty plans, demonstrating that this is indeed achievable. But despite repeated Parliamentary resolutions to take action, Canada still has not implemented a national plan to reduce poverty.

A national anti-poverty plan would be comprehensive in scope, focusing on income security, housing, health, jobs and employment, food security, and early childhood education and care. It would complement provincial and territorial poverty reduction plans and commit to measurable goals and timelines, ensuring that sufficient action is taken at the federal level to address poverty.

The government has a moral obligation to lead. This includes implementing structural changes to eliminate poverty and creating new policies that ensure all people have the means to achieve a sustainable livelihood that provides a livable income. Our public policy must make human well-being its priority, rather than economic growth, individual profit, or international competitiveness.

Regardless of moral and economic arguments, our federal government’s obligation to Indigenous peoples of Canada alone requires that it be actively involved in anti-poverty work. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) final report clearly articulates that poverty among the Indigenous peoples of Canada is at unacceptable levels. The legacy of colonization and oppression experienced by First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people has done lasting damage to communities and individuals. The federal government has a responsibility to respond to the findings of the TRC report by ensuring that Indigenous people have access to the basic resources for healthy communities, support for culturally appropriate education, fair negotiation of land claims, and the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

### LEARN MORE

CPJ and Canada Without Poverty co-lead *Dignity for All: The campaign for a poverty-free Canada*, a non-partisan initiative calling for a federal anti-poverty plan. In February 2015, we released “***Dignity for All: A National Anti-Poverty Plan for Canada***” after holding six policy summits with community organizations, academics, people with a lived experience of poverty, and faith communities. This report shows that there are effective and attainable policy solutions. Now we need the political will to act. Learn more at [dignityforall.ca](http://dignityforall.ca).

Public justice means that everyone has a responsibility to take action against poverty, and this includes our federal government. Poverty is a significant injustice because it undermines human dignity, limiting people’s ability to live out God’s calling and fully participate in their community. A public justice framework recognizes that all people are created by God, with rights and responsibilities, including the right to live in dignity. At its centre, an anti-poverty plan must also recognize the inherent worth of each person and protect the human rights they hold in this country. As we practice faithful citizenship, we recognize the responsibilities that citizens and governments have in promoting the well-being of everyone.

**QUESTION: Will you pass legislation to implement a comprehensive national anti-poverty plan?**

## Affordable Quality Childcare

The latest package of tax credits for Canadian parents provides limited assistance to those who need it most. The Family Tax Credit (also known as income splitting) allows higher income earners to transfer a portion of their annual income to the lower income partner to reduce the household's overall tax burden. Single parents, a group that faces disproportionately high levels of poverty, cannot get any help at all from income splitting. This policy will be most beneficial to upper-income families.

The Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) was recently increased from \$100/month to \$160/month for each child under six. Parents of children aged six to 17 now receive \$60/month for each child. This credit delivers the same monthly cheque to all parents, regardless of whether their income is \$200,000/year or just \$20,000/year. This program diverts significant resources away from low-income families to upper-income families.

CPJ believes that the funds needed to pay for these tax breaks would be better spent on programs that benefit the most vulnerable families in Canada such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB). This progressive, refundable benefit includes the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) which targets low- and middle-income families. These family programs are already in place and provide income support to 90 per cent of children in Canada.

To address the needs of low- and middle- income families our federal government should boost the CCTB/NCBS to \$5,600/year for each child and increase access to affordable and high quality child care.

**QUESTION: Will you reverse tax credits that largely benefit the wealthy (i.e. UCCB and income splitting) in order to invest in programs that assist vulnerable Canadians (i.e. CCTB/NCBS)?**

## Good Jobs

Conventional wisdom says that full-time year-round employment is a guaranteed path out of poverty. That's no longer the case. Recent data show that 44 per cent of poor households in Canada have at least one person working. And some low-income families have two people working.

This is largely a result of precarious employment, which is characterized by some degree of insecurity and unpredictability, generally low wages, and few benefits. In the past 20 years, this type of work has increased by nearly 50 per cent in Canada. Youth and other groups under-represented in the workforce face particular barriers in obtaining secure employment.

**QUESTION: What steps will you take to reduce the growth of precarious employment in Canada?**

### LEARN MORE

In 2014, CPJ released "*The Burden of Poverty: A snapshot of poverty across Canada*," an update on the most recent statistics about poverty in Canada. It demonstrates the unequal burden of poverty in Canada placed on recent immigrants, single-parent families, and Indigenous peoples. It is available at [cpj.ca/burden-of-poverty](http://cpj.ca/burden-of-poverty).

## Housing for All

Housing is a key determinant of health and is a key plank of a national anti-poverty plan. Since the 1980s, access to affordable housing and income support programs, particularly for those with psycho-social and physical disabilities, has declined. This has created high levels of homelessness and housing insecurity in many Canadian communities.

Federal investment in affordable and social housing has fallen considerably short of demand. Taking inflation and population growth into account, funding levels have been on the decline for more than two decades. And funding is scheduled to continue to drop sharply as the federal government steps out of its remaining affordable housing commitments. The \$1.7 billion in annual federal funding for Canada's 600,000 social housing units has already started to expire putting more than 200,000 units – or one-third of Canada's stock of social housing – at risk.

Canada must increase funding by no less than \$2 billion per year in new money to implement housing strategies that meet the needs of those who are homeless and precariously housed.

**QUESTION: Will you invest at least \$2 billion per year in new money towards affordable housing?**







## **CLIMATE JUSTICE IS PUBLIC JUSTICE**

Throughout the Bible, we read of God's tremendous love for the earth. In Genesis, God declares the goodness of creation. In the Psalms, the trees themselves sing for joy. And in the New Testament, nature parables illustrate the interconnectedness of all systems and beings.

Yet creation is under threat. Our current path – one driven by frenetic fossil fuel and pipeline development – is leading us to devastating climate change. We can shift to a green economy now or pour billions into expensive and risky infrastructure development that locks future generations into a dirty development model. Without regulations or adequate fees on carbon emissions, industry and consumers are effectively allowed to throw their garbage – that is, their emissions – into the shared global atmosphere.

There is indeed already a cost to dispose of this garbage. Yet this cost is not charged to emitters. Instead it is borne by all of us, and predominantly by future generations and those living in the far North and Global South. It is these groups that are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Many people of faith in Canada support their denominational international development agencies. These groups have warned us that climate change will hurt the poorest in the Global South most. Yet the poor have contributed the least carbon emissions. Our solutions must not further cripple their aspirations and development.

Indigenous peoples in Canada are also directly impacted by the effects of climate change. Inuit and northern communities are witnessing the migration of species, melting of permafrost, and changing weather conditions. Climate change affects the social and economic well-being of these indigenous communities and increases the risk of further marginalization and exploitation.

We're already seeing species extinction, more frequent and more intense natural disasters, and threats to human livelihoods and health. Continuing down our current course will only make things worse. Such devastation can hardly be considered respectful of God's beloved world and all life that God created.

Our economy, ecology, and society are interdependent. A public justice vision tells us that we need a more holistic approach, one that considers the health of the economy, to be sure, but also the well-being of plants and animals in the natural environment, as well as sustainable livelihoods, lifestyles, and health of individuals, families, and communities.

Responding to the call to be faithful citizens means that we take these concerns seriously. It means recognizing our own personal and collective contributions to these problems. It means accepting the responsibility to change our personal and collective behaviour.

In order to preserve the life of the planet, carbon consumption needs to be curbed significantly. Alternative approaches to energy development require new thinking and new investments. Our responses to economic, social, and environmental crises must be integrated.



## Federal Climate Leadership is Needed

Carbon in the atmosphere has already surpassed the internationally agreed-upon “safe” level of 350 parts per million, first exceeding 400ppm in 2013. Based on World Bank data on 213 countries, Canada ranks 15th among the world’s worst per capita emitters of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), a potent greenhouse gas (GHG), releasing 14.7 metric tons per person, per year into the atmosphere. Among G8 countries, we rank third. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the International Energy Agency, at least 66 per cent of known fossil fuels reserves world-wide – including 75 per cent of those in the Athabasca oil fields – must stay underground in order to avoid catastrophic climate change.

At the Copenhagen climate change negotiations in 2009, the Government of Canada committed to reducing our GHG emissions to 17 per cent below 2005 levels by 2020. Environment Canada projections indicate that current measures will get us less than half-way there. The Federal Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Julie Gelfand, has said she is “concerned that Canada will not meet its 2020 emission reduction target and that the federal government does not yet have a plan for how it will work toward the greater reductions required beyond 2020.”

Canada recently announced new targets to reduce GHG emissions by 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. This target is the weakest among G7 countries. Meanwhile we still don’t have measures in place to meet it.

In the absence of federal leadership on climate justice, several provinces have stepped forward and are taking action (for example, the B.C. carbon tax, the phase-out of coal power in Ontario, and cap-and-trade systems implemented and planned in Quebec and Ontario). Still, the federal government must take action as national co-ordination is key.

### LEARN MORE

In 2011, CPJ was actively involved in the development and dissemination of the “*Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change*” available at [cpj.ca/climate-statement](http://cpj.ca/climate-statement).

In 2013, we published “*Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis*,” a worship and action guide for Christians interested in delving deeper in creation care. It is available at [cpj.ca/lej](http://cpj.ca/lej).

CPJ is producing “*Living Faithfully into a New Climate*” to encourage increased church engagement during the 2015 UN Climate Conference in Paris. Learn more at [cpj.ca/climate](http://cpj.ca/climate).



“Climate change, quite simply, is the issue of the twenty-first century. All of the other issues we care about – social justice, peace, prosperity, freedom – cannot occur unless our planet is healthy.”

— Sallie McFague

## Canada needs a credible Climate Change Action Plan that includes:

**A strong and predictable price on carbon** pollution that is designed to increase over time to allow energy prices to better reflect true costs, drive sustainable innovation, and ensure that both industry and consumers make more efficient use of our resources.

**QUESTION: Do you support putting a price on carbon emissions through a tax or fee sufficient to keep the rise in global temperatures below 2° Celsius?**

**Strict GHG emissions standards** applicable across the entire oil and gas sector, without exception for subsectors such as the oil sands. Given that the oil and gas sector is the largest and fastest growing source of emissions in Canada, it requires effective regulation immediately.

**QUESTION: Would you implement strict GHG emissions standards across the oil and gas sector? If so, when?**

**An end to the over \$1 billion annual federal subsidies** and special tax breaks to the Canadian fossil fuel industry that encourage exploration, development, refining, and export of oil, coal, and gas. Our federal government committed to this in 2009 but still hasn't taken firm action to end these subsidies.

**QUESTION: Would you end all subsidies to coal, oil, and gas producers, including those through tax breaks or weak environmental laws? If so, when?**

A national energy plan that ensures a sustainable and healthy future for Canada, including increased **investments in cleaner, low-impact energy alternatives** like wind, solar, geothermal, and tidal power.

**QUESTION: What are the major components of your plan to promote the development of renewable energy in Canada?**



Signing and implementing a binding **international climate change agreement** at the Paris Conference of Parties (COP21) that commits nations to reduce carbon emissions and set fair and clear targets to ensure that global average temperatures stay (at least) below a 2° Celsius increase from pre-industrial levels.

**QUESTION: What would you do to ensure that Canada plays a constructive role at the international climate change negotiations (COP21) in Paris in December?**

Support for the **climate adaptation** efforts of those facing the most significant impacts of climate change, particularly those in the far North and the Global South. This financing should be delivered to developing countries as new grants, rather than loans. Canada should increase its contribution to the U.N. Green Climate Fund from \$300 million to \$500 million.

**QUESTION: What role would you propose Canada play in support of international climate change adaptation and mitigation financing?**



## A NEW APPROACH TO REFUGEES

Refugees, currently numbering 20 million internationally, are among the most vulnerable populations in the world. Many of those escaping conflict and persecution come to Canada seeking safety and protection. However, changes to our federal immigration system have led to a steady decrease in the number of refugee claimants accepted in Canada per year. This comes at a time when the world is facing one of the worst refugee crises in modern history.

Refugees face unimaginable hardships. They have been forced to abandon their homes in order to save their lives and have likely witnessed and endured extreme acts of violence on their journey to safety. They arrive in Canada suffering from trauma, with little in the way of money or possessions.

Some of the hardships refugees face when they arrive in Canada include limited or no access to healthcare services and social assistance and reduced timeframes to prove their claims. These policy changes have jeopardized the safety of refugees and have eroded the fairness of our immigration system.

In such cases, God calls us to “extend hospitality to strangers” (Romans 12:13). To those who are not only strangers, but have been forced to flee life-threatening situations, we must demonstrate an even higher level of mercy and compassion.

As faithful citizens, we must recognize the extraordinary vulnerability of refugees and embrace our duty to ease their plight. Though refugees are the ones most affected by these policy changes, they are also the least likely to speak out in their own defence. We have the opportunity to use our collective voice to stop these injustices. Citizens play a unique role in ensuring that our government implements policies that protect all those who live within our borders, regardless of their immigration status.

Canadians take pride in our country’s multiculturalism. To truly embrace it, we need a new approach to how we treat those who seek refuge within our borders. We also need to remove obstacles that impede their successful resettlement. Public justice demands reform of our refugee system.

### LEARN MORE

CPJ’s research report, “**Private Sponsorship and Public Policy: Political barriers to church-connected refugee resettlement in Canada,**” is available at [cpj.ca/refugee-report](http://cpj.ca/refugee-report).

In July 2015, CPJ released “**The Invisible Victims.**” This report examines the humanitarian, economic, and legal impacts on refugee claimants of imposing a minimum residency requirement for social assistance. It is available at [cpj.ca/invisible-victims](http://cpj.ca/invisible-victims).



## Syrian Refugee Crisis

Canada has been slow to respond to the crisis faced by refugees from Syria. While our government has contributed millions of dollars in humanitarian aid to the region, it has been reluctant to commit to resettling refugees in Canada.

The UN Refugee Agency has called for 100,000 Syrians to be resettled worldwide. Canada has typically taken in ten per cent of international targets. Yet in 2013, the federal government committed to resettling just 1,300 Syrian refugees by the end of 2014. This target was only met in March 2015.

Many organizations, including CPJ, called on our government to increase this commitment to 10,000 refugees. Fortunately, the government responded and pledged to resettle another 10,000 over the next three years, from 2015 to 2017. However, it is still unclear how this will be accomplished given the slow record of success so far. Private sponsors, most of which are faith groups, are expected to resettle 60 per cent of this quota. No consultation took place before the announcement was made to verify these numbers would be achievable. And no additional resources were offered to help resettlement efforts. This is consistent with the government's lack of consultation with stakeholders on this issue in recent years.

**QUESTION: Do you believe the government's pledge to resettle 10,000 Syrian refugees over the next three years is sufficient? How will you meet this target?**

### Protecting Refugee Claimants

Refugee claimants, also known as asylum seekers, are not sponsored to come to Canada but make their claim for protection after arriving here. Just over half of all applications are accepted. However, this does not mean that applications that are denied were not filed in good faith. In fact, only three per cent of claims are found to be "manifestly unfounded" or to have "no credible basis."

For nearly six decades, the federal government has disallowed provinces from denying refugee claimants (and other non-residents) access to social assistance. If a province or territory chose to impose a residency requirement for social assistance, they would risk losing federal funding.

This changed with passage of Bill C-43, the Fall 2014 omnibus budget bill. This bill allowed provinces and territories to withdraw social assistance for refugee applicants without losing federal funding. This exposes refugee claimants to incredible risk. During the time between their arrival and when they become permanent residents, claimants rely heavily on income supports to make ends meet. They have few other options if they were to lose them.

In order to protect refugee claimants, our federal government must ensure that they have equal access to social assistance regardless of where they reside, their method of arrival, or the stage in their application process.

**QUESTION: Will you reinstate the prohibition on minimum residency requirements for social assistance?**

## Consultation with Refugee Sponsors

One way faith communities welcome newcomers is through sponsoring and resettling refugees. The private sponsorship program was initiated in large part by faith communities in response to the massive influx of refugees fleeing Vietnam in the 1970s, and has since become a crucial method of providing protection for refugees in Canada.

In CPJ's 2014 research study, "**Private Sponsorship and Public Policy**," churches and faith communities identified six major challenges to refugee sponsorship: long wait times and processing delays; cuts to the Interim Federal Health (IFH) program; a lack of government consultation; a lowering in the age of "dependent" children who may be sponsored (from 21 to 18); limited allocations of sponsorship applications; and visa post caps, which limit the number of refugees who may be sponsored from a specific region.

In 2012, the federal government made significant cuts to health coverage for refugees. Despite a recent federal court ruling that these cuts are "cruel and unusual" they remain largely in place. This means that sponsors take on additional financial liability. In fact, nearly one-third of church-connected sponsoring groups report that this has led them to decrease or end their involvement in the refugee sponsorship program.

**QUESTION: Will you reinstate the pre-2012 Interim Federal Health Program?**

It is critical that our government seek and consider input from stakeholders, including refugees, refugee sponsors, and those who work directly with them, when developing or making alterations to refugee policy.

**QUESTION: What will you do to ensure that private sponsors and faith communities are included in making resettlement decisions?**

"Each individual refugee is a child of God, and hundreds of thousands of refugees have been in camps for more than a decade. Children are born and raised in camps."

— Rose Dekker



## Go to [cpj.ca/election2015](http://cpj.ca/election2015)

Throughout the entire election campaign you'll find more in-depth coverage including:

- New analysis on a range of issues including Indigenous rights, fair taxation, and housing.
- More articles and blogs on the four key issues covered in this bulletin.
- Links to election resources from our partner organizations.
- Information on how to register to vote.
- Helpful tools and resources on hosting and organizing an all-candidates meeting.
- Information on how to order more copies of this Election Bulletin.

CPJ will be sending out more updates during the 2015 federal election campaign. Stay up-to-date by:

- Signing up to our e-newsletter at [cpj.ca/justice-news](http://cpj.ca/justice-news).
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Citizens for Public Justice's mission is to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society, and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God's call for love, justice, and the flourishing of creation.

**CPJ annual membership fee** includes *the Catalyst*: \$50 / \$25 (low-income)

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