



Press release

Immediate release

**REACTION OF JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE - CANADA
TO THE CLOSURE OF THE CANADIAN BORDER TO ASYLUM SEEKERS**

Montreal, March 24th, 2020. - Jesuit Refugee Service-Canada (JRS-Canada) is challenging the federal government's decision to close the border to refugee claimants.

Why is it not possible to take the same measures imposed on Canadian travelers arriving from a foreign country to asylum seekers? In fact, until last Thursday, the Canadian government had a plan in place to quarantine these people. Why the abrupt change?

"It is possible to maintain public health requirements while respecting the human rights of refugee claimants," says Norbert Piché, National Director of the Service.

JRS-Canada recognizes that, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are living in extraordinary times and that these extraordinary times require extraordinary measures that governments impose on citizens. This concerns everyone.

Last Friday, March 20th, the Canadian government closed the border to everyone with a few exceptions. These exceptions did not include refugee claimants.

Asylum seekers are fleeing persecution. They have fled their countries of origin because they feel persecuted. They also do not feel safe in the United States. Why is it not possible to take the same measures imposed on Canadian travelers arriving from a country other than Canada for asylum seekers, that is, to impose a 14-day quarantine on them?

Furthermore, these asylum seekers will be turned back to the American authorities, where they will surely be detained. Their detention will put them at greater risk of contracting the virus. Even if the American authorities did not detain them, where would they go? Everything is closing down. They probably don't have much money. They could end up on the street.

Finally, the rejection of irregular migrants, who arrive in the country through irregular crossings, such as at Roxham Road in Quebec, will cause further difficulties. For example, people may use other, more dangerous irregular crossings (using smugglers) and not report to Canadian authorities to avoid being turned back to the United States. This would not be in Canada's interest or in the interest of refugee claimants.

Therefore, we reiterate what we have stated above: it is possible to maintain public health requirements while respecting the human rights of asylum seekers.

About Us

Jesuit Refugee Service - Canada, seeks to accompany, serve and advocate for refugees and other displaced persons, so that they may heal, learn and define their future for themselves.

- 30 -

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