

April 21, 2017

Habitat for Humanity's vision is that everyone has a safe and decent place to live. I am proud to work for an organization that believes we ALL deserve that opportunity, no matter who we are, where we live, where we are from, or where we go. Habitat Canada joins Habitat for Humanity organizations in over 70 countries around the world to make this vision a reality. In Canada, there are 56 local Habitats that work with Canadians, in every province and territory, to transform people's lives through affordable homeownership both at home and abroad.

I am proud to be Canadian. I believe it is our diversity, and most importantly, our *respect* for diversity, that helps make this country so wonderful.

It is deeply disheartening to hear negative comments directed towards Habitat homeowners. We know that when families feel safe and secure, they can become thriving members of our community. Many of us who are proud to call ourselves Canadian may have not been born here and the same could be true for our parents, grandparents or great-grandparents. Where we come from, or where our family comes from, does not make any one of us somehow 'less' Canadian.

Living in this country also affords us the ability to freely practice a religion of our choosing, or no religion at all. Last year, the World Economic Forum named Canada the second best place to live in the world. Canada also came in at number two for "citizenship," which measured factors including religious freedom. That freedom, combined with our inclusive values as Canadians, is part of why our country is such an amazing place to live.

When Canada first began welcoming Syrian refugees, we recognized that although we may not have an immediate solution to the issue of housing and refugees, we looked forward to the day when we could welcome these families to apply for affordable homeownership and become Habitat homeowners. We are proud to say that, for some of these families, now is that time.

I am always impressed by the dedication Habitat homeowners demonstrate when they partner with us to build a better foundation for their families to thrive. All Habitat homeowners go through a stringent application process. Habitat homeowners are not provided with a free house. After successfully meeting the eligibility criteria, they pay an affordable mortgage based on the fair market value of the house. Habitat homeowners also spend 500 hours volunteering, which includes building their own home alongside volunteers.

Building Homes. Building Hope.

La fierté, ça se construit.

I am appalled by the anti-Muslim, anti-refugee, racist rhetoric that I've seen on social media over the past few weeks. Those views are not representative of the people who support Habitat's work, and it is not representative of the wonderful local communities that come together to help build strength, stability and self-reliance alongside Habitat homeowners. When we say that everyone deserves a safe and decent place to live, we mean it. We do not discriminate, and neither race nor religion is a factor when it comes to selecting the future Habitat homeowners we partner with.

Spreading hatred is not what being Canadian means to me and it's not what being Canadian means to any of us at Habitat for Humanity.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Rodgers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "R" at the end.

Mark Rodgers
President & CEO
Habitat for Humanity Canada