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Manitoba groups calling on feds to welcome more asylum seekers



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Manitoba refugee advocacy groups want the federal government to do more to welcome asylum seekers from around the world and people fleeing the United States in the wake of President Donald Trump's travel ban.

The Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties and Immigration Partnership Winnipeg both said it's time for Canada to revisit the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement.

"Everything is really concerning right now," said Michelle Falk, executive director at Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties.



PHOTOS



One man from Djibouti in East Africa told CTV News people are scared the U.S. will send displaced people fearing for their lives back to their home countries.

"The way things have been going on in the States for the past week or so, we no longer think that the United States should be considered a safe country," she said.

Under the agreement, people seeking refugee protection must make a claim in the first country they arrive in, either the United States or Canada, unless they qualify for an exception to the [agreement](#).

Abdikheir Ahmed is a leader in the local Somali community and works with Immigration Partnership Winnipeg.

He said a lot of community members are concerned for their relatives.

"They can be rounded up, deported at any moment," he said.

Ahmed also wants to see the agreement revisited.

"This (agreement) was done under the understanding the U.S. was a safe country for refugees. The U.S. is not a safe country for refugees anymore ... and Canada should consider withdrawing from this agreement," he said.

Falk said if the agreement was repealed, refugee claimants could go to official border crossings. The association is also asking the government to increase the cap on the number of refugees.

Manitoba has seen a rise in the number of refugee claimants illegally crossing the border near Emerson, Man. Between April 2016 and December 2016, the Canada Border Services Agency reported 410 people crossed. That's up from 68 people crossing between April of 2013 and April of 2014.

On Monday, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council said 10 people avoided the border and crossed into Manitoba to flee from the United States in the wake of Trump's travel ban on seven majority Muslim countries.

One man from Djibouti in East Africa told CTV News people are scared the U.S. will send displaced people fearing for their lives back to their home countries.

"I expect more to cross the border. It's very frightening," Ahmed said.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Minister Ahmed Hussen said in Ottawa Tuesday there is no change to the Canada-U.S. Safe Third Country Agreement at this time. When asked if Canada would welcome more people, Hussen said the government intends to stick to its current immigration plan.

"If you look at the numbers of say privately sponsored refugees that we have for 2017, it's 16 000. That is a historic high, if you take out the exceptional year of 2016," Hussen said.

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