Dear (Member of Parliament)

I am writing to urge the federal government to honour its obligations with regard to the care and shelter of refugees. According to the UNHCR’s 1951 Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, signatory nations like Canada are required to welcome refugees when they appear at our borders. According to Article 21, we are expected to provide housing for refugees in need. The Convention makes no distinction between asylum seekers and refugees unless the claimant is excludable or denied the determination of refugee status. Yet, in the past year, refugees from Africa in particular have been denied space in Toronto’s shelter system. Hundreds have had to sleep on the streets, or in church basements. The City’s budget and resources have been too small to accommodate this sudden influx of people applying for asylum. This is not at all what the refugees were expecting, nor what our city or our country should have offered them.

In late November, the government of Ontario offered the City of Toronto 600 million dollars for our shelter system, but only if the federal government pays for the care of refugees. Toronto’s Mayor Olivia Chow has estimated that this will cost 250 million dollars next year. These funds should arrive quickly, so that offer from the Ontario government can be realized. There is rarely cause for hope when discussing shelter and homelessness issues. This week, it appears that our society could do the right thing. I urge the federal government to be part of the solution by sending substantial funding to Toronto for the care of refugees. They have come to Canada hoping to find peace, security and good government. Let’s live up to our reputation, and our international obligations.

Sincerely,

( Your name)

(Your address with postal code)