

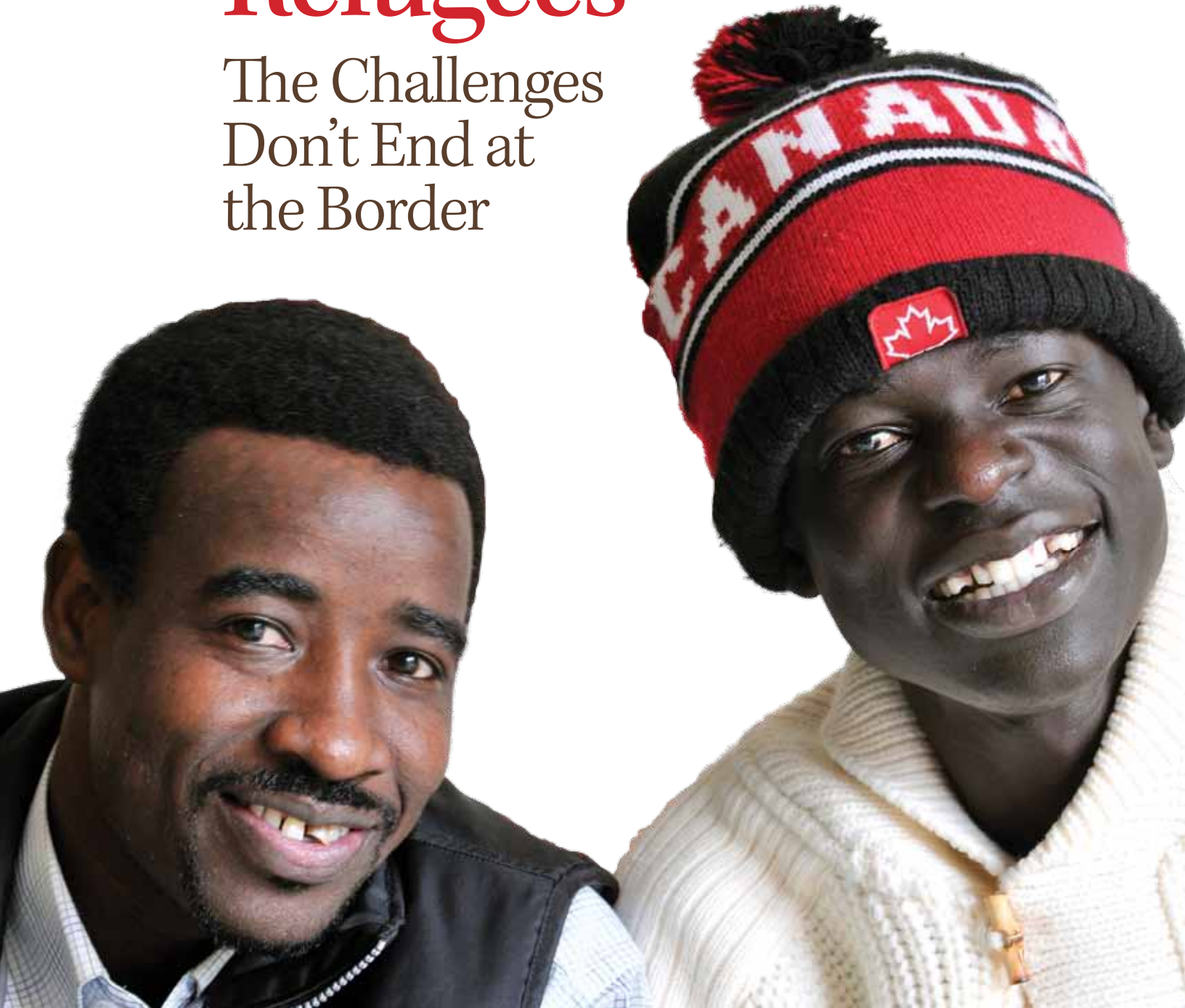


CULTURES

west

BC's Resilient Refugees

The Challenges
Don't End at
the Border





Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of British Columbia

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Cover Photo: Ian Smith, Vancouver Sun
Sudanese refugees Ahmed Ali Bakhat (left) and Peter Yuot share Christmas and an apartment in their new life in Canada.

AMSSA is an affiliation of Member Agencies providing immigrant settlement and multicultural services in communities throughout BC.

VISION

A just and equitable society in which everyone benefits from social and economic inclusion.

MISSION

AMSSA facilitates collaborative leadership, knowledge exchange and stakeholder engagement to support member agencies that serve immigrants and build culturally inclusive communities.

GOALS

Inclusiveness
Integrity
Mutual Respect
Equity
Diversity
Collaboration

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Message from the President



“From Canada’s welcoming reception of the Bhutanese to the swirling controversy surrounding the Tamils, everyone seems to have an opinion.”

Refugees come to Canada from diverse walks of life. Former Governors General Adrienne Clarkson and Michaëlle Jean are two prominent Canadians who came to this country as children of refugee families. Like them, the vast majority of refugees are here because their lives were in direct danger and they were forced to flee from their countries of origin.

Recently, news coverage has focused a great deal on refugees. From Canada’s welcoming reception of the Bhutanese to the swirling controversy surrounding the Tamils, everyone seems to have an opinion. Yet many of the opinions we form are in response to partisan politics or mainstream news stories. When you add the prevalence of uncensored online articles and social media discussions, it’s easy to see why this topic is rife with misconceptions and misunderstandings.

With so many opinions on exactly what is “refugee status,” we thought it would be important to examine the issue from a both a **global and a national perspective**. In this issue, we highlight the different categories of refugees in Canada—**privately sponsored refugees, government assisted refugees (GARs), and refugee claimants**. As you review the articles, you will learn about one Surrey City Councillor’s efforts to eliminate the government transportation loan which all government assisted and privately sponsored refugees must repay. You will read personal accounts by refugees—one personal journey sheds light on the **misconceptions about queue jumpers**; another is the story of **what happens when a refugee claimant**

first arrives in Canada.

We profile one program that receives provincial funding to provide **training for front line workers**. Government legislation has significant impact on the refugee claims process. **Existing laws are being modified and new ones being enacted.**

Thanks to permission from the *Vancouver Sun*, we were able to reprint, in part, the heartwarming story about **two refugee roommates who would have been enemies if they had met back home.**

As always our popular features such as the **Mind Buster Quiz** and **Member Achievements** will respectively challenge and inspire you. In **Post Script** we continue the last edition’s dialogue on **continuing points of connection between First Nations and immigrant communities.**

I’m thrilled that we took on this very topical subject and it is my hope that Cultures West will fill in the gaps in our readers’ knowledge about refugees and related issues.

Let us know what you think. We’d love to hear from you!

Farah Kotadia, President

Refugees: The Big Picture

Leslyn V. Johnson

Refugees are people who are forced to leave their home countries because of serious human rights abuses. Their only means of survival is to seek refuge or asylum in another country. The right to asylum is an international human right, and is guaranteed by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (also referred to as the “Geneva Convention” or the “Refugee Convention”). According to this Convention, a refugee is a person: *who is outside his or her home country and who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.*

That’s generally the picture that comes to mind when most people think or speak of a refugee. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) definition of a refugee doesn’t end there. For the UNHCR, protecting refugees spans a broad spectrum that includes asylum-seekers, returnees, internally displaced and stateless persons.

Refugees include individuals recognized under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; its 1967 Protocol; the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa; those recognized in accordance with the UNHCR Statute; individuals granted complementary forms of protection; or, those enjoying temporary protection. This category also includes people in a refugee-like situation.

Asylum-seekers—individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs)—people or groups of individuals who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural- or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border.

Returned refugees (returnees)—refugees who have returned voluntarily to their country of origin or habitual residence.

Returned IDPs—IDPs who were beneficiaries of UNHCR’s protection and

assistance activities and who returned to their areas of origin or habitual residence.

Stateless persons—individuals not considered as citizens of any state under national laws, and persons with undetermined nationality.

Other groups or people of concern—individuals who do not necessarily fall directly into any of the groups above but to whom UNHCR has extended its protection and/or assistance services, based on humanitarian or other special grounds.



On June 4 1969, Canada signed the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and has since earned a reputation as being a world leader in protecting refugees. In signing the Refugee Convention, Canada accepted that it has obligations towards refugees. Protecting refugees is not simply a humanitarian gesture, but a legal requirement. Refugees have rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees basic rights for refugee claimants.

The Canadian refugee system is comprised of:

- ❁ the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, for people seeking protection from outside Canada; and
- ❁ the In-Canada Asylum Program for people making refugee protection claims from within Canada.

Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program

Today there are some 10.5 million refugees in the world. Canada is one of 20 countries that resettle about 100,000 refu-

gees each year. About 10% of that number find a permanent home in Canada.

In 2009, Canada’s Humanitarian Resettlement Program resettled refugees from over 70 different nationalities.

In-Canada Asylum Program

The asylum program provides protection to refugee people in Canada who are at risk of torture, or cruel or unusual punishment in their home countries.

The number of people who come to Canada and make their claims for asylum here varies from year to year. In 2009, more than 33,200 people came to Canada seeking asylum.

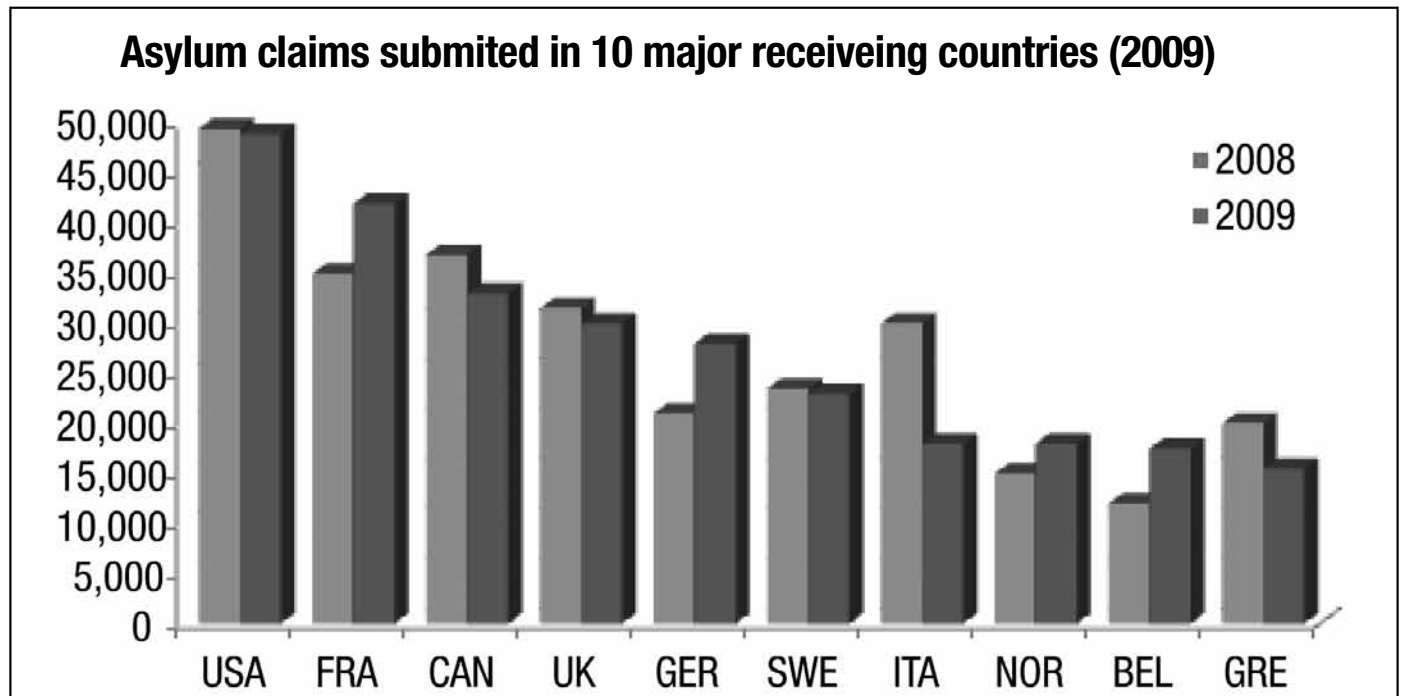
In *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries 2009*, the UNHCR reports that as the top three refugee receiving countries in 2009, the United States of America, France, and Canada together accounted for one-third of all new asylum claims submitted in industrialized countries. Canada was the third largest recipient of applications among 44 receiving countries, with 33,300 new asylum requests registered during 2009. This is a ten per cent decrease compared

to 2008 (36,900 claims). Canada’s increase in Hungarian and Czech asylum claims (2,200 and 1,200 respectively) was largely offset by a drop in Mexican (-1,900) and Haitian (-2,800) asylum applications.

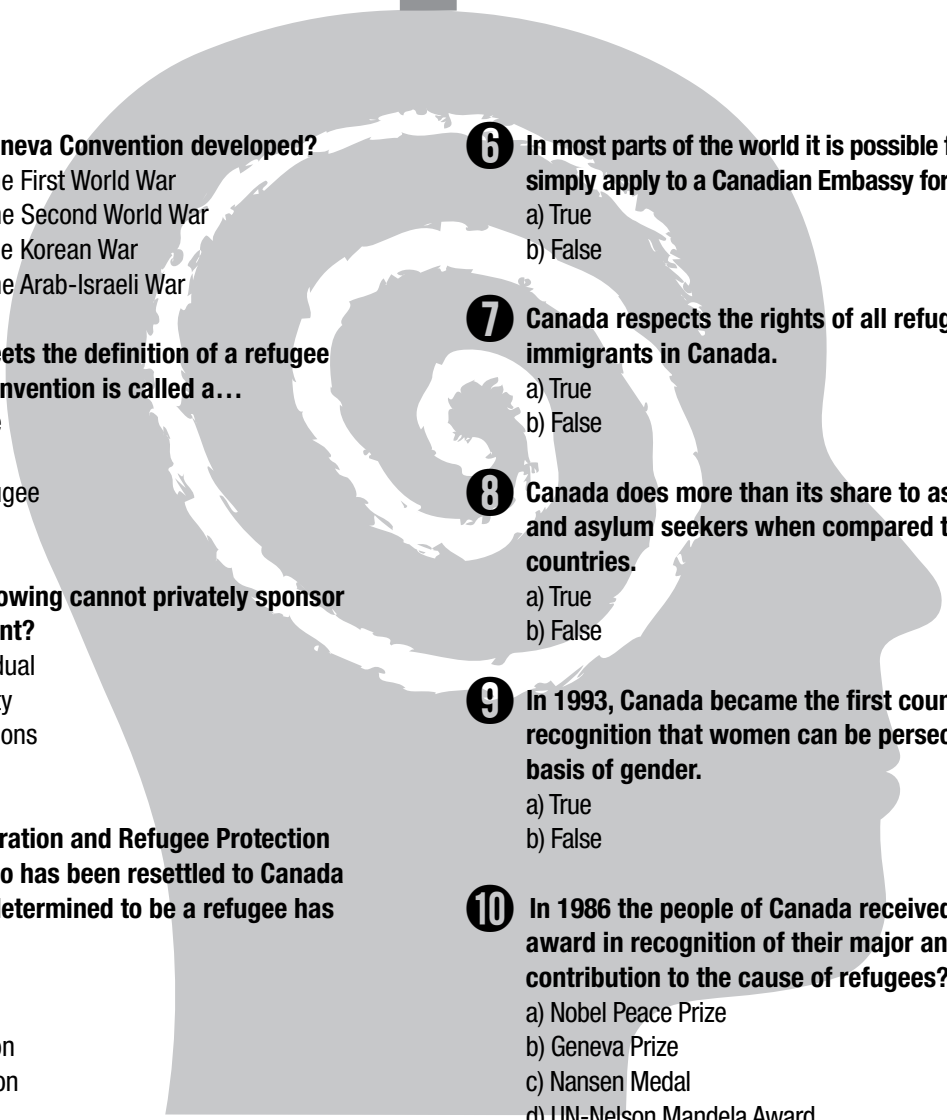
Over the past 40 years, more than half a million refugees have been resettled to Canada, where they can find safety and a permanent home and contribute their talents.

RESIDING IN CANADA	
Refugees	169,434
Asylum Seekers	61,170
Returned Refugees	0
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS)	0
Returned IDPs	0
Stateless Persons	0
Various	0
Total Population of Concern	230,604

The article is based on data from the UNHCR, Canadian Council of Refugees (CCR) and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)



Mind Buster. quiz

- 
- 1** When was the Geneva Convention developed?
a) In 1918 after the First World War
b) In 1951 after the Second World War
c) In 1953 after the Korean War
d) In 1967 after the Arab-Israeli War
- 2** A person who meets the definition of a refugee in the Geneva Convention is called a...
a) Geneva refugee
b) UN refugee
c) Convention refugee
d) Asylum refugee
- 3** Which of the following cannot privately sponsor a refugee claimant?
a) A private individual
b) Faith community
c) Ethnic associations
d) Unions
- 4** Under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, a person who has been resettled to Canada as a refugee or determined to be a refugee has what status?
a) Immigrant
b) Citizen
c) Protected person
d) Displaced person
- 5** The vast majority of the world's refugees are located where?
a) Asia
b) Europe
c) Global North
d) Global South
- 6** In most parts of the world it is possible for refugees to simply apply to a Canadian Embassy for resettlement.
a) True
b) False
- 7** Canada respects the rights of all refugees and immigrants in Canada.
a) True
b) False
- 8** Canada does more than its share to assist refugees and asylum seekers when compared to other countries.
a) True
b) False
- 9** In 1993, Canada became the first country in recognition that women can be persecuted on the basis of gender.
a) True
b) False
- 10** In 1986 the people of Canada received which award in recognition of their major and sustained contribution to the cause of refugees?
a) Nobel Peace Prize
b) Geneva Prize
c) Nansen Medal
d) UN-Nelson Mandela Award

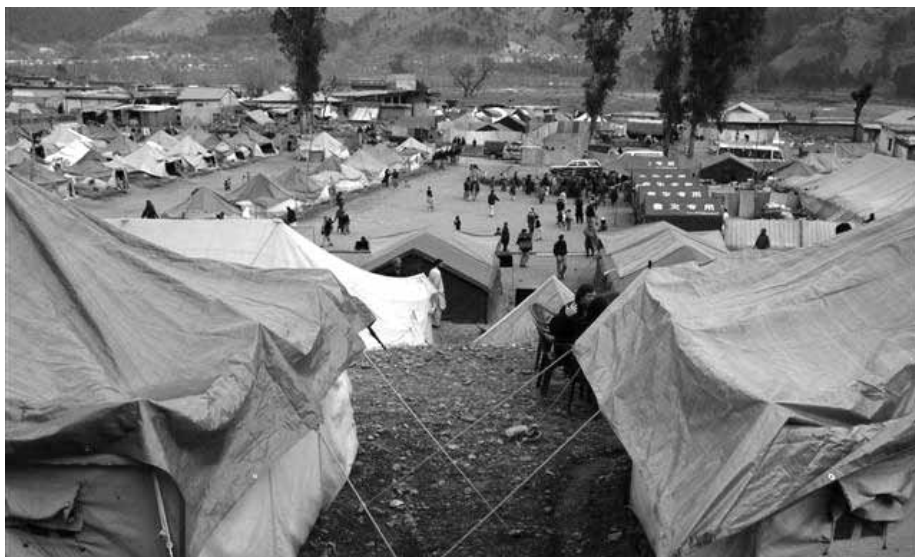
Answers can be found on page 18

The **Private Sponsorship** of Refugees

Jennifer Mpungu

By definition, a refugee is a person who is forced to flee their home country because they have a very real fear that they will lose their lives or their freedom if they stay. They risk persecution in their homeland, and must find somewhere else to go in search of safety. For some, this persecution may result from belonging to a particular tribe or ethnic group, as was the case with the genocide in Rwanda. The ideal solution for most of the world's refugees is repatriation—return to the country from which they have fled. This is possible when conditions have improved to allow them to return safely and with dignity. Where voluntary repatriation is not likely, settling and integrating refugees into their country of first asylum is also a solution. Finally, the only solution for a very small number of refugees who cannot repatriate is permanent resettlement to a third country such as Canada. Today, there are 15.2 million refugees around the world, 128,000 of who need resettlement. However, only ten percent of refugees are resettled annually.

Canadians welcomed the “boat people” of Southeast Asia in the late 1970s. Ever since, the government has allowed community groups, and faith and humanitarian organizations to “privately sponsor” refugees from abroad. Not only did Canada pioneer this program, but we remain the only country in the world with a private sponsorship program. Sponsorship is a three-way partnership between sponsors, the government of Canada, and the refugees themselves. It allows refugees with no other solutions to resettle in Canada. Once refugees



arrive in Canada, sponsors provide financial and settlement assistance for one year.

For several years, private sponsorship numbers hovered between 3,000 – 4,500 annually. This March, however, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration increased that number to 6,500 and called on more groups to sponsor refugees. This development, which continues the “Canadian humanitarian tradition,” has been welcomed by the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) and NGOs. The Government now needs to add visa officers or increase resources overseas to facilitate this call for increased private sector participation, and to match the increase that it is asking from the private sector.

There are already some 10,000 privately sponsored refugee cases waiting to be processed by Canadian officers overseas. Currently refugees face extremely long processing times at some visa offices. At Nairobi, the slowest office, the average wait time is 39 months. Of the total cases pending, 5,400 are in

Nairobi. For the program to work, processing times must be much shorter and more equitable across all regions.

Canada also needs to do more to welcome refugees. Refugees resettled to Canada bear the burden of a transportation loan—to pay for their medical exam and travel to Canada. As a result, refugee families start their new life in Canada with a debt of up to \$10,000 which greatly undermines their ability to integrate and to contribute to their full potential here. Canada has done well in the past, and we sure can do better in the future. Cancelling the transportation loan would be a start.

Jennifer Mpungu coordinates the Refugee Assistance Program of Mennonite Central Committee BC—the first Private Sponsorship Agreement Holder in Canada since 1979. She also co-chairs the Canadian Council for Refugees Working Group on Overseas Processing and Sponsorship. Jennifer is passionate about refugee rights, particularly for those refugees in protracted refugee situations who have no voice of their own.

The Changing Faces and Neighbourhoods of Government Assisted Refugees in Metro Vancouver

Lisa Ruth Brunner and Chris Friesen

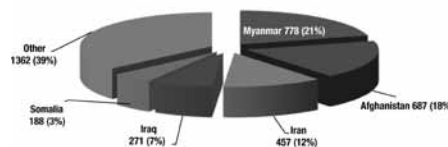
Government assisted refugees (GARs) are refugees who are selected from abroad and resettled to Canada, arriving as permanent residents. They differ from refugee claimants (refugees who seek asylum in Canada and undergo an asylum hearing with the Immigration and Refugee Board) and privately sponsored refugees (refugees who are sponsored independently by organizations such as religious associations) in that the federal government is responsible for their selection and initial settlement. For example, GARs are eligible for income support through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) for up to one year after arrival. Despite these provisions, both GARs and service providers in Metro Vancouver face new challenges as the characteristics and settlement patterns of GARs change.

In 2002, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) shifted the focus away from refugees with an “ability to establish” in Canada to those the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) deems most in need of protection. As a result, Canada’s GAR population was significantly altered to include more “high needs” individuals. These newcomers face multiple barriers to settlement, such as low literacy levels in their original languages, physical and mental health issues, larger households, single-parent households, and youth with little formal education. It also shifted the makeup of GAR source countries away from primarily European countries, bringing newcomers from drastically different political, economic, and social contexts. Many arrive with special

requirements after years of trauma, torture, and/or time in refugee camps due to protracted refugee situations, raising important questions about the settlement needs of “post-IRPA” GARs.

Between 2005 and 2009, an average of 805 GARs were “destined” to British Columbia each year. Of those, virtually all settled in Metro Vancouver. The top five source countries during this time period were Myanmar (21%), Afghanistan (18%), Iran (12%), Iraq (7%), and Somalia (3%), with the remaining 39% coming from 38 different countries (18 in Africa, 12 in Asia, four from former Yugoslavia, three in Latin America, and one in the Middle East).

Government Assisted Refugees (GARs)
Total Individual Metro Vancouver Arrivals
by Country of Origin, 2005–2006



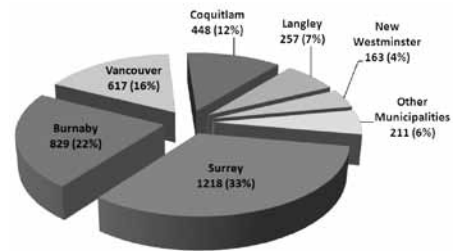
The recent “changing faces” of GARs in Canada also include those who are “new and few”—a relatively small number of individuals forming a “new” ethnic group previously unrepresented in Canada. Groups like the Myanmar of ethnic Karen descent who lived in camps since the late 1980s, the Bhutanese of ethnic Nepalese descent who lived in camps since the early 1990s, and the Indonesians of ethnic Acehnese descent who lived undocumented and in detention camps in Malaysia since the late 1990s raise additional questions regarding the unique settlement needs of the “new and few.”

Between 2005 and 2009, the majority of Metro Vancouver GARs

settled in Surrey (33%), Burnaby (22%), and Vancouver (16%).

Government Assisted Refugees (GARs)

Total Individual Arrivals by Municipality, 2005–2009



Now the proportion of GARs settling in each municipality is changing. While Burnaby received the most GARs between 2003 and 2005, in 2006, Surrey surpassed Burnaby. The disparity is now significant; in 2008, Surrey received 38% of all Metro Vancouver GARs. In 2009, this percentage rose to 43% of all GARs—about 2.5 times the amount of Burnaby, the second-highest GAR destination for that year. The City of Langley had a spike in GAR settlements in 2007 with the arrival of the Karens from Myanmar—most of whom settled in Langley or Surrey—but has since dropped. Coquitlam, meanwhile, holds steady as one of the top five GAR destinations in Metro Vancouver. In both 2008 and 2009, Coquitlam received slightly more GARs than Vancouver, making it the number three GAR destination for those years.

When GARs arrive at Vancouver International Airport, they are first brought to Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia’s (ISSofBC) Welcome House for temporary accommodation and orientation services. After a maximum of 15 nights, ISSofBC staff help them to find permanent accommodation. This is difficult considering the overall lack of local affordable housing.

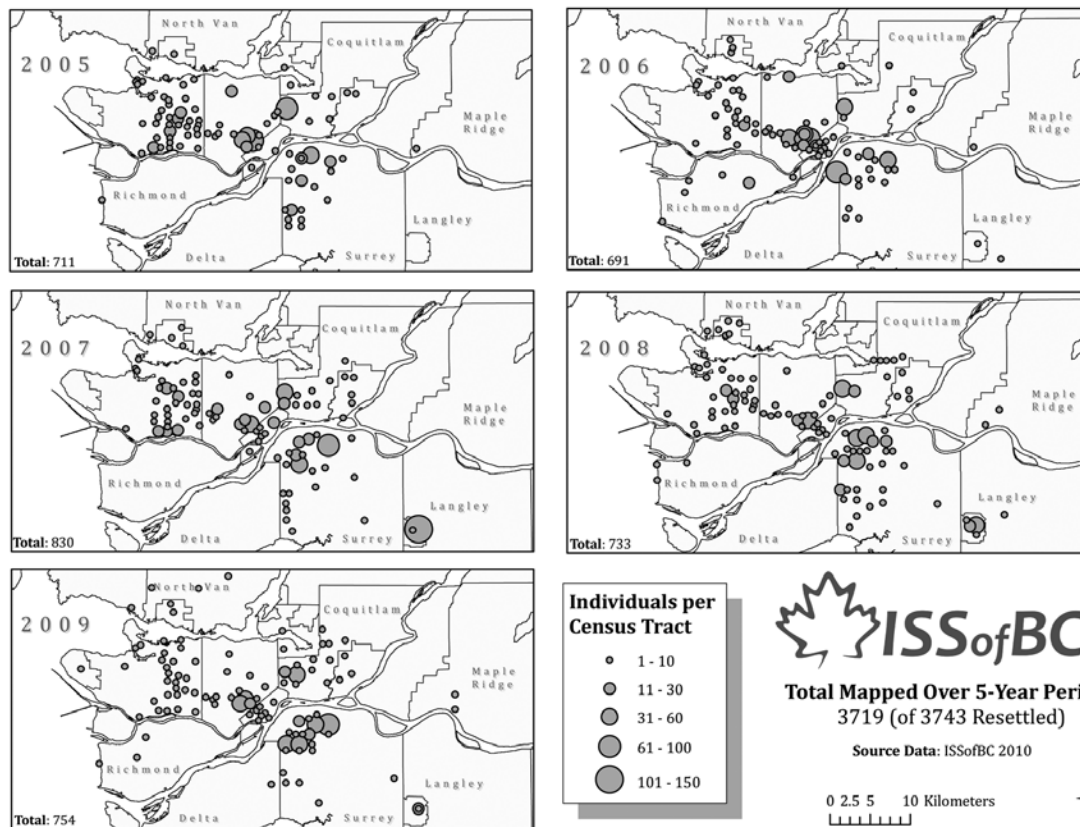
The shelter allowance provided through the RAP is lower than the average cost of local rent, so settlement workers struggle to balance affordability with the elements that are necessary for successful GAR settlement. These include general needs of low-income residents—such as access to public transit—and those more specific to GARs. For example, it is helpful to locate post-IRPA GARs together based on pre-

existing ethno-specific communities to ease the adjustment process. Another factor to consider is the impact on local infrastructure. For example, schools in areas with a high concentration of GARs take in a disproportionate number of students with high illiteracy rates—often enrolling in the middle of the school year—while hospitals take in patients with medical conditions not commonly seen in Canada. ISSofBC has taken recent

steps to work with local communities to facilitate a smoother settlement process.

The following maps give a general overview of the settlement patterns of Metro Vancouver GARs over the past five years. They are based on ISSofBC's record of GAR postal codes following their stay at Welcome House. The postal codes were matched with their corresponding census tract for both privacy and clarity.

Metro Vancouver GAR Arrivals (2005-2009)



The maps show that GAR settlement is very roughly centered along the Expo SkyTrain line with clusters in northwest Surrey, southeast Burnaby, southwest Coquitlam, and the City of Langley. What the maps do not show, however, is that many GARs move—sometimes several times—in search of adequate housing within Metro Vancouver. For example, some GARs who initially settled in Vancouver or Burnaby later move to Surrey for more affordable housing.

As the faces of post-IRPA GARs become more familiar, it is crucial that we understand how settlement patterns are forming and subsequently affecting service providers, local infrastructure, and most importantly GARs' overall success and participation in Canadian society. An upcoming ISSofBC report will provide a more detailed analysis of GAR settlement patterns at the municipal level. (All data provided by ISSofBC 2010)

Lisa Ruth Brunner is currently finishing an M.A. degree in geography at Simon Fraser University where she is the Student Refugee Program coordinator with SFU-World University Service of Canada. She is also participating in an MITACS-Accelerate internship at ISSofBC.

Chris Friesen has been the Director of Settlement Services for the Immigrant Services Society of BC since 1992. He is a frequent speaker, media spokesperson and research collaborator on the issue of immigrant and refugee settlement both in Canada and abroad.

Calling on Canada to rethink the Government Transportation Loan

Leslyn V. Johnson

Government assisted refugees (GARs) are refugees who the United Nations has indentified as needing protection. Coming from war-torn countries, they have often witnessed or experienced unspeakable horrors. Many have lived in refugee camps for up to 20 years. Many were born in camps. Most are facing extremely dire needs. Upon arrival in Canada, all are asked to sign a Government Transportation Loan document that commits them to repaying the costs that the government has incurred to resettle them. The loan covers pre-entry medical expenses, transportation expenses and a service fee.

Most countries who support refugee resettlement have some version of a transportation loan. The loans are often grants that do not require repaying. Yet, Canada is one of the few countries that ask refugees to repay their transportation loan. Refugees have a one year grace period, but if the loan is still outstanding after three years, the government starts charging interest. Canada is the only country that charges interest.

Surrey receives well over 30% of GAR's settling in Metro Vancouver each year. Surrey Councillor Judy Villeneuve first heard about the Government Transportation Loan program when that City's Multicultural Committee was discussing the impact of refugee families on the school, health care and library systems. "I was astounded that we were asking the poorest of the poor who were refugees to pay back loans!" Refugees receive \$720 per month to cover rent, food, transportation, and other living expenses. Repaying the loan is a priority, but becomes burdensome. Parents who lack professional skills work two or three part time jobs

to make ends meet. Instead of going to school, kids may also work to help pay off the debt. "They're afraid that they won't be able to bring other family members or that they will be sent back. I think it's incredibly unfair," says Villeneuve.

Now the Surrey Councillor wants the federal government to forgive current loans and provide grants in the future. "Re-

ally this is very little money across Canada—\$13 to \$15 Million per year, and if all were forgiven, \$38 Million on a federal budget of \$260 Billion." Villeneuve chairs Surrey's Social Planning Committee, and championed a resolution that the Surrey Council presented at the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Annual Convention in 2009. The lengthy lobby process involves UBCM adopting the resolution, and further adoption by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) this past September after which the resolution became policy. Since then the FCM has already sent a letter to federal Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, calling for the termination of the refugee transportation loan program.

With mounting support from immigrant and refugee serving agencies, and MLAs and MPs in Surrey, Villeneuve is optimistic that the lobby will be successful. However, she still thinks that there needs to be more awareness and political action. She wants people to write their MPs



“I was astounded that we were asking the poorest of the poor who were refugees to pay back loans!”

Judy Villeneuve, City of Surrey Councillor

about the issue, and to say that, from a humanitarian perspective, this immigration regulation should be discontinued.

“I think it's a moral issue. A humanitarian issue, and we, as one of the wealthiest countries in the world, should not be putting this kind of burden on people.”

Operation Swaagatem: Bhutanese refugees in Coquitlam

Kathy Sherrell and Chris Friesen

On June 10, 1985, Druk Gyalpo King Wangchuck, the King of Bhutan, introduced the Bhutanese Citizenship Act. The Act, which is sometimes referred to as the “One Nation, One People Act,” modified the definition of a Bhutanese citizen. Over the next five years over 100,000 individuals of ethnic Nepali origin—or approximately one-sixth of the Bhutanese population—were stripped of their citizenship rights and expelled from the country. They have been living in refugee camps in eastern Nepal since then with little hope for a durable solution.¹

The Government of Canada, along with six other countries, has committed to offering permanent settlement to up to 70,000 Bhutanese refugees. In 2008, Citizen and Immigration Canada (CIC) indicated 800-900 of the 5,000 Bhutanese Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) being admitted to Canada would

settle in BC over a four year period. The Bhutanese are a new refugee group in the Canadian context² and fit with Canada’s broader commitment to settle refugees from protracted refugee camp conditions. The life experience of Bhutanese refugees arriving in Canada is very diverse: while some are highly educated and have travelled and worked outside the camps, others had never left the camps or been exposed to “westernized” conditions. Further, the lack of a pre-existing Bhutanese community in BC creates additional settlement challenges.

The imminent arrival of this large group of refugees from a protracted refugee camp situation was met with an unprecedented response. Partnerships sprung up between immigrant and refugee serving agencies, School District #43, and all three levels of government to establish a welcoming environment. In February 2009, ISSofBC held a Pre-Arrival Planning Forum to educate the public and mainstream service agencies about the Bhutanese refugees, as well as existing and

planned programs and services for the newcomers. School District #43 hosted a summer program to help immigrant and refugee youth to integrate into the school system by assisting them with academic, social and recreational skills. The City of Coquitlam compiled a Welcome to Coquitlam booklet in Nepalese. Public awareness was also increased through mainstream and local newspaper articles.

ISSofBC partnered with Dr. Jennifer Hyndman to use Metropolis BC funding to research the Pre-Post Arrival Refugee Programming for Bhutanese GARs. The goals of Operation

Swaagatem (Operation Welcome) are three-fold:

- ☼ to document the spring 2009 pre-arrival planning and create a community readiness checklist that will promote better practices in refugee resettlement;
- ☼ to create curriculum for a Youth-focused pre-departure orientation program that will be piloted in Nepal in January 2011; and
- ☼ to undertake a qualitative

analysis of initial settlement outcomes of Bhutanese families destined to BC.

The first group of Bhutanese refugees arrived in March 2009. While the number of Bhutanese GARs settling in BC is not as high as initially forecast, to date approximately 80 Bhutanese people are building a new life in Coquitlam.

^{1,2} Health Status and Social Capital of Recent Immigrants in Canada: Evidence from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada

Kathy Sherrell is the Manager of Community Settlement Programs at ISSofBC and a doctoral candidate in Geography at the University of British Columbia. Kathy has worked extensively with refugee groups in BC through both research and advocacy.

Chris Friesen has been the Director of Settlement Services for the Immigrant Services Society of BC since 1992. He is a frequent speaker, media spokesperson and research collaborator on the issue of immigrant and refugee settlement both in Canada and abroad.



Member AC

S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

Bridging Immigrants and Refugees with ECD Services: Partnership Research in the Development of an Effective Service Model

The report, *Bridging Immigrants and Refugees with ECD Services: Partnership Research in the Development of an Effective Service Model*, is a three-year project that identifies key issues that affect service provision. Findings show:

- ❁ barriers to service access – invisible barriers from perceived discrimination/attitude of staff/service providers; cultural differences about the perception of service vs. real barriers due to distance, cost of childcare, language, culture, availability of information.
- ❁ newcomer communities have different cultural beliefs and practices, and different understandings of ECD.

The report looks at how well the community is connected to ECD services and the challenges that need to be overcome for services to be accessible and acceptable. It also examines how to remove existing barriers in order to promote ECD services, and provide education about the social and cultural determinants of ECD.

A total of 113 parents participated in 13 focus groups with parents from Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, and Farsi speaking communities in the Tri-Cities area. In addition, the study conducted seven individual/group field interviews with service providers and community educators.

For a copy of the research report or to arrange a speaking engagement, please contact Kelly Ng at kelly@success.bc.ca.

Burnaby Family Life

WelcomeBC Award



Burnaby Family Life recently received a prestigious WelcomeBC award on behalf of the Burnaby Intercultural Planning Table (BIPT). BIPT creates improved sources of information and resources, increases awareness of existing information and resources and helps to identify and resolve gaps in services for newcomers to Canada. The provincial government proclaimed October 6 as WelcomeBC Day, and BIPT was awarded the province's first WelcomeBC award for its success at building partnerships, creating new solutions for services in Burnaby and helping newcomers feel welcomed in

their new homes.

Burnaby Family Life wishes to thank its partner and funding agencies in BIPT and all those who made the award possible.

For more information, see www.burnabyfamilylife.org/media/all

West Coast LEAF (Legal Education and Action Fund for Women)

Youth engagement programs tackling human rights and systemic discrimination

West Coast LEAF is engaging British Columbia's youth through public legal education programs and a new youth website - www.youth.westcoastleaf.org.

Two of the programs are for youth between the ages of 11–15. *No Means No* provides youth with a safe environment to explore issues around consent and sexual assault. The program engages youth in discussions about stereotypes. They learn that gender, race and class based discrimination intersect, and that the lived experience of an elderly First Nations woman may be very different than that of a Caucasian woman in the same demographic.

The *Youth in the Workplace* workshop informs youth of their legal rights as they enter the workforce in Canada. Under current BC law, youth can start working as early as 12 years old. The workshop educates youth on the range of legal rights and responsibilities to prevent exploitation and discrimination.

The youth website, which is still in development, contains information on sexual assault, consent and sexual harassment. There is also an overview of equality rights and the justice system.

For more information please visit www.westcoastleaf.org

Langley Community Services Society

Safe Harbour



The Langley Community Services Society offers the Safe Harbour Program as one of its many programs, and has presented it at many multicultural events such as Langley's International Festival and Multicultural Lunar New Year.

As a Safe Harbour Community Organizer, the organization has recruited Township of Langley council members along with more than a dozen other groups and organizations. The recruits become Safe Harbour locations by signing on to three key commitments: Equitable

Treatment, Providing an Immediate Safe Place & Prepared Employees and Worksites.

The Safe Harbour program was also promoted at Langley's International Festival last summer, where information was distributed to the public. As community organizers, Langley Community Services Society actively promotes the program in the community to get people to understand what Safe Harbour is all about, and to provide a Safe Harbour for diversity in their community.

achievements

Kelowna Community Resources (KRC)

Mobile Diversity Kiosk

Kelowna Community Resources has developed a mobile kiosk with touch screen technology to raise awareness about immigration, multiculturalism and local success stories.

The software can accommodate a wide variety of applications including matching games (match the country with the flag, or the dress or the currency), success stories, videos, community resources, cultural Q & As and volunteer opportunities.

New new content and applications are added weekly to keep the information on the kiosk relevant, fresh and specific to the respective community. The kiosk has already travelled to several outdoor events as well as indoor venues. When at a community event, the kiosk does not require internet access, just power.

The community has embraced the kiosk's format, utility and technology as a novel way to provide information, encourage curiosity about different cultures, and attract a youthful audience. Requests to have the kiosk at community events continues to grow and when not at an event, it is available at high traffic locations throughout the Central Okanagan.

For more information call KRC at 250.763.8008

South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS)

Peachfest Parade



This year, South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS) participation in the Peachfest Parade blew the crowd away. Event Coordinator Andrea Garrett and Volunteer Coordinator Silvia Aidar, put together a magnificent, interactive display, with over 80

volunteers, musical entertainment, belly dancing, and volunteer breakfast with refreshments provided by community businesses.

This year the Penticton Sikh Temple and Indian Cultural Society joined the parade, one of the largest ever. With volunteers from over 30 countries, one person commented that it was like the "United Nations" all in one room.

During the parade, more than 40 flags from around the world were proudly flown by their respective citizens, driving home the message that Penticton is a truly diverse population. In addition, a huge inflatable globe was rolled down the street to further engage the crowd.

The Peachfest Parade has thrust SOICS and its services into the mainstream consciousness once again and has resulted in a significant rise in requests for information and services.

Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society of Prince George (IMSS)

Anti-racism and multicultural projects

The Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society of Prince George has joined forces with community stakeholders to make Prince George more Welcoming and Inclusive for immigrants and newcomers and to build a more cohesive community.

The Critical Incident Response Model (CIRM) is a provincial initiative that "allows communities throughout BC to develop community led responses to racism and hate activity." The goal of the community protocol was to have cohesive, community wide education and responses available when dealing with racism and hate. A signing ceremony to recognize protocol commitments took place on March 19, 2010 to mark the International Day for Elimination of Racism. By signing the document, participants agreed to use the resources and training available to them as part of the protocol.

Organizing Against Racism and Hate (OARH) is developed under the BC Anti-Racism and Multiculturalism Program (BCAMP). The purpose of the project is to form Regional Networks and outreach to other communities, and share, develop and create awareness of anti-racism and anti-hate resources in the region.

As part of the OARH project, IMSS recently hosted the North East Regional Youth Forum to engage youth in multiculturalism, anti-racism, and welcoming and inclusive communities and workplaces. This will develop provincial recommendations to the Council that can then advise the Minister.

More than 100 youth and volunteers from in and around Prince George attended the two-day forum. The goal of the forum was for youth of diverse backgrounds to share their experiences and ideas with a hope of inspiring other youth to take up the challenge to eliminate racism in North Eastern BC.

UPCOMING EVENTS

AMSSA Diversity Health Fair

Have you heard? We're already planning for the 7th Annual Vancouver Diversity Health Fair, Saturday February 12, from 10am to 3pm at The Croatian Cultural Centre. The largest event of its kind in Canada, the fair has grown into one of the Lower Mainland's most anticipated multicultural events. Featuring free admission, over 50 interactive health and wellness exhibitors, onsite health screenings, dynamic fitness demonstrations and workshops. Come and experience the popular Healthy Cooking Stage, Multicultural Performances, Healthy Kids Zone. Win fantastic prizes.

Where else could you learn about diabetes and healthy eating or get your blood pressure and blood sugars tested, discover how to create a healthy weekday dinner on a budget, learn how to Bhangra dance, listen to the a cappella sounds of African singers or get your spine checked for posture? All with access in over eight languages!

Visit us at www.amssa.org and look for 2011 The Diversity Health Fair updates.

Those Queue Jumpers!

Chris Morrissey

Prajit came to Canada to study at UBC. When he was beginning his fourth year, he began to feel anxious about returning home. He had no idea how he could stay in Canada. One day he was in a coffee shop and he overheard a conversation at the next table.

“So how are things going?” asked one guy.

“OK I guess. I’m still waiting to get a date for my refugee hearing and when I think of it, I get very anxious.”

“Are you finding much info about gays in your country?”

“Yes, some. I hope it’s enough”

Right away Prajit knew he had to find out more. It had never occurred to him that he could make a refugee claim—because he was gay. So he does. Is he a queue jumper?

What if Prajit, while still in his country, met someone who told him that he could help him get to Canada where he would be safe? Now is he a queue jumper?

What if someone had told Prajit that there was a boat leaving his country in a few days; that the journey would be long and dangerous but there was a chance they would make it to Canada? What if he decided to take the risk and joined others on the boat. Does this make him a queue jumper?

No matter what route he takes to get to Canada, he is leaving a place where, if he lives his life openly, he could be arrested, imprisoned, tortured and even killed. Yes, he came to Canada hoping for a better life! In fact he was hoping for a life, period! Every human being has the right to live free from fear of persecution.

The Convention on the State of Refugees states;

The Contracting States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees who, coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened in the sense of article 1, enter or are present in their territory without

authorization, provided they present themselves without delay to the authorities and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence.

Many of us have been fortunate enough to immigrate here. Immigration is about who will make an economic contribution to Canada. Most people have to apply to immigrate from outside Canada and that is the way it is for immigrants. But the rules for refugees are completely different.

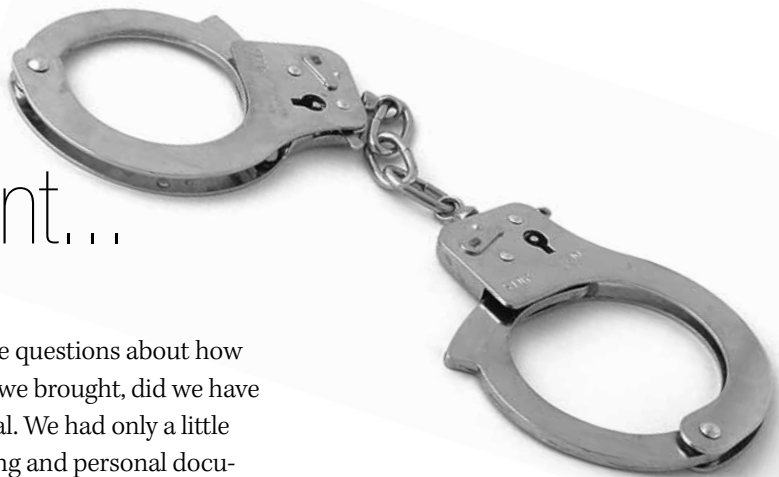
When we hear people talking about “queue jumpers,” “good” or “bogus” immigrants, it is important to clarify—is the conversation or the complaining about immigrants or refugees? We can help others understand the differences and that Canada has signed on to offer refuge to those who can show that they have a well-founded fear of persecution if they are sent back to their country. And everyone has the right to live free from fear and persecution.



Founded in 2000, Rainbow Refugee Committee (RCC) is a volunteer organization that provides information and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBTQ) asylum seekers and refugee claimants both inside and outside Canada.
info@rainbowrefugee.ca

Chris Morrissey has lived in six countries so knows first-hand the challenges of moving to a new country and learning a culture etc. She filed a suit in Federal Court so that she could bring her same-sex partner to Canada. Chris is passionate about justice particularly for LGBTQ people.

I came to Canada as a refugee claimant...



Luis Ortega

Almost four years ago my son and I arrived in Canada as refugee claimants. I hope that our story helps you to understand some of the challenges faced by people who have to leave their country, abandoning everything they hold dear including their hopes and dreams.

As a professional I had a stable job, comfortable income, a loving supportive family and friends. However, my life changed when, in the course of my work, I discovered a network of fraud and corruption involving important political figures.

I had never left my country or thought I would do so under such circumstances. The journey was a last-minute decision to escape the risk of death. For three months we hid with help from friends, fleeing telephone threats that materialized with an attack on the highway. Even in hiding we were shot at. My colleague was killed.

With four suitcases, ill-concealed anxiety, and the bitter taste of hasty departure in our mouths, we arrived at Vancouver International Airport. In bad English I asked the immigration officer to help us because we were fleeing and needed asylum.

The officer took us to an office, another asked for our identification and why we had come to Canada. With no interpreter, I managed to explain why we were fleeing. After an interrogation, we were told to wait. We waited three hours with no idea about what was happening. I was terrified they were informing my government and planning to send us back.

Then, more questions about how much money we brought, did we have anything illegal. We had only a little money, clothing and personal documents. We had to hand over everything and were taken to a detention area where they said we would be safe. We were handcuffed, medically examined and told to take off our belts and shoelaces. *They* said it was normal, but *we* felt like criminals being publicly handcuffed and taken into custody.

Everything was spinning. The terror of recent months and the stress was overwhelming. The anxiety was making my stomach sick. Were we safe yet? Everything was like a movie in slow motion and I felt like a robot. Perhaps I wanted to feel numb, to block out the unpleasant memories that scared me, to escape the vulnerability and pain.

In the holding room they gave us blankets, soap and food but we couldn't eat or sleep. Then the next day we were locked in a small cell and told to write down why we were in Canada. They interviewed us separately with an interpreter on the phone. More questions like a police interrogation, repeating questions that seemed confusing and requesting dates and details that, in our stressed condition, we couldn't answer accurately.

We stayed in the cell for several hours; we didn't know how long. Later a higher-ranking officer, with a more humane attitude, apologised for the prolonged detention and interviewed us again with an interpreter now asking if we were at risk if we returned. I said yes.

Finally, he produced the documents that gave us the legal status of Refugee

Claimant, and explained what would happen. We signed papers. He handed us a packet of documents and our suitcases and, with a handshake, welcomed us to Canada.

More than 36 hours after arriving at the airport, my son and I were physically and emotionally exhausted. Here we were in an unknown country, alone without family or friends. Yet, despite this, we were relieved and a little more confident knowing that we were safe at last.

Then reality hit. Where would we sleep? What should we do? It's not easy to start from scratch, when you're displaced and lonely. Deep waves of nostalgia often overtook us. Sometimes we found ourselves slipping into a dark depression, but shook it off in an effort to renew our hope and optimism for new dreams. Fortunately we got to know some wonderful people who gave us guidance and support to start our process of integration.

Thanks Canada, for your generous humanitarian tradition that gave us the opportunity to continue our life.

How Bill C-11 Changes the Refugee Claims Process

Melissa McDowell and Alexandra Charlton

In Effect Since June 29, 2010		Changes to Humanitarian and Compassionate Claims (H&C)
Previous System	New System	Impacts of Changes
Could apply for H&C at any time, during or apart from refugee claim	Cannot apply at same time as refugee claim – must wait until after final Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Client must choose immediately whether to apply as a refugee or make H&C claim - H&C does not offer stay of deportation – client can be deported before a decision is returned
n/a	Officials can only consider established connections in Canada and/or “hardships” that would befall applicant returning to country of origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If a claimant has just arrived, it would be hard to demonstrate established connections in Canada - Do risk of persecution, torture, imprisonment constitute “hardship”? Officials cannot consider refugee claims issues
	Failed claimant cannot apply for temporary residence until 1 year after final IRB decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Without a work or study permit, the claimant could be forced into underground economy if they tried to stay in Canada to wait for H&C decision
Expected in December 2011		Changes to Refugee Protection Division (RPD) Process and Timelines
Current System	New System	Impacts of Changes
n/a	Designated Countries of Origin (DCO) – countries with a high percentage of failed claims may be designated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perception of bias – will judges consider merits of individual case or be influenced by the designation? - Will DCO claimants qualify for/have access to Legal Aid?
Claimant has 28 days to prepare a Personal Info Form (PIF) with aid of lawyer / counselor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Claimant must submit to an interview no sooner than 15 days after making claim. - Legal counsel may be present but will not participate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4-hr interview replaces document with consistent structure and template - No time to gain understanding of process and prepare - Requirements of interview unknown - No help from legal counsel to tell their story - Difficult for traumatized/vulnerable claimants to put together a narrative, talk about trauma - Will 4 hours be enough? PIFs take longer than that; language interpretation takes time
Time to RPD hearing not specified – now 18-24 months (up to 730 days)	Regular Claimant - 90 days Claimant from DCO - 60 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unlikely to have earned enough to pay a lawyer (takes approx 3 months to get work permit) so will be dependent on Legal Aid if they qualify - Enough time to secure Legal Aid? Can take 3 weeks to be assigned a lawyer, more to get a meeting. How will they prepare? - Enough time to collect necessary documents? All docs must be submitted 3 weeks before hearing - Enough time for vulnerable/traumatized claimants to open up?
n/a	Manifestly Unfounded – option for RPD decision if judge thinks case is fraudulent or not a valid refugee claim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perception of bias – will an appeal or judicial review be taken seriously?

		New Refugee Appeals Division (RAD)
Current System	New System	Impacts of Changes
Refugee Appeals Division (RAD) legislated but never enacted	Claimants have 15 days from a negative RPD decision to submit a written appeal	- If claimant has been assigned Legal Aid for hearing, will they be able to handle appeal as well? - Short timeline means lots of pressure - Enough time for translation and editing assistance?
n/a	Minister can appeal positive RPD decisions	- Will Minister use this option more frequently than current judicial review challenges? - Will Minister appeal positive decisions from DCOs? - Should claimants be prepared for the possibility that this may happen? Will they be able to defend themselves in a written appeal process?
n/a	Timelines for Appeals Decisions Regular Claimants - within 120 days DCOs or Manifestly Unfounded - 30 days	- CIC plans to speed up removal orders – failed claimants will be removed within 12 months of a negative decision
Claimants can apply for leave for a Judicial Review of a negative decision	Appears this option would still be open to failed claimants	- Will leave be granted less frequently with an appeals division in place? - Judicial Review only considers whether an error was made in the decision or whether the decision was fair and reasonable
Expected in December 2012		Changes to Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRRA)
Current System	New System	Impacts of Changes
CIC asks claimant if they want a PRRA when they issue removal order	PRRA will be administered by IRB – can only be offered 12 months after a negative final decision	- Failed claimant is likely to be removed within 12 months and never receive the offer. - Will this force more people underground?
		New Assisted Voluntary Removal Program (AVR)
Current System	New System	Impacts of Changes
n/a	AVR Pilot in Toronto for claimants from Mexico, Caribbean, Central and South America initially, more options later – will receive financial help to leave Canada	- Will the pilot be expanded? And when? Could be 4-5 years before implementation in BC (if ever) - Must have valid travel documents at the time of the <u>initial</u> refugee claim – disqualifies many

Service Providers working with Refugee Claimants need to consider:

- Educating claimants on process and procedure immediately upon arrival as a priority
- Faster timelines mean more claimants needing help at same time which puts more pressure on Providers
- How might this system impact client targets for the coming year?
- How will the changes impact the services they provide?
 - interview preparation
 - assisting with collecting documentation
 - lawyer referrals and assistance with Legal Aid applications
 - hearing preparation
 - appeals preparation – content guidance, translation, editing, etc.
 - deportation assistance

Melissa McDowell is AMSSA's Settlement Projects Assistant

Alex Charlton is the Coordinator of S.O.S. (Settlement Orientation Services). Formed in 1993, S.O.S helps refugee claimants through the complex immigration process and with the realities of adjusting to life in Canada.

Enhancing Skills of Front Line Workers: Trauma Counseling for Refugees

Sri Pendakur, MSW, RSW

In 2008, the Vancouver Public Partner Early Childhood Development Learning and Care (ECDLC) Coordinating Committee conducted a community needs study which identified trauma counseling for refugees as a key priority. The study also recognized that trauma counseling was not specific to children, but needed to include families. In 2009, the committee submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (ALMD). With their help, we embarked upon a three-year project to provide training for front line workers within the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), Fraser Health and Vancouver Coastal Health Mental Health Services, and refugee serving agencies in the

Lower Mainland such as DIVERSEcity and Immigrant Services Society of BC.

The range of training that this project provides to mental health clinicians and external partners will enhance their ability to work with refugees. Training will include:

- Foundational half-day cross-cultural training to:
 - introduce participants to key facets of refugees' culture and
 - assist participants in applying that knowledge to shape their mental assessment and treatment practices for refugee children and youth in the context of their families.
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT): evidence-supported treatment for the children and youth with PTSD symptoms, depression, behaviour problems and other difficulties related to traumatic life experiences.

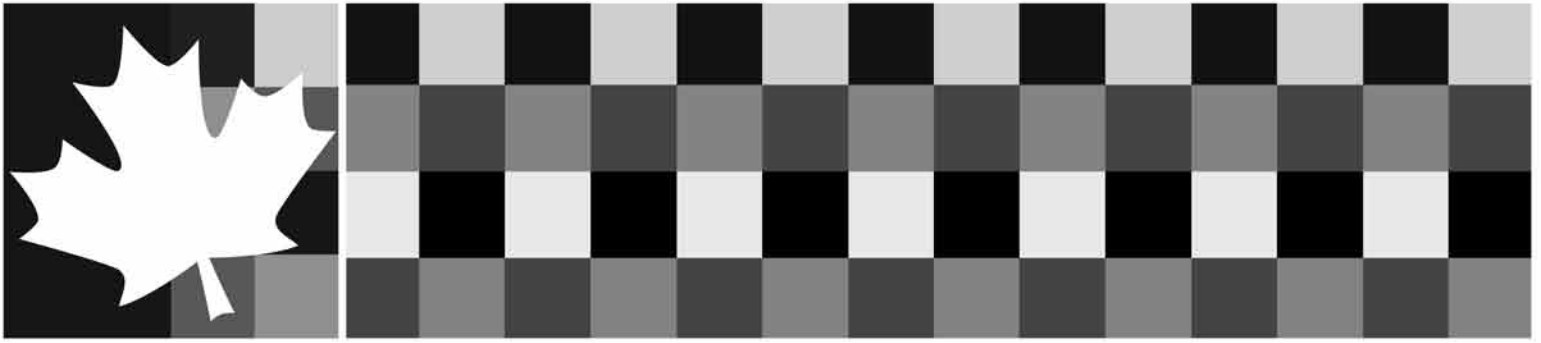
Throughout the project, outcomes will be measured to gauge community impact. The goal of the project is to enhance the ability of clinicians to provide trauma treatment and develop linkages with specialized refugee services in our community. More importantly, we want to provide help for people who are having difficulties due to their refugee experiences.

Project funding partners are MCFD, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), and the Ministry of ALMD.

Sri Pendakur is the Professional Practice Lead for the Adult Mental Health, Vancouver Community Mental Health which is a part of Vancouver Coastal Health. He is also on the Service Systems Committee of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

Mind Buster quiz ANSWERS

- 1 When was the Geneva Convention developed? **b) In 1951 after the Second World War**
- 2 A person who meets the definition of a refugee in the Geneva Convention is called a... **C) Convention refugee**
- 3 Which of the following cannot privately sponsor a refugee claimant? **A) A private individual**
- 4 Under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, a person who has been resettled to Canada as a refugee or determined to be a refugee has what status? **c) Protected person**
- 5 The vast majority of the world's refugees are located where? **d) Global South**
- 6 In most parts of the world it is possible for refugees to simply apply to a Canadian Embassy for resettlement.
b) False – They must be referred by the UNHCR or privately sponsored.
- 7 Canada respects the rights of all refugees and immigrants in Canada **b) False – The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has repeatedly criticized Canada for its slowness in reuniting refugee families.**
- 8 Canada does more than its share to assist refugees and asylum seekers when compared to other countries.
b) False - Canada donates far less per capita in support for refugees abroad than many other developed countries.
- 9 In 1993, Canada became the first country to recognize that women can be persecuted on the basis of gender. **a) True – Canada has also been a world leader in protecting refugees persecuted on the basis of their sexual orientation.**
- 10 In 1986 the people of Canada received which award “recognition of their major and sustained contribution to the cause of refugees”? **c) Nansen Medal**



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Peace and friendship in a new land; Two refugees, raised to be enemies, share hopes for the future of their wartorn country

Darah Hansen

If they'd met back home, Peter Yuot and Ahmed Ali Bakhat would have been enemies, not roommates.

Bakhat is a Muslim from Sudan's wartorn western region of Darfur and Yuot a Christian from the country's bitterly impoverished south. That religious and geographical divide helped to fuel one of the deadliest civil conflicts of the 20th century, killing an estimated 2.5 million people and displacing millions by 1999. More recently, the death toll has risen again by another 300,000 in Darfur alone following renewed violence.

Both Yuot and Bakhat readily admit they were taught to distrust, even hate, each other long before they ever met. Yet here they are, seated amiably in the living room of the small New Westminster apartment they share with Yuot's two younger brothers. It's a friendship that began just minutes after the pair first crossed paths in November 2008.

They arrived in Vancouver within days of each other, both new refugees, exhausted but eager to begin new chapters in their lives. Both men had already endured unthinkable difficulties in recent years.

Yuot was just 13 in 1996 when a brutal government assault on his farming village of Duk Padiet added him to the ranks of the Lost Boys of Sudan—a term used to describe the thousands of young Sudanese men who fled their homes during the two-decade-long conflict to escape death or forcible recruitment as child soldiers. [...]

It would be another three years before Yuot reached the relative safety of an international relief camp in neigh-

bouring Kenya. In the meantime, he walked.

Yuot had never been to school, but found his best—and often only—comfort in the occasional English-language lessons he could glean from passing United Nations workers whose convoys brought desperately needed food and clean water supplies into the war zone.

It was during one of these visits he remembers being given a metal jerry can to drink from. It was marked with blocks of English letters and an eye-catching red-and-white decal. A friend told him the foreign words spelled "Courtesy of the Government of Canada." "That is how I learned about Canada," he says.

Bakhat, 33, is a more recent refugee. The former shopkeeper took to the road in 2004 after violence in his Darfur home exploded into indiscriminate killing, torture and mass rape led by a government-backed militia.

His memories are of bombings, bodies and barren, scorched earth. "Everything is burned, even the trees," he says. With no passport or formal identification of any kind, Bakhat bribed and hitched his way through Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria, Togo, Benin and Ghana before eventually gaining acceptance to Canada through the UN.

"It was terrible," he says of the experience.

A NEW BEGINNING

Yuot was first to arrive in Vancouver, on November 13. With him were his brothers Jacob, 16, and Paul, 14. The elder Yuot has been more father than brother to the boys since they were placed in his care a decade ago by their weary mother, who

worried constantly about her sons' safety in Sudan. Bakhat's flight landed five days later, on November 18.

They met in Welcome House, a temporary shelter for new refugees and immigrants in the city's downtown core. It was a cool exchange at first, spoken in Arabic, the official language of Sudan. "We were very polite," Yuot recalls as both he and Bakhat sought to work out where on their country's dangerous political spectrum the other might fall.

To their surprise, they found they had much in common. Both are firm patriots of Sudan, yet both want desperately to see peace and prosperity brought back to the country and all its people. It was a bold realization—enough to make them question what's really behind Sudan's problems. The two shook hands in agreement. "We said, 'We are both Sudanese. Let us leave politics back home,'" Yuot says. [...]

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

Everyone in the apartment holds their nation's best interests firmly in mind, even as they struggle to balance the complexities of their new lives.

The younger boys are both full-time students at New Westminster secondary, with plans to go on to university. Jacob intends to study finance so he can help ensure that aid money distributed in Sudan finds its way into the right hands. Paul wants to become an electrical engineer so he can connect even the poorest regions of the country to light and power.

Yuot, himself, has a long-term goal of becoming a lawyer. His dream is to fight the injustices and corruption that

have crippled Africa for decades. Bakhat, meanwhile, wants to pursue business and help connect Sudan with the global economy.

The two adults in the home have far more immediate concerns to address first, however. As of November 2009, both received notice to begin paying back federal loans extended to them when they were accepted from the refugee camps to come to Canada.

Typically, the government gives refugees one year to get on their feet financially before demanding repayment for transportation, pre-entry medical examinations and other service fees. Interest is charged on delinquent accounts and failure to pay could affect their status in the country.

Bakhat is facing a bill of \$1,300, while Yuot has been charged a much steeper \$4,300 tab for himself and his brothers. The loans represent a heavy burden on the pair, who are already finding it extremely difficult to stretch the little money they earn to cover their \$1,000-a-month rent, plus utilities and food.

Bakhat, who speaks fluent Arabic, as well as a regional Zagowa dialect, earns about \$700 a month at a part-time job at a Burnaby restaurant while attending full-time English language classes during the day.

The outgoing Yuot, meanwhile, was forced to drop out of upgrading courses at Douglas College earlier in the fall when he was told he wasn't eligible to apply for a student loan until his federal bills were fully covered. He was working a temporary job as an attendant at the Belkin Art Gallery at the University of B.C., where he earned about \$1,200 a month, but that job ended in mid-December. In the weeks since, he's found a new job working security during the Olympics in Vancouver. Meanwhile, he was able to make his first government loan payments after receiving \$800 from the First Lutheran Church in Vancouver.

There is no room for frills or extrava-

gance in this home. [...]

Yet, there are few complaints to be heard, apart from the fact they don't know their neighbours (an unthinkable situation in Africa, they agree.)

Indeed, they say, most people in the refugee community are in the same boat.

And like most newcomers, Yuot and Bakhat are happy to embrace all that Canada, and Vancouver, has to offer them, from the driverless SkyTrain (an alarming initial realization) and public libraries, to reliable electricity and Internet access.

The original article ran in the December 24 issue of the Vancouver Sun. Excerpts were reprinted with permission.

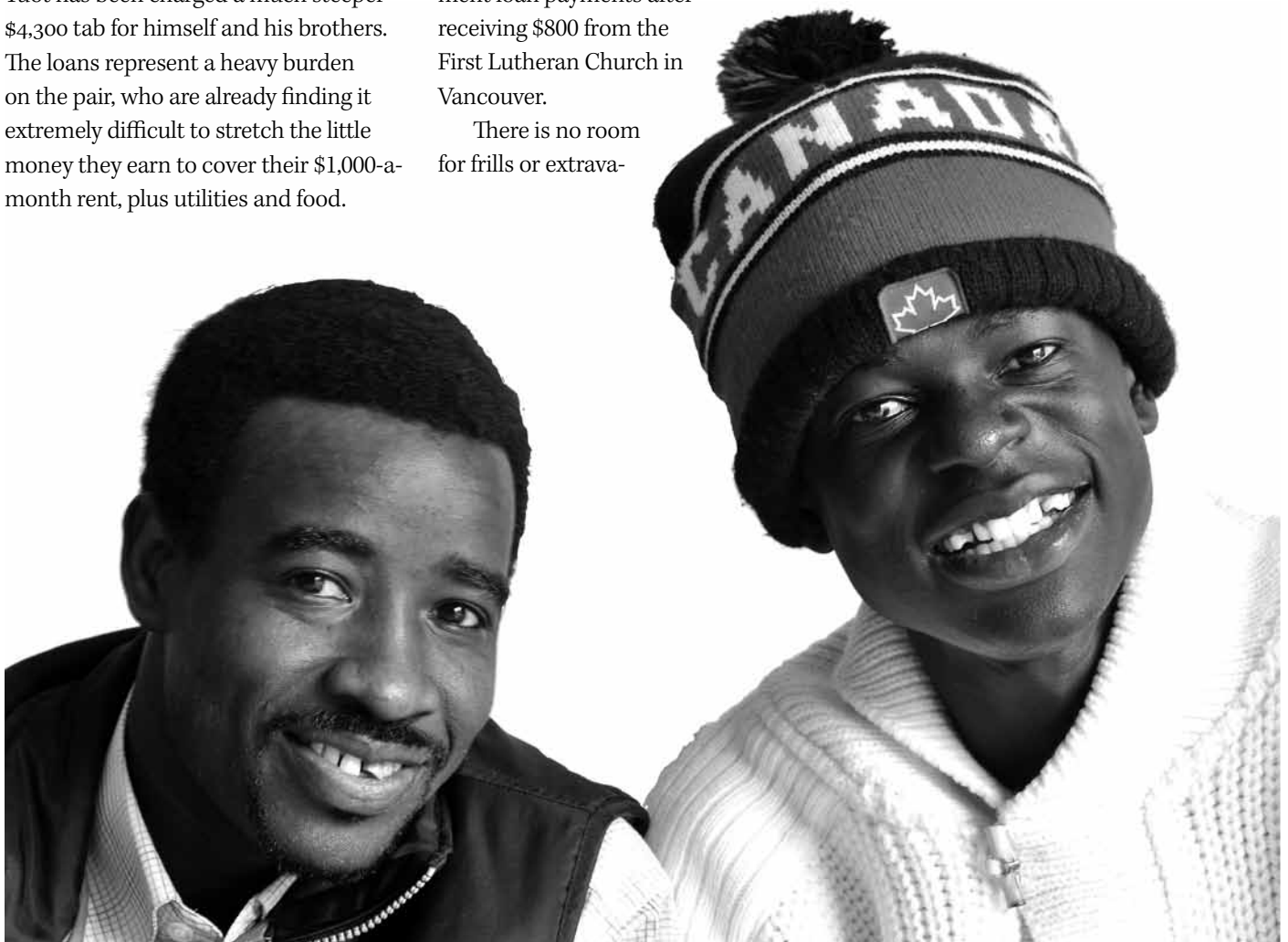


Photo: Ian Smith, Vancouver Sun / Sudanese refugees Ahmed Ali Bakhat (left) and Peter Yuot share Christmas and an apartment in their new life in Canada.

Bill C-49 — Targeting Human Smugglers or Criminalizing Asylum Seekers?

Melissa McDowell and Timothy Welsh

This edition of *Cultures West* was already in production when the federal government announced new legislation affecting asylum seekers—Bill C-49, the Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada's Immigration System Act.

Bill C-49 will impose new mandatory prison sentences for convicted human smugglers and penalties for the owners of boats used for smuggling. The Act also targets those who are the “customers” of human smugglers— asylum seekers regardless of their reasons for seeking status and residency in Canada.

Bill C-49 introduces concepts and terms which potentially group together asylum seekers arriving to Canada into broad new categories. With this bill the Government of Canada emphasizes terms such as “illegal migrants” and “queue-jumpers” over “asylum seekers” and “refugee claimants.”

The government defines “illegal migrants” as asylum seekers who apply for refugee status to Canadian authorities after their arrival. If passed, the bill would give the Minister of Public Safety sole discretion to declare the arrival of any group of “illegal migrants” as an Irregular Migration Event, in which case all members of that group would be:

- subject to mandatory detention for one year—men, women and children incarcerated in federal prisons as there are no immigration detention centres;
- prohibited from applying for permanent resident status for five years after being granted refugee status by the Immigrant and Refugee Board, and subject to reassessment at any time during this five-year period for return to their country of origin;
- unable to apply for family reunification until they achieve permanent resident status (ie: at least five years);
- eligible to access only basic medical care; and
- banned from ever re-entering

Canada if they return to their country of origin after applying for refugee status in Canada.

Legal experts are noting that the penalties for human smugglers were already very tough, so Bill C-49 may be more about “criminalizing” refugee claimants. Even those whose claims Canada determines to be “well-founded”

year of detention.

Valid refugee claimants and those whose claims are unfounded both arrive on Canada's shores. Many Canadians may unwittingly know former asylum seekers who now play significant roles in their communities. These are people whose lives were undeniably at severe unjust risk before gaining the safety of Canada. Without access to regular United Nations refugee protection systems they could only arrive at our border to make an asylum claim.

According to Amnesty International and similarly-focused organizations, Bill C-49's proposals challenge Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and could violate international laws, including the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

People smuggling and the treatment of asylum claims are complex issues. It is difficult for Canada to balance the integrity of our border controls with our fair perception and treatment of genuine asylum seekers. Public input and parliamentary process will hopefully refine Bill C-49 so that it does not have the primary outcome of painting all asylum seekers with the same “criminality” brush.

“Legal experts are noting that the penalties for human smugglers were already very tough, so Bill C-49 may be more about “criminalizing” refugee claimants.”

will find the new labels, penalties and restrictions apply to them if the Minister of Public Safety so decrees—including a

Post Script

Revisiting the Dialogues Project

Our Post Script story provides readers with a follow-up to the topic we covered in our previous edition.

Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver (the Dialogues Project) is a joint project between the City of Vancouver and community partners. Its goal is to promote greater understanding and stronger relationships between indigenous and immigrant communities within Vancouver.

While the project runs from January 2010 until July 2011, it was officially launched in April at the UBC First Nations Longhouse. The event brought together stakeholder organizations including Vancouver City Council, and the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

Dialogue Circles

A series of dialogue circles were held between April and July 2010 at nine venues around Vancouver. Participants were invited to small group settings to share their stories and experiences on social inclusion and relations between Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities. The goal of the circles was to facilitate discussions on how to build stronger cross-cultural alliances. Each dialogue group discussed past, current, and future relations between Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities.

In July, a closing dialogue session was held to report on the learnings of the circles, and to allow participants to identify and prioritize next steps. Mayor Gregor Robertson as well as the Right Honourable Mme. Adrienne Clarkson and Mr. John Ralston Saul also participated in the closing session.

Community Research

The Dialogues Project conducted a survey to gather information from diverse communities and provide a snapshot of people's perspectives and experiences regarding Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal relations. The survey was distributed between May and July 2010 through partner organizations, interested stakeholder groups, and other project participants.

The survey findings will indicate what people know of the Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities, and the issues about which they wish to know more. Respondents' comments will help to identify potential areas for community collaboration.

A literature scan will also review information targeted at newcomers regarding Aboriginal histories, issues and perspectives. The main sources of information under review are from government departments or community organizations.

Cultural Visits

In the fall and winter of 2010 a number of cultural visits will be held. Some of the visits held to date include those hosted by the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, MOSAIC, UBC First Nations House of Learning, the Museum of Anthropology and Musqueam. The visits will provide opportunities for participants to learn more about the histories and cultures of the hosting community groups.

Elders & Youth

An Elders and Youth Program will bring together elders and youth to engage in discussions around community relations. The elders and youth may also

do wider outreach to help engage other communities around the issues and goals of the Dialogues Project.

Documenting the Dialogues Project

A "Story" document will be published towards the end of the Project and will be translated into key languages for wide dissemination amongst Vancouver's diverse communities. It will include general highlights and outcomes of the dialogue circles, community surveys and literature scan, along with material from interviews with members of the Aboriginal, immigrant and non-Aboriginal communities. The "Story" document will include the perspectives of participating communities, and will become a significant legacy for further engagement around collaboration between Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities.

In addition, a DVD will include highlights from key events and gatherings, such as project celebrations, the dialogue circles, as well as interviews with community members who have contributed significantly towards inter-community dialogue and relationship building. The DVD will be completed at the conclusion of the project and will be made available to the broader public.

For more information on the Dialogues Project see

www.vancouver.ca/dialoguesproject

Member Organizations

PROVINCIAL

Association of BC TEAL (Teachers of English as an Additional Language)
 BC Human Rights Coalition (BCHRC)
 BC Teachers Federation – Social Justice Program (BCTF - SJP)
 Canadian Cancer Society – BC & Yukon Division
 Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) – Pacific Region
 Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) – BC Division
 Canadian Red Cross
 ELSA Net
 Legal Services Society of BC (LSS)
 Scouts Canada – Provincial
 Social Planning & Research Council of BC (SPARC)
 Society for Intercultural Education, Training & Research (SIETAR)
 TRAC Tenant's Resource & Advisory Council
 Westcoast Child
 Care Resource Centre
 West Coast Domestic Workers' Association (WCDWA)
 West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund

NORTH

Immigrant & Multicultural Services Society (IMSS)
 Kitimat Multicultural Society
 Skeena Diversity Society
 Multicultural Heritage Society (MHS) - Prince George
 Terrace & District Multicultural Association (TDMA)

VANCOUVER ISLAND

Campbell River & Area Multicultural & Immigrant Services Association (CRMISA)
 Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS)
 Comox Valley Community Adult Literacy and Learning Society (CALLS)
 Cowichan Intercultural Society (CIS)
 Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA)
 Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS)

FRASER VALLEY

Abbotsford Community Services (ACS)
 Chilliwack Community Services
 Langley Community Services Society
 DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society (DCRS)
 Mission Community Services Society (MCSS)
 OPTIONS: Surrey Community Services Society
 Progressive Inter-Cultural Community Services Society (PICS)

INTERIOR

Community Connections Society of Southeast BC
 Kamloops Cariboo Regional Immigrant Society (KIS)
 Kamloops Multicultural Society
 Kelowna Community Resources Society
 Nelson Community Services Centre
 South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS)
 Vernon & District Immigrant Services Society (VDISS)

LOWER MAINLAND

411 Seniors Centre Society
 Association of Neighbourhood Houses of Greater Vancouver (ANH)
 Burnaby Family Life Institute
 Burnaby Multicultural Society (BMS)
 Centre of Integration for African Immigrants (CIAI)
 CHIMO Crisis Services - Richmond
 Collingwood Neighbourhood House (CNH)
 Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS)
 Family Education and Support Centre
 Family Services of Greater Vancouver (FSGV)
 Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC)
 Inland Refugee Society of BC (IRS)
 Jewish Family Service Agency (JFSA)
 Kiwassa Neighbourhood Services Association
 Little Mountain Neighbourhood House Society (LMNHS)
 MOSAIC
 Multicultural Family Centre
 Multicultural Helping House Society (MHHS)
 Multifaith Action Society (MAS)
 North Shore Multicultural Society (NSMS)
 Pacific Immigrant Resources Society (PIRS)
 Richmond Intercultural Advisory Committee
 Richmond Multicultural Concerns Society (RMCS)
 South Vancouver Neighbourhood House
 Settlement Orientation Services (SOS)
 SUCCESS (United Chinese Community Enrichment Services)
 Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services (VLMMFSS)
 Vancouver Cross-Cultural Seniors Network Society
 Vancouver Multicultural Society (VMS)
 Westcoast Family Resources Society
 Women Against Violence Against Women/Rape Crisis Centre
 YMCA – Connections
 YWCA Vancouver International