

Op-Ed

CCR applauds Starbucks

The Canadian Council for Refugees was very pleased this week to learn of Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz's commitment to hiring 10,000 refugees worldwide to work at his company, a decision sparked by the Trump Administration's controversial travel ban on seven predominantly Muslim countries.

People in such countries the world over need the help of those who are able to give it, and Canadians are lucky to be in a position to provide comfort, aid and new lives if necessary.

Newcomers arrive on our shores for all sorts of reasons. Immigrants choose of their own will to move to Canada, while refugees are fleeing from dire circumstances like war or persecution. Refugees often wait much longer than immigrants for processing.

Many who come here are leaving behind good, stable careers in their own countries. Once arriving in Canada, migrants want to work again to provide for their families and contribute to their new-found communities. It is *not* true that refugees are taking good jobs away from Canadians. In fact, according to our 2016 research, bringing refugees into the country creates more jobs for Canadians by expanding our domestic market.

The CCR applauds Starbucks for its refugee hiring plan and for assisting in the settlement of refugees worldwide and in Canada. Settlement services are fundamental to participation in Canadian life and providing networking and professional opportunities, as well as the the chance to earn a living wage, are essential. These are values that the CCR, as a national non-profit organization, fully believe in.

Canada is an open, welcoming country that has time and time again shown it supports opportunities for migrant workers. Canada would be the best place for Starbucks to implement its refugee hiring program.

New Canadians are thriving in the workforce. Between 2008 and 2011, 77 per cent of immigrant and refugee workers aged 25 to 54 were employed and thus contributing to the Canadian workforce. In Manitoba this number reached 83 per cent, showing that immigrants and refugees are beneficial to any community, not just large cities. Advances in health care and social assistance programs have created more jobs for those with overseas training. Refugees who come with prior skills are immediately employable in many sectors of the Canadian workforce.

Major employers have an opportunity to set an example in Canada of how refugees can be welcomed into the workforce. Companies have a corporate social responsibility – meaning that they must use their influence and resources to positively impact the places they do business. Starbucks has recognized that responsibility; the CCR hopes they are just the first of many to commit to helping new Canadians in need.

Although many of us were born on Canadian soil, we are a mosaic of cultures. This country was built by immigrants over the past 150 years. Those not indigenous to this land were colonists from France and Britain. Others were refugees fleeing the American War of Independence. Then came the Irish, Scots, Poles, Germans, Ukrainians and Greeks. The Japanese and Chinese began arriving in the late 19th Century. All faced persecution and discrimination at the time of their arrival. Isn't it time we stop questioning the motives of people who want to live in our great country?

Hiring 10,000 refugees is a lofty goal. Starbucks may find it difficult. They may want to give up and change their strategy to help in other ways.

We say to Starbucks: Our planet has a never-ending supply of refugees. World peace will not happen in our lifetime and we must therefore do all we can to protect those who need it and give them as many opportunities as possible to be successful in life.

We urge Starbucks to set a reasonable goal for hiring refugees each year so they can evaluate proper timing for hitting their target. We would be happy to work with Mr. Schultz to reach a goal of 1,500 refugees hired in Canada over the next 24 months. We would be happy to help provide training programs for new workers and to work with local management to find suitable candidates for employment.

Please visit our website at <http://ccrweb.ca> if you would like to learn how to volunteer for with the CCR.

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