

We all have human rights, or none of us do.

The federal government's decision to cut funding for refugee shelter under the Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) ensures that there are human rights for some, but not for others — specifically refugees, who are already fleeing the direst of circumstances in the pursuit of basic safety. Not only do these funding cuts contravene Canada's international human rights commitments, but they also violate its own federal laws.

Under international covenants, Canada has a legal obligation to ensure access to shelter and housing without discrimination — including on the grounds of immigration status or nationality.<sup>1</sup> Cuts to IHAP funding also undermine the federal government's own statutory commitments in the National Housing Strategy Act (2017), including to the right to housing and the needs of equity-seeking groups. And, as Toronto saw in 2023, reducing funds for refugee shelter also places refugees at serious risk of harm, including death — a clear violation of their Charter right to life, liberty, and security of the person.

These are not arbitrary arguments; they are clear legal and human rights obligations.

Cutting IHAP funding for refugee shelter also creates costs elsewhere, including to the health care system, public transit, community services, and private business. Placing this financial burden on an already over-burdened health care system would create dire outcomes for everyone seeking health services — particularly in emergency departments, where people often seek shelter. For Toronto's TTC system, libraries, community centres, campuses, and businesses — especially malls, coffee shops, and quick-serve restaurants — refugees seeking *de facto* shelter in these spaces would create a financial and labour cost. For refugees who can't find shelter and are forced to live outdoors and in encampments, the cost of outreach, policing, and emergency response would outstrip the cost of simply granting people safe shelter. Most of these costs will be municipally borne, but some will be paid for by non-profits, post-secondaries, BIAs, and individual businesses. This is, in effect, an abandoning of responsibility.

To be clear, refugees are unequivocally a federal responsibility.<sup>2</sup> This responsibility was affirmed in 2023, when the federal government provided Toronto with IHAP funding to shelter thousands of refugees who were languishing on the street. The federal government made a promise of continued funding for refugees, who still require substantial shelter beds in Toronto. Cuts to IHAP funding are a shirking of federal responsibility as well as a broken promise to the City of Toronto — let alone a violation of the law and Canada's human rights obligations, as well as an unnecessary financial burden on those who shouldn't carry it.

Clearly, the legal case, the business case, and the humanitarian case are all aligned. The federal government must be aligned as well. As signatories on this letter, we affirm that the federal government must fulfill its promise to the City of Toronto by continuing to provide full IHAP funding to meet the real need for refugee shelter for as long as it is required.

The alternative is simply too great of a cost to bear.

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<sup>1</sup> [International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights](#) (1966) and [Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#) (1951).

<sup>2</sup> As enshrined in the [Immigration and Refugee Protection Act](#) (2001).

Signed,

*Organizations*

1. Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO)
2. Anglican Diocese of Toronto
3. Canadian Street Soccer Association
4. Christie Refugee Welcome Centre
5. College Street United Church
6. Covenant House Toronto
7. CUPE Ontario
8. Crossroads Theatre
9. Dixon Hall
10. Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth
11. HIV Legal Network
12. Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre
13. More Neighbours Toronto
14. My Brother's Keeper Parkdale
15. National Right to Housing Network
16. Neighbourhood Legal Services
17. Progress Toronto
18. Right to Housing Toronto (R2HTO)
19. Romero House
20. Social Planning Toronto
21. Social Rights Advocacy Centre
22. Sojourn House
23. St. Felix Centre
24. St. Michael's Hospital Academic Family Health Team
25. The Neighbourhood Group Community Services (TNGCS)
26. Toronto Drop-in Network (TDIN)
27. Toronto Indigenous Harm Reduction
28. Toronto Neighbourhood Centres
29. Toronto Shelter Network (TSN)
30. Toronto Underhoused and Homeless Union (TUHU)
31. Unison Health and Community Services
32. Women's National Housing & Homelessness Network
33. Workers' Action Centre
34. York South Weston Tenant Union
35. YWCA Toronto

*Individuals*

1. Ali Serjeant, Community Support Worker & Researcher
2. Anne Egger, Nurse Practitioner
3. Bea Marie, Community Worker & Advocate
4. Dan Rutembesa, Associate Executive Director, Sojourn House
5. Dani Morrison, Housing Specialist
6. David Meyers, Senior Manager, Centre for Independent Living Toronto

7. Diana Chan McNally, Homelessness Advocate
8. Eliot Smith, Housing Case Manager
9. Faduma Abdulle, Program Coordinator
10. Gary Bloch, Family Physician
11. Ike Nwibe, Executive Director, Cecil Community Centre
12. Jalal Nazari, Social Worker
13. Jirjees Al-shammaa, Crisis Worker
14. Karen Sierra, Housing and Settlement Manager
15. Lynn LaCroix, Co-organiser, Les Nocturnes Street Outreach & PhD Student, York University
16. Madison Joyce, Registered Nurse
17. Melanie Seabrook, Community Organizer
18. Oren Jungreis, Housing & Settlement Coordinator, Romero House
19. Samantha Green, Physician
20. Samantha Yang, Physician
21. Shula Katz, Advocate/Frontline Community Worker
22. Yasmin Yousef, Refugee / Newcomer Advocate
23. Zahara Abdulwakil, Advocate