

18th National Metropolis Conference March 3-5, 2016

Welcome Remarks by:
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I want to begin by acknowledging we are gathered on the traditional homelands of the Anishnabe peoples of Turtle Island; a place with a long and rich history of welcoming many different peoples from many different places.

I am so pleased to welcome you all to Toronto; this city where more than half the population – almost 1.4 million people – were born outside Canada; this city that has welcomed many different populations of refugees, from escaped Black slaves in the 1800's, to Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees in the 1970's and more recently to Eritrean, Tibetan, Sudanese, and Syrian refugees.

I am pleased to welcome you to a city that is also home to a large and vibrant presence of community organizations – of which a significant number are OCASI member agencies; a city that is home to organizations and groups dedicated to realizing the themes of this year's National Metropolis Conference – Getting results in 'migration', 'opportunities', and 'good governance'. As at every Metropolis, the 2016 conference is a wonderful opportunity to engage and interact with peers, with colleagues and friends across the many different sectors that are central to the Metropolis project of creating a national forum for research and policy on migration, and build on twenty years of sustained effort.

These are exciting and encouraging times in Canada for those concerned with migration. We have seen some positive changes – the rescinding of egregious policies, that while on the face look neutral, in fact have differential impact on racialized groups and women – policies such as Conditional Permanent Residence, and two-tier citizenship.

We have seen a reversal of policies with harmful impact on refugees, such as the full restoration of Interim Federal health. We have seen transportation loans waived for Syrian refugees and hope to see that extended to all refugees. And the massive undertaking to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees, and as important, to allow Canadian residents in their hundreds and thousands to come together to sponsor refugees and resettle them in their communities are powerful and memorable expressions of a changed Canadian migration policy.

We hope new policy under this government will be about facilitating fair and equitable immigration and refugee entry, including for francophone immigration from source countries beyond Europe, the removal of the Designated Country of Origin regime, pathways to permanent residence for migrant workers and international students, and increasing and accelerating family reunification. We hope the government will open up the conversation about regularization for the thousands of residents without immigration status.

We hope for policies that will support the successful settlement, integration and inclusion of all migrants, including policies that will address the significant racial and gender disparities in economic outcomes, leading to delayed settlement.

For the first time in a long time, I believe we have an opportunity to move beyond merely holding onto what is important, and instead dare to think beyond today's practical realities in migration and resettlement.

And so, over the next three days of learning and sharing at the many excellent plenaries and breakout sessions, I hope that you all find spaces for good discussion and good conversation in how we can work together to realize our full potential.

I wish you all the best for a good conference.