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Local call to action on refugee crisis

Brian Logel Chair of the Headwaters' Refugee Sponsorship Committee will speak at Trinity United Church in Shelburne November 22nd sharing news about the Syrian family his group has been working to bring to Orangeville for some months. He says Canada is lagging behind other countries in welcoming desperate and displaced Syrian victims of war and calls on citizens to urge action from our government, donate aid, and organize sponsorship.

Six years ago the Headwaters' Refugee Sponsorship Committee successfully sponsored an Iraqi family of four who were refugees living in Syria; they came to Orangeville and quickly adapted to Canadian life. Now, six years later, the group has gathered once more to sponsor a Syrian family living in Jordan, a very small country flooded with refugees of the five year conflict.

A newly retired school principal, Logel says that since the end of the Second World War, ?Syria has been ruled by a family of brutal dictators, who were supported by western and Russian governments. The current dictator's father was responsible for the torture and death of thousands of his own citizens. The current president has continued his family's brutal reign and five years ago when the population started peacefully protesting his rule, calling for fair elections, the government's violent response caused the outbreak of the civil war.? Since that time, nearly 300,000 people have been killed, more than 7 million have been displaced and over 4 million have fled the country.

The family which Headwaters' Refugee Sponsorship Committee are trying to bring to Orangeville have fled to Jordan where there are two large desert camps, one holding 80,000 refugees. Logel says the group is keeping the identity of the family confidential because ?they are still in danger.? The young family fled Syria early in the conflict after their village was bombed and the father was beaten for refusing to join the conflict.

The situation is beyond desperate with the UN food program close to bankruptcy and winter on the doorstep. The United Nations is calling for developed countries to accept ?reasonable numbers of Syrian refugees,? says Logel. Churches or established community organizations can sponsor refugees; individuals may form ?a Group of five? to sponsor a family, but Logel says they must guarantee to look after those their sponsor ?financially and emotionally for one year.? He reports that, currently there is a group in Orangeville, another forming in the Hockley Valley area, and another in the Shelburne area.

The cost of such a sponsorship is about $30,000 and Brian Logel says the Headwaters' group has been able to raise about 2/3 of the funds to date. ?Our family has had their first interview and medical exams with the Canadian High Commission in Amman,? he says, ?They still have to pass the security screening.? Newly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has made a daunting promise to bring 25,000 refugees to Canada by the end of 2015. ?Under the Conservative government it took approximately 19 months to process Syrian refugee applications and longer for private sponsorships,? says Logel. ?We are hoping now the process will be sped up and we will see our family sooner.?

By Marni Walsh