

Dufferin-Caledon resident appears before Parliamentary committee

Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson last week welcomed Mono resident Jennifer Miedema during her appearance before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Miedema was appearing on behalf of Compass Community Church to highlight the difficulties they experienced trying to sponsor Eritrean refugees.

"I was pleased to invite Ms. Miedema to appear so that she could share her experiences and those of her fellow sponsors with Members of the Committee," Tilson said. "While we are all sympathetic to the plight of Syrian refugees, the focus on that particular group has cut the available positions for other vulnerable populations, notably Eritreans in Ms. Miedema's case."

"While I am proud of my country and the way it has welcomed Syrian refugees and we do welcome them with open arms, it is unjust to prioritize one group to the detriment of all others and I truly don't think that was the intent of the Canadian people,"

Miedema said during her testimony. "I plead with my government to lift or greatly increase the caps given to our visa offices, particularly in Israel, where the need is so great. Please, please move more resources there, and enable private sponsorship groups to extend our own hospitality and generosity towards those in desperate need."

"There are so many groups like mine wanting and waiting to sponsor refugees currently detained in Israel," she added. "We are being demoralized and stymied by these incredibly low caps. Also, please improve the processing times for refugees in Israel. Lives are being lost or held in limbo for years. Because refugees in Israel are not legally declared refugees by that government, only sponsorships through a Sponsorship Agreement Holder are permissible. But as was done for Iraqi and Syrian refugees, I ask that the Minister would extend similar regulatory exemptions to allow sponsorship of Eritrean refugees by Group of Five and Community Sponsors without refugee status recognitions. These measures are necessary to help this vulnerable group of refugees."

The Committee is concluding its study, embarked upon this past spring, into the resettlement of Syrian refugees to Canada. Tilson observed that Miedema's important testimony shows that while the Syrian situation remains grave, they are not the only at-risk group of refugees in need of Canada's protection and that there are other groups ready and able to assist.