



Advancing Community Unity & Prosperity

AFRICAN COMMUNITIES OF MANITOBA INC

December 5, 2014

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister,

I write to you as a concerned Canadian citizen and as the President of the African Communities of Manitoba Inc. (ACOMI). I am writing on behalf of the African community in Manitoba to express our concerns regarding the recent decision of the Government of Canada to suspend visas to people in the Ebola affected region in West Africa - namely the countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea.

We have, together with other Canadians, witnessed the civil unrests and upheaval for the past several years in these West African countries resulting in many from that region settling in Canada as refugees. Unfortunately, to make things worse in the past year, we have watched as Ebola ravages through the region. The situation in the region has been overwhelming and beyond the region's capacity leading to one of the world's largest health catastrophes that require an organised worldwide effort to combat its spread.

The Ebola catastrophe has had a direct negative impact on our African-Canadian communities. As our beloved relatives in the region perish by the thousands and become victims of Ebola, African-Canadians have become directly affected physically, morally and psychologically.

Our African-Canadian communities have however not been sitting still. In Winnipeg, our communities have been working with churches and the general Manitoban community to disseminate information on Ebola, educating the public on the disease, organising fundraising events, calling for prayers, and consoling one another as much as they can.

We would like to commend the Governments of Canada and the Provinces that have offered in diverse ways (e.g. through personnel, funds and equipment) to help offset the pressures within the affected region.

Despite what we have to go through as devastated African-Canadians, certain policies of the Canadian Government against the affected Ebola region add more agony to our sufferings. While we welcome all of Canada's efforts and contributions in this battle against Ebola, we remain deeply concerned about the recent decision of the Canadian Government to suspend visa applications for residents and nationals of the West African countries battling Ebola. Instead of saving lives by encouraging and facilitating visas for those who would like to join their families in Canada in escaping the devastating outbreak, suspending the immigration process as well as banning any entry visas to our brothers and sisters do make our suffering and the suffering of our refugees intolerable.

On behalf of all African-Canadian communities we call on the Canadian Government:

1. To reconsider the entry visa ban against all the West African countries which are affected by the Ebola outbreak. In 2003 Canada played a proactive role during the SARS outbreak by contributing to the drafting and establishment of the International Health Regulations. The regulations kept the world focus on having a disciplined approach to health related risks by not allowing fear and politics to drive responses to world-wide disease threats. Canada was against entry visa bans during the SARS outbreak, and it is unfortunate that we have imposed such a ban on the Ebola region. The visa ban has a devastating impact on us as African-Canadians; especially around this time of the year when families come together to celebrate Christmas and New Year.
2. To re-open the immigration process for the Ebola affected West African countries. Canada is known for its humanitarian values, and we expect the Government of Canada to save lives by facilitating the immigration process and encouraging other nations to open their doors as well.

We would also recommend that the Canadian Government proactively open a special immigration visa process, as was done in other cases such as the Philippines (2013) and Haiti (2010) natural disasters; to save the lives of the vulnerable refugees and orphaned children in the affected region.

3. To continue being the champion on well-informed, scientifically-based and evidence-based decision making. The World Health Organization (WHO) has indicated that there is no evidence to support the effectiveness of a travel ban as a protective measure; rather it encourages affected countries to cover up epidemics instead of disclosing them. We urge the Canadian Government to reverse its decision on the visa application suspension for the affected region.

In concluding, we believe this is an urgent issue. If the West African region is abandoned from the rest of the world, the isolation and desolation may result not only in economic consequences but an irreversible international political and humanitarian disaster.

Thanking you in advance for taking the time to read this letter; we await your response with great interest.

Yours truly,



André Doumbè
President,
African Communities of Manitoba Inc. (Acomi)

cc: The Honourable Chris Alexander, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
The Honourable Thomas Mulcair, The Leader of the Official Opposition
Justin Trudeau, MP, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada
Mr. Mario Beaulieu, MP, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Elizabeth May, MP, Leader of the Green Party of Canada