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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## REFUGEE ORGANIZATION CREATES A TEDDY BEAR THAT SPEAKS ARABIC AND ENGLISH TO WELCOME SYRIAN CHILDREN TO CHILDREN

**TORONTO** — A teddy bear that speaks Arabic and English is welcoming Syrian refugee children to Canada while teaching them a little about their new home thanks to Toronto-based COSTI Immigrant Services.

The talking teddy bear named Ahlan, which translates to “welcome” in Arabic and conveys the sentiment “You’ve come to stay with family”.

And that’s exactly how COSTI wants refugee children to feel when they arrive in Canada. Ahlan Bear is a new friend, a security blanket and a comfort to a child coming to Canada for the very first time under the worst of circumstances.

“Canada is now home to over 32,737 Syrian refugees and we want them to feel at home,” says Mario J. Calla the Executive Director of COSTI Immigrant Services, “This initiative is an innovative way of saying welcome home and you’re safe, to the most vulnerable members of the family.”

Ahlan Bear is a press-activated talking stuffed animal toy that speaks one of 64 different phrases when hugged or squeezed. To create the bilingual Ahlan Bear, COSTI collaborated with language and resettlement experts to develop 64 unique pairs of helpful phrases in English and Arabic. Useful sentences like “What is your name?” and “How are you?” and Canadian touchstones like “I love hockey!” and “Let’s build a snowman!” give them a reference point to make them feel connected to their new home.

Canadians are encouraged to share the launch film to raise awareness for the initiative and support the cause by visiting [AhlanBear.com](http://AhlanBear.com) to help give a friend to a child who had to leave everything behind.

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### COSTI Background Information:

COSTI Immigrant Services is a community-based multicultural agency providing employment, educational, settlement and social services to new Canadians and individuals in need of assistance. Since 1952, COSTI has been helping those in need, assisting newcomer professionals and tradespersons and all individuals looking for employment, providing hope to refugee families, protecting women and children, strengthening families, combating racism and discrimination, and assisting all those who function at a disadvantage in society. With a staff of over 350 people, speaking more than 60 languages, COSTI strives to ensure that all individuals, regardless of language, cultural, or financial barriers, are given the opportunity to use their existing skills, learn new ones, and participate in all aspects of Canadian life. COSTI presently provides support to over 39,000 individuals annually.