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Turkish Assistance with Evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon

Turkish government has provided invaluable assistance at all levels in Ankara, Adana, Mersin and elsewhere. This brief report is to provide a general picture and specific examples of Turkish assistance to the evacuation. Of course this continues and we may have more to report in the coming days. It is fair to say that without the high level of cooperation and spirit of good will demonstrated by our Turkish colleagues, the transit of thousands of Canadian evacuees would have been much more onerous and the delays in returning them to Canada much longer. Canadian-staff here and in Mersin/Adana are unanimous in our praise and gratitude for the cooperation of the Turkish authorities. Thanks to my colleagues in Mersin, Adana and Ankara for their input to this.

- (1) *Mersin Port* - as the first few ships arrived, it became rapidly apparent that standard customs and disembarking procedures and levels of staffing by Turkish port officials would result in significant delays faced with such large numbers of entrants. As a result, Turkish staff levels were quickly increased and machine-readers brought to the port. This greatly facilitated getting the Canadians (and others) off the ships, through Customs and Immigration and on to buses for transit to Adana; The Mersin Governor was present on many occasions at dockside, greeting Canadians and supervising operations. Due to his personal intervention drinks were given to evacuees and air conditioning was put in place in the sweltering reception hall. This dramatically increased the comfort level for evacuees and Canadian staff.
- (2) *Adana Airport* - Adana Governor ordered all border police (responsible for immigration), customs, and airport staff to facilitate the exit of Canadian evacuees. He specifically instructed that all such staff be on-call for the duration of the crisis. This was particularly important given that arrival and departure times for aircraft changed at short or no notice. Attitude of police and other Turkish officials has been exemplary/professional and inter-agency coordination very effective (not always the case here!)
- (3) *Borders* - MFA gave specific instructions to all borders to facilitate the entry of Canadian staff and evacuees. We saw first-hand the effect of this when communicating with border posts across the country, including on the Syrian-Turkish border and at Ankara and Istanbul airports. All interlocutors repeated to us that they had been instructed to cooperate, to issue evacuees with visas at the border, and waive all fees; The Turkish Embassy in Ottawa and others around the world issued visas to Canadian staff in record time and with minimal procedure thus facilitating the transport of key personnel to Turkey; With one exception due to a miscommunication, incoming Canadian staff were able to enter Turkey without visas due to MFA instructions.