



30 Years of the Canadian Council for Refugees: A Brief Historical Overview

The following are some pieces from the history of the CCR. They are certainly not comprehensive: they are intended only to give a taste of the range of things undertaken by the CCR, and affecting the organization during its 30 years. They are divided into:

- > Policy positions taken by the CCR
- > Structural developments within the CCR
- > Developments in the refugee and immigration field outside the CCR, particularly in Canada.

Year	Some positions taken by the CCR	Some developments within the CCR	Some events outside the CCR
1978	Resolution on refugee resettlement: concerns that private sponsorship may become the norm. Government assurances that only 10% will be privately sponsored.	Election of first executive of the Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees, Beacon Arms Hotel, Ottawa, 13-14 February 1978. John Watson elected President. 23 participants attended.	The new Immigration Act, passed by Parliament in 1976, came into force. It created a refugee determination system (decisions made by the Refugee Status Advisory Committee – RSAC) and enabled the private sponsorship of refugees.
1979	Resolution on settlement assistance: three year limit of service for immigrants and refugees creates hardships for people and assisting agencies.	Mario Paquette elected President, following resignation of John Watson. At a meeting at Friends' House, Toronto, April 1979, members agreed to continue with no funding beyond memberships, no hired staff, no incorporation.	By mid-year, nearly 1.5 million refugees had fled South-East Asia. In June, the Canadian government announced that 50,000 South-East Asian refugees would be resettled by the end of 1980.
1980	Resolutions calling for no visa requirements on countries where human rights violations, all refugee claimants to have right to oral hearing before independent Board, refugees with security certificates to have right to know and address any information considered by RSAC (Refugee Status Advisory Committee).	George Cram elected President. Over 100 participants at meeting at University of Toronto, 6-8 June 1980, the first conference with full simultaneous translation. In December the Executive was empowered to hire support help.	Minister Lloyd Axworthy set up a Task Force on Immigration Practices and Procedures to examine various issues, including female domestic workers, illegal migration, immigration consultants and Canadian refugee policy.

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1981	Resolutions calling for a special designated class for refugees from Central America and the use of Minister's Permits to facilitate immediate family reunification from El Salvador.	CCR was represented at UNHCR/NGO Consultation in Geneva. Executive empowered to apply for funds from any source not impugning autonomy of Standing Conference and to establish a bilingual secretariat.	A special program was announced for Salvadorans, allowing those in Canada to stay indefinitely.
1982	Resolutions calling for a system of quarterly ISAP advances and streamlining of documentation required by ISAP.	Thérèse Jubinville President. 65 participants at June meeting in Aylmer, QC; no recorded numbers at December meeting in London, ON (numbers were small).	Poland was added to the countries for the Political Prisoners and Oppressed Persons class, in response to the suppression of the Solidarity movement.
1983	Resolution calling on the government to ensure it meets current refugee levels for Africa and to consider increasing African levels. Resolution calling for consistent standards for bonds for release of detained claimants.	Members noted importance of government participation at meetings but decided some sessions should be closed.	Responding to the surge in anti-Tamil violence, Canada imposed a visa requirement on Sri Lankans, while facilitating the landing of some in Canada.
1984	Resolutions calling for measures to resettle disabled refugees, a moratorium on removals of Bangladeshis, and the landing of all Tamils in Canada.	Yvette Knott President. Executive asked to research options for travel subsidies for West and Maritimes and to have more regional balance in presenters.	Guyanese refugee claimants arrive fleeing ethnic and political persecution. The refugee claim backlog grows to 12,000 cases.
1985	Resolutions calling on government to encourage sponsorship of unaccompanied minors, special program leading to landing for all Guyanese in Canada, all foreign aid to Sri Lanka to be conditional on the elimination of root causes.	An extraordinary meeting was held in September in Montreal to enable a collective response to the Plaut report (on refugee determination), and to meet with Minister of Employment and Immigration, Flora MacDonald.	4 April: Supreme Court of Canada renders the Singh decision, recognizing that refugee claimants' basic rights are protected by the Charter.

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1986	Resolution condemning government's proposals on refugee determination as a betrayal of the principles of universal access and right of appeal on the merits.	Michael Schelew President. Name changed to Canadian Council for Refugees. Decision taken to seek charitable status. Executive size increased to six. Working Group on Refugee Women established. Members asked to give at least one extra public awareness talk per month. Fall meeting held in Winnipeg (first time outside QC/ON) with 204 participants.	The UNHCR awarded the people of Canada the Nansen medal.
1987	"The CCR, in a unanimous decision, is demanding the immediate withdrawal of Bill C-55. We would ask that it be replaced with a Bill which respects the principles listed: 1. Universal access to the refugee determination procedure. 2. A refugee board independent of immigration control. 3. Oral hearings. 4. The right to counsel of your choice. 5. Right to appeal."	At the May meeting, participants, preoccupied with the announced new refugee determination procedures, prepared a special song for the session with Minister Gerry Weiner. Most participants wore a black armband. "Expressions of concern to Mr. Weiner were strong and universally negative."	Canada ratified the Convention Against Torture. Bill C-55, creating a new refugee system and the Immigration and Refugee Board, was introduced in Parliament. Following the arrival by boat of a group of Sikhs in the summer, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney issued an emergency recall of Parliament for the tabling of Bill C-84, the Refugee Deterrents and Detention Bill.
1988	Resolution calling for an inquiry into workings of visa sections in Islamabad and New Delhi. Government urged to significantly increase the level of government assisted refugees.	President Margaret Third-Tsushima. Working Group struck on Unaccompanied Minors. Working Group on Overseas Protection created, tasked with preparing a public report on refugee claim procedures and selection at Canadian visa offices abroad.	Bills C-55 and C-84 were passed by Parliament.



For more information on the Canadian Council for Refugees and its activities, see:
www.ccrweb.ca

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1989	Resolution supporting recommendations of the Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees. Revision of the Backlog Program urged. CCR and allies to seek ways of using the international human rights system to promote refugee protection.	First CCR meeting in Vancouver (1-3 June). Decision taken to establish a working group on Settlement/ Integration issues. However, it did not start functioning until 1991. The Executive proposed holding one national consultation a year, instead of the customary two: the membership defeated the motion. Nancy Worsfold was hired and became first coordinator, then Executive Director. (Previously staff had provided only administrative support).	1 January: legislative amendments came into force. The newly created Immigration and Refugee Board began operations.
1990	Resolution calling for immediate family reunification for family members of all who have been recognized as Convention Refugees in Canada, and all who have been accepted in the backlog clearance program.	The CCR Working Group on Protection produced a discussion paper on "Immigration detention law and practice." Janet Dench was hired on a part-time contract to work on the "Trace" project, designed to track the fate of refugee claimants deported from Canada.	The government unveiled its Five Year Plan for immigration, proposing an increase in total immigration from 200,000 in 1990 to 250,000 in 1992.
1991	Resolution calling for Minister's permits to allow for rapid family reunification. The CCR followed up with a call to members to write letters: "Now is the time to act! Family reunification for refugees. You can make a difference." The CCR called on the government to meet its target of 13,000 sponsored refugees.	The CCR's Task Force on Overseas Protection, chaired by David Matas, held hearings in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. The Spring Consultation (Victoria) included a "Settlement Day" and a "National Conference on Sponsorship Review". The CCR office moved from a room generously offered at CSAI (thanks to Sr Monique Proulx) to 6839 Drolet.	A new Québec-Canada Accord came into effect, giving Québec sole responsibility for the selection of independent immigrants and the administration of all settlement services in the province.

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1992	The CCR highlighted three main issues in relation to Bill C-86: carrier sanctions, safe third country rule, and eligibility determinations by senior immigration officers. The CCR opposed the deportation of Somalis and protested differential treatment of Somalis and Yugoslavs.	David Matas President. CCR significantly increased public relations activities. CCR initiated roundtable meetings with the immigration department. Report of the CCR Task Force on Overseas Protection released in September 1992. CCR adopted a Refugee Participation Policy.	Bill C-86 was introduced, making significant changes to the Immigration Act, including to the refugee determination process. The bill eliminated the first level hearing process, that the CCR had opposed. A year earlier, then Minister Barbara McDougall had written “I must disagree with the CCR’s resolution that the initial hearing provisions be repealed.” The number of government-assisted refugees arriving dropped to just over 6,100 (the lowest in the CCR’s 30 years).
1993	The CCR protested the new identity document requirements for landing of refugees (a dominant issue for the rest of the 1990s). The CCR called on the government to restore the government-assisted refugees level to 13,000 a year and to meet this level.	The CCR adopted its Mission Statement, stating that the organization is “committed to the rights and protection of refugees in Canada and around the world and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada.”	Under Kim Campbell’s government, responsibility for immigration fell into the new Department of Public Security. The Liberal government elected in November 1993 created Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The Supreme Court rendered the Ward decision, the first case in which the CCR was an intervener.
1994	The CCR took positions on a wide range of settlement issues, including calling for settlement worker recognition, and opposing the Settlement Management Information System (SMIS). Resolution calling on the government to work towards a minimum 50% quota of women as principal applicants in refugees resettled from abroad. The CCR called on the IRB to create a “code of procedure” for survivors of torture.	The spring consultation (Ottawa) included sessions designed to bring together those interested in refugees and development.	The government announced plans to lower immigration levels and shift the emphasis away from family reunification. The NGO-Government Committee on the Private Sponsorship of Refugees was formed, in response to a recommendation in a resolution adopted by the CCR in 1993.

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1995	The CCR published the report of its Task Force on Family Reunification. Resolution calling for increased resettlement of Burmese refugees in Thailand. Resolution calling for a fair procedure to determine if a person is inadmissible on security grounds.	The CCR was identified as the PARINAC focal point for Canada, as part of a UNHCR process (Partnership in Action) for strengthening cooperation with NGOs.	The “Head Tax” (Right of Landing Fee) was imposed on all adults becoming permanent residents. In February, Prime Minister Chrétien and President Clinton announced they were seeking a Safe Third Country Agreement. The Minister announced the process of Settlement Renewal, by which the federal government would withdraw from settlement service delivery.
1996	Resolution on “turnbacks” at the US-Canada border: calling on Canada to cease turning back claimants to wait for an interview because they are now being detained by INS. The CCR requested a meeting with CIC to discuss “administrative and service delivery problems” with the Interim Federal Health Program. Resolution on the refugee crisis in Rwanda and Zaire. The CCR affirmed the principles of private sponsorship: partnership, additionality and naming.	Sharry Aiken President The CCR adopted its Anti-Racism Policy.	The government published proposed regulations to create the Undocumented Convention Refugees in Canada Class. The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration made far-reaching recommendations for changes to the Regulations, which were largely dismissed by the government.
1997	Resolution calling for repeal of new Family Class Sponsorship Regulations and for revisions to the regulations consistent with Canada’s international human rights obligations. Resolution on the Women and Risk Program (one of the many on this program!) Resolution urging best interests of the child guidelines for use by both IRB and CIC.	Launch of the CCR process to examine “best practices” in settlement services.	A three-member legislative review advisory group appointed by the Minister held hearings across the country on Canada’s immigration laws. The Source Country Class and the Country of Asylum Class were introduced for resettlement from abroad.

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1998	The CCR published “Best Settlement Practices: Settlement Services for Refugees and Immigrants in Canada” and “Interdicting Refugees”. The CCR drew attention to problems in refugee determinations made by visa offices and called for a meaningful review of negative decisions. The CCR called on the IRB to stop the use of video-conferencing for refugee claim hearings and detention reviews.	Francisco Rico-Martinez President The CCR appointed four outreach coordinators across Canada to promote the CCR and its work.	The government-appointed advisory group released its report “Not Just Numbers”.
1999	The CCR adopted a position paper on “The Settlement in Canada of Refugees from Kosovo”. The CCR called on the government to ratify the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and to implement measures to protect stateless persons.	The CCR spring consultation was held in Halifax, the first time the CCR met in one of the Atlantic provinces. The consultation was one of the best attended to date.	Following consultations on “Not Just Numbers” the government announced its plans for legislative change in the white paper, “Building on a Strong Foundation for the 21st Century”. The flight of thousands of Kosovars led the UNHCR to request countries to offer them “safe haven”. Canada responded enthusiastically, taking in over 5,000. The arrival of Chinese migrants by boat on the West Coast was met with a virulent media frenzy.
2000	The CCR presented detailed comments on proposed legislation to replace the Immigration Act. The CCR called for urgent protection measures for Eritreans who had fled to neighbouring countries and for a suspension of removals of Eritreans from Canada. The CCR formally adopted the National Settlement Service Standards Framework. The CCR denounced the use of private companies for removals.	The CCR launched a Media Network, with membership from all provinces. A full day skills training workshop was held at the Vancouver consultation.	CIC invested in the Refugee Resettlement Model (RRM), which “comprises a variety of pilot projects and initiatives.”

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2001	The CCR held an International Conference on Refugee Women Fleeing Gender-Based Persecution, in May in Montreal. Resolution calling on the government to facilitate the granting of permanent residence to nationals of moratorium countries who have been in Canada for more than three years.	The CCR was an active participant in the International Conference on Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees (ICRIRR), held in Sweden in April. To follow up, the CCR organized workshops on the theme at the fall consultation in Toronto, and invited guests from abroad.	Bill C-11, the new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act was passed by Parliament. The US-Canada Smart Border Accord, signed in December, included a commitment to negotiate a safe third country agreement.
2002	Resolution calling on the government to develop an anti-racist analytical framework. Resolution calling on the government to conduct immigration examinations of separated children only in the presence of a properly appointed designated representative.	Kemi Jacobs President. A resolution was adopted calling for the CCR to raise awareness of the needs of immigrant and refugee youth through its networks and consultations.	The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act came into force, but not the articles giving refugees the right to an appeal.
2003	The CCR endorsed a Client Code of Service Rights and encouraged its use by CCR member organizations. The CCR opposed the new IRB rule on reverse order of questioning (i.e. that the tribunal questions the claimant before the claimants counsel). The CCR committed to work with others in favour of regularization for non-status immigrants.	The CCR acted as NGO Focal Point for the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement. The CCR organized local and national consultations on trafficking issues, leading to a report with detailed recommendations.	In January, the Canadian government, reversing an earlier policy, began directing back refugee claimants at the US-Canada border, without regard to whether they would be detained. In December, incoming Prime Minister Paul Martin split the immigration department, with enforcement functions going to the new Canada Border Services Agency.
2004	Resolutions adopted relating to workers on temporary work permits. Resolution calling on the government to ensure that appropriate responses are available to the increased proportion of special needs refugees being resettled. Resolution calling on UNHCR and Canada to respond to the needs of Iraqi refugees.	Nick Summers President	In December, the Safe Third Country Agreement between the US and Canada came into effect.

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2005	Resolution calling on UNHCR to intervene on behalf of Uighur refugees detained by the US in Guantanamo Bay. Resolution calling for the elimination of Regulation 117(9)(d) – the Excluded Family Member rule. CCR and others launched a legal challenge of the designation of the US as a Safe Third Country.	The CCR adopted its Policy on Anti-Homophobia, Anti-Heterosexism and Anti-Transphobia. The CCR identified family reunification as a key campaign affecting all areas of our work.	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Judy Sgro resigned over allegations of improper interventions in individual files, including in the case of a refused refugee claimant. Significant media comment followed, much of it attacking the refugee claim process.
2006	The CCR hosted an International Conference on Refugee Rights, in June in Toronto. Resolution calling for the amendment of the law so that there is independent review of a decision to detain on the basis of ID. Resolution opposing the arming of border guards.	Liz McWeeny President. The CCR launched its Youth Network. The CCR launched a process to bring a gender-based approach to settlement, leading to the “Pathways to Gender Justice” toolkit.	The IRB adopted Guideline 8 on Procedures with Respect to Vulnerable Persons. The CCR began its advocacy for such guidelines twelve years earlier, in 1994, and pressed repeatedly for the guidelines in the intervening years.
2007	The CCR called for increased Canadian response to the Iraqi refugee crisis. The CCR called on the Minister to conduct a departmental review of the understanding and application, by CIC officials, of the notion of Best Interests of the Child.	The CCR reorganized its core groups and committed to the development of an Anti-Oppression Policy.	In November, the Federal Court upheld the legal challenge of the Safe Third Country Agreement.



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