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NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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## Celebrating family in a complicated world

Like millions of Canadians, I'm really looking forward to spending time at home with my family over Christmas.

At the same time, I can't help but think of those in our community and elsewhere who suffer family hardship due to separation caused by geopolitical events beyond their control.

One example with particular resonance in North Vancouver, home to one of our country's largest communities of Canadians from Iran, is the lack of a Canadian embassy in that country.

The absence of direct Canadian diplomatic representation in Iran creates significant family issues - in particular, issues relating to visas.

Most Iranian Canadians that come to see me as their MP acknowledge the challenges associated with working with the current regime in Iran and the reasons why Canada currently does not have an embassy there.

But they are deeply concerned about the family hardship caused by the lack of consular services. It means that Iranians with families in Canada must go into a general line up in another country - most often Ankara, Turkey - to obtain travel visas, study permits and family sponsorships.

Canada's processing time for requests from Iranians is longer than the international average. In 2015, for example, the average wait time for Iranian permanent resident applications from individuals living in Iran was 32.6 months longer than for citizens of all other countries.

### Close to home

A while back, a young woman active in the North Vancouver community came to my constituency office looking for help with a spousal sponsorship application.

A Canadian citizen from Iran, she'd been married there a few months before and had applied for spousal sponsorship for her husband.

At that time the average wait for processing for other countries was 12 months. He remained in Iran while she began to organize their family home in North Vancouver. They were soon overjoyed to learn they were expecting a child. My office submitted a request for expedited processing so the father could be in Canada to help during the pregnancy and be here for the birth of their child.

After her husband made several trips from Tehran to Ankara for interviews, tests and to submit documents, he was granted permanent residency - but not until after the birth of their child. The process they thought would take a year took two years.

### Community roundtable

Last March, I convened a roundtable with Iranian Canadian residents of North Vancouver who had experienced difficulties with the current visa and sponsorship processes. The intent of the dialogue was to learn about - and to learn from - their challenges and to come up with potential solutions.

Several important suggestions came out of this meeting. One of these was the idea that - in the absence of physical Canadian diplomatic representation in Tehran - we should focus on enhancing processing capacity and associated wait times in Ankara by increasing resources and by dedicating specific processing resources to Iranian applicants.

We brought these ideas to officials with the Departments of Immigration and Global Affairs in Ottawa and I believe their level of engagement and response reflects an enhanced understanding of how difficult the current situation is for many Iranian Canadians.

Over this past year there has been improvement. Since our North Vancouver roundtable, our federal government has added ten new full-time processing positions to the Canadian Embassy in Ankara plus a number of additional temporary duty officers.

Further, and perhaps most significantly, the Canadian Government has dedicated resources in Ankara to focus on the processing of Iranian applications. This is already having an impact on access and processing times for Iranian applicants and is very much a direct result of the feedback provided by Iranian Canadians living in North Vancouver.

The roundtable model of listening, working collaboratively with constituents on developing possible solutions and making the case in Ottawa is one I've found to work well and one which I will continue to develop and refine.

As we particularly celebrate family at this time of year, I would like to extend my very best to you and yours!

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