

Local resident writes PM Trudeau to help in refugee case

Written By TOM CLARIDGE

A local resident who has sponsored concert fundraisers for Syrian refugees is asking Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for help in bringing to Canada a resident of war-torn Aleppo who has apparently been told by a Canadian embassy that he hasn't suffered enough to qualify as a refugee.

In her letter to Mr. Trudeau, Ann Lay said a group she had formed 2 1/2 years ago will sponsor the admission of ?Elias?, who has relatives in Caledon and would be housed and employed on his arrival.

Mrs. Lay, who lives south of Orangeville in Melville, told the PM that on May 31 Elias ?was declined entry into Canada by our Embassy in Lebanon because he was not living there. He is only permitted a four-day visa and would be taken by police if he stayed longer. He has an uncle in Lebanon he can stay with, but Lebanon has closed its borders to Syrians, as have Turkey, Jordan and Egypt.?

She said she went to the Orangeville office of Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson

?and to my horror I was told they contacted the Embassy and was told this young man had not suffered enough to qualify as a refugee.?

Mrs. Lay said that in the 40 years she has been helping refugees by raising money through concerts and speaking in churches in the Toronto area, ?I have never met a situation such as this.?

Advising the prime minister that sponsors in the Orangeville area have already brought in many Syrian refugee families, most of whom are Muslims, she said Elias is a ?young Christian man who has suffered a great deal and is more than qualified to be here.?

Mrs. Lay told the Orangeville Citizen that Elias' family owned a bakery in Aleppo for three generations before it was bombed and looted. His father was kidnapped and tortured because he was a Christian, and was released only when the family paid a \$20,000 (US) ransom.

She said Elias' mother has suffered a nervous breakdown and his sister ?has given up everything to look after her suffering parents.?

The family's church in Aleppo has been bombed, and Christians, who formed 10 per cent of Syria's population before the civil war broke out in 2011, are being persecuted in Aleppo and all over Syria.

?Aleppo is destroyed and there is no work for him there,? she said. ?Everything is scarce ? food, electricity, water and heating, and there is still constant bombing.?

Describing Elias as well-educated, fluent in English and willing to work hard, Mrs. Lay said he has a cousin and aunt living in Terra Cotta, and the sponsorship group has prepared a place for him to stay and is prepared to give him whatever help he needs. ?We have immediate work for him so he can support his suffering family in Aleppo.?

She ended the letter to Mr. Trudeau by thanking him in advance ?for any help you are able to give to this matter, as so many people have worked hard to raise the funds and he has family here that are ready to house him and give him employment. We believe he has suffered enough.?