The Church of England today has published a letter sent to the Prime Minister in early September signed by 84 of its bishops calling for the Government to increase the number of Syrian refugees being resettled to this country "to a minimum of 50,000" over the next five years.
Referring to the situation in Syria as "one of the largest refugee crises ever recorded" the Bishops write that "a moral crisis of this magnitude calls each and all of us to play our parts."

Calling directly on the Prime Minister to increase his current offer to accept 20,000 refugees over the next 5 years to 50,000 the Bishops write:

"We believe such is this country's great tradition of sanctuary and generosity of spirit that we could feasibly resettle at least 10,000 people a year for the next two years, rising to a minimum of 50,000 in total over the five year period you foresaw in your announcement. Such a number would bring us into line with comparable commitments made by other countries. It would be a meaningful and substantial response to the scale of human suffering we see daily."

In addition to "recognising and applauding" the announcements made by the Prime Minister the Bishops offer help from the Church of England in encouraging their churches to provide welcome, housing and foster care to refugees as well as to support the Government in its ongoing efforts.

In their letter the Bishops also called for the creation of a National Welcome and Resettlement Board, mirroring the successful work of such boards created by Government in response to past refugee crises in the 1950s and 1970s. Since the writing of the letter the board has been created with the Bishop of Durham serving as co-chair of the board.

Speaking on behalf of the bishops, the Rt. Revd. Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham said:

"The Archbishop of York recently said that the current situation has rightly been described as a refugee crisis but it is also a time of opportunity for us as a country and for our wider continent. The opportunity before us is to rise above narrow self-interest, however defined, and to embrace the highest parts of our humanity.

We recognise that both the Prime Minister and His Government responded to calls from the country for there to be a programme of resettlement and we are grateful to him for responding to those calls. However there is a real urgency to this issue with those increasingly being forced from their land as their homes are literally bombed into the ground. As the fighting intensifies, as the sheer scale of human misery becomes greater, the Government's response seems increasingly inadequate to meet the scale and severity of the problem. It is disheartening that we have not received any substantive reply despite an assurance from the Prime Minister that one would be received. There is an urgent and compelling moral duty to act which we as bishops are offering to facilitate alongside others from across civil society."

ENDS
Dear Prime Minister,

Like you, your Government, and the people of our nation we are deeply concerned for the refugee crisis that we have to face together. We are grateful to you and your ministers for the conversations they have already held with the Archbishop of Canterbury and others around these issues.

We pray for the millions of people fleeing war and violence in one of the largest refugee crises ever recorded, and we remember those who have tragically died seeking sanctuary on European shores: those like Alan Kurdi, the three year old boy who heartbreakingly died and was washed up...
on a beach in Turkey.

It is a command in Judaism, “to welcome and love the stranger as you would yourself because you were strangers in the land of Egypt”. Followers of Islam are obliged to provide food, shelter and safety to the traveller. Christ himself and his family were refugees. We are reminded that in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral there is a 17th century notice which pays tribute to “the large and liberal spirit of the English church and the glorious asylum which England has in all times given to foreigners flying for refuge against oppression and tyranny.”

Such traditions and prayers must be joined with action. A moral crisis of this magnitude calls each and all of us to play our parts.

We recognise and applaud the leadership you and your government are showing in this crisis, both as one of the world’s top international donors and the recent announcement that the government will resettle 20,000 people over the next five years.

We stand ready to play our part as well. We will:

1. Encourage our church members to work alongside the wider community in offering welcome, orientation, integration, sign-posting and support to all refugees who come
2. Encourage, where possible and feasible, churches, congregations and individuals to make rental properties and spare housing available for use by resettled refugees.
3. Promote and support foster caring among churches, congregations and individuals where appropriate to help find the homes needed to care for the increasing number of unaccompanied minors
4. Pray for, act with and stand alongside your government, to rise to the challenge that this crisis poses to our shared humanity

From what we see in congregations across the United Kingdom we are confident that the country stands ready and willing to support the government to be even more ambitious as it responds to this historic crisis.

We believe such is this country’s great tradition of sanctuary and generosity of spirit that we could feasibly resettle at least 10,000 people a year for the next two years, rising to a minimum of 50,000 in total over the five year period you foresaw in your announcement. Such a number would bring us into line with comparable commitments made by other countries. It would be a meaningful and substantial response to the scale of human suffering we see daily.

We believe that should a National Welcome and Resettlement Board be established in response to the crisis drawing together civic, corporate and government leadership to coordinate efforts and mobilise the nation as in times past, such an effort would not be beyond the British people. A senior Bishop would gladly serve on such a board on our behalf and at your pleasure.
This letter is written to you privately at present. The College of Bishops meets in Oxford next week and will spend some time on Thursday 17th considering our practical response. If you were able to respond to me ahead of that date it would help our discussions.

Faithfully,

+Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham
+Stephen Conway, Bishop of Ely
+John Inge, Bishop of Worcester
+Graham James, Bishop of Norwich
+Peter Hancock, Bishop of Bath & Wells
+Martin Seeley, Bishop of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich
+Mike Hill, Bishop of Bristol
+Nick Holtam, Bishop of Salisbury
+Nick Baines, Bishop of Leeds
+James Langstaff, Bishop of Rochester
+Richard Frith, Bishop of Hereford
+Christopher Foster, Bishop of Portsmouth
+Tim Thornton, Bishop of Truro
+Alan Smith, Bishop of St Albans
+David Walker, Bishop of Manchester
+Peter Forster, Bishop of Chester
+Donald Allister, Bishop of Peterborough
+James Newcome, Bishop of Carlisle
+Stephen Cotterell, Bishop of Chelmsford
+Julian Henderson, Bishop of Blackburn
+Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry
+Trevor Wilmott, Bishop of Dover
+Jonathan Gledhill, Bishop of Lichfield
+Martin Warner, Bishop of Chichester
+Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool
+Stephen Croft, Bishop of Sheffield
+Alastair Redfern, Bishop of Derby
+Andrew Watson, Bishop of Guildford
+Christopher Lowson, Bishop of Lincoln
Colin Fletcher, Bishop of Dorchester
Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester
Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Southwark
Tim Dakin, Bishop of Winchester
Adrian Newman, Bishop of Stepney
Peter Hill, Bishop of Barking
Jonathan Clark, Bishop of Croydon
David Urquhart, Bishop of Birmingham
Tony Robinson, Bishop of Wakefield
Pete Broadbent, Bishop of Willesden
Ian Brackley, Bishop of Dorking
John Wraw, Bishop of Bradwell
Richard Blackburn, Bishop of Warrington
Richard Atkinson, Bishop of Bedford
Chris Goldsmith, Bishop of St Germans
Robert Freeman, Bishop of Penrith
Andrew Proud, Bishop of Reading
Mark Sowerby, Bishop of Horsham
Chris Edmondton, Bishop of Bolton
Jonathan Frost, Bishop of Southampton
Paul Williams, Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham
Ric Thorpe, Bishop of Islington
Jonathan Baker, Bishop of Fulham
Rod Thomas, Bishop of Maidstone
David Courth, Bishop of Grimsby
David Thomson, Bishop of Huntingdon
Sarah Mulally, Bishop of Crediton
Alan Wilson, Bishop of Buckingham
Paul Slater, Bishop of Richmond
John Stroyan, Bishop of Warwick
James Bell, Bishop of Ripon
Toby Howarth, Bishop of Bradford
Keith Sinclair, Bishop of Birkenhead
Paul Ferguson, Bishop of Whitby
Richard Cheetham, Bishop of Kingston
Peter Burrows, Bishop of Doncaster
Philip North, Bishop of Burnley
Michael Ipgrave, Bishop of Woolwich
Libby Lane, Bishop of Stockport
Lee Rayfield, Bishop of Swindon
Frank White, Acting Bishop of Newcastle
Graham Tomlin, Bishop of Kensington
Roger Morris, Bishop of Colchester
Jonathan Meyrick, Bishop of Lynn
Ruth Worsley, Bishop of Taunton
Michael Beasley, Bishop of Hertford
Alison White, Bishop of Hull
Richard Jackson, Bishop of Lewes
Geoff Pearson, Bishop of Lancaster
John Holbrook, Acting Bishop of Leicester
Robert Atwell, Bishop of Exeter
Jonathan Goodall, Bishop of Ebbsfleet
Alan Winton, Bishop of Thetford
Graham Usher, Bishop of Dudley
Anne Hollinghurst, Bishop of Aston
Glyn Webster, Bishop of Beverly

Viv Faull, Dean of York
Annette Cooper, Archdeacon of Colchester
Christine Wilson, Archdeacon of Chesterfield
Joanne Grenfell, Archdeacon of Portsdown