



## **CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES**

### ***NO FASTER WAY?***

***Private sponsorship of refugees: Overseas processing delays***

*October 2004*

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“...the refugee program is in the first instance about saving lives and offering protection to the displaced and persecuted.”

*Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 3(2)(a)*

“...physically and emotionally we are getting weaker and more troubled...”

*Letter from sponsored refugee family waiting for processing*

“Is there no faster way than this to process vulnerable families?”

*Letter from sponsor to Citizenship and Immigration Canada*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, now celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, has enabled over 180,000 refugees to start a new life in Canada. The program, unique in the world, allows Canadians to contribute their time and resources to resettling refugees and, in so doing, increase the number of refugees who can find safety and a new home in Canada. In 1986, largely because of the efforts made through the private sponsorship program, the United Nations awarded the Canadian people the Nansen medal, the only time this award for service to refugees has been given to an entire people.

Yet this highly successful program is being crippled by painfully slow processing, that keeps refugees and their sponsors waiting for years. Half of the cases take over 18 months to be completed; one in five cases takes more than 28 months. In some regions of the world where the situation for refugees is particularly grim, the wait is even longer. Applicants in eastern Africa (covered by the Nairobi visa office) have an even chance of waiting more than 27 months, while in Southern Africa (covered by Pretoria) the mean waiting period is 32 months.<sup>1</sup>

The delays cause enormous practical and psychological difficulties for the applicants. Refugees who are eligible for resettlement to Canada are by definition people in an unstable situation. They may even be in danger – and delays only exacerbate the danger. They may risk arrest, imprisonment and forced return to persecution in their home country. They may be in conflict zones where violence is widespread. They may be unable to work and feed their families. Children may not be able to go to school. Access to health care may be minimal. Often refugees face extortion and abuse by local police. Refugees in camps may experience insecurity and food shortages. Refugee women and girls are especially vulnerable, asked to exchange sexual favours for food and shelter, or exposed to rape. Refugees with family in Canada often depend for their survival on money sent by their relatives, who in turn are prevented from getting on with their lives while they work to support family overseas.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures are from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, for the period July 2003 to June 2004.

Meanwhile, a refugee's sponsors in Canada anguish over the dangers facing the refugee, powerless to help. Delays in processing erode the morale of volunteer sponsors and discourage new sponsors from getting involved. Organizations that sponsor refugees are concerned that they cannot sustain their members' interest over the 2-3 years it often takes, especially when they receive limited information about the progress of the application. They fear their members are turning to more fruitful endeavours.

Delays only add to the challenges inherent in the integration of new refugees in Canada. Years of waiting in difficult circumstances take their toll on refugees' emotional, mental and physical health, increasing their need for health and social services once they finally arrive.

It is important to underline that the problem of delays is not caused by the individual immigration officers, the vast majority of whom work extremely hard, often in challenging conditions, to see refugees resettled as quickly as possible. The underlying problem lies with a seriously under-resourced and sometimes inefficient system.

**Some of the types of situation familiar to private sponsors:**

- Mariam<sup>2</sup> is a single woman from Ethiopia. She is currently in South Africa and was sponsored in January 2001. In May 2004 Mariam's sponsor requested an update on the file and was told that the government's computer file reported no activity on the file. An email request for information made by the local immigration office went unanswered.
- Abdi is a Somali refugee currently in Nairobi. A group applied to sponsor him in April 2002. More than two years later he still has not been scheduled for an interview.
- A sponsorship group applied in October 2001 to sponsor two Afghan families through the visa post in Damascus. Three years later, the group has received no information about the processing of their cases.
- Following processing of their sponsorship, a Sudanese family in Cairo was able to travel to Canada in April 2003. However, one member of the family had to remain behind because she was pregnant. When the baby was born, the sponsor immediately sent a letter accepting the extra member of the family. Some time later, the Cairo visa office requested a letter from the sponsor accepting the child. A year later, the same request was made again.
- Two Burundian sisters, the younger still a teenager, were sponsored through the Nairobi visa office. As young women alone in an unsafe environment, they and their relatives in Canada suffered great anxiety. One might hope that their vulnerability would lead to faster processing, but in fact there was a year's delay between their successful interview and departure for Canada. The delay seems to have been caused in part by several processing mistakes, including erroneously switching the file numbers between the two girls.
- In 2001 a group applied to sponsor two Sudanese men in Cairo. Confirmation was received from the Cairo office that the application had been received. After hearing nothing for a year, the sponsor contacted Cairo and was told that they were far down the list and not to bother the visa office. Every six months, the sponsor attempts to get an update from the government, but without success. Contacts in the Sudanese community have reported that one of the men has been interviewed, but not the other.

<sup>2</sup> All the names in the case examples in this report are fictitious.

## OVERVIEW OF THE PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

The private sponsorship program allows Canadians to contribute towards meeting some of the objectives of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*:

“to recognize that the refugee program is in the first instance about saving lives and offering protection to the displaced and persecuted”

and to

“affirm Canada’s commitment to international efforts to provide assistance to those in need of resettlement.”<sup>3</sup>

Under private sponsorship, a Canadian organization or a group of Canadians undertakes full responsibility for a refugee or a refugee family resettled to Canada. By taking on this responsibility, the private sponsor increases the number of refugees who can find a permanent home in Canada, adding to the approximately 7,500 resettled refugees for whom the government takes financial responsibility. The sponsor is responsible for all material and financial support as well as emotional support and orientation.

Private sponsors can either name individual refugees they wish to sponsor or ask the government to identify refugees in need of resettlement. In either case, the government is responsible for ensuring that the persons to be sponsored meet the refugee definition, are in need of resettlement and are admissible on grounds of health, criminality and security.

### The Private Sponsorship Process

- Private sponsorship group submits an undertaking to sponsor a refugee to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) in Canada.
- CIC approves the undertaking and sends it to the visa office overseas nearest to the refugee.
- The visa office opens a file and sends an application form (IMM0008) to the refugee (in some cases, the sponsorship group will have included a completed IMM0008 along with the undertaking).
- Refugee returns IMM0008 to the visa office.
- Refugee is invited to an interview with a visa officer.
- Interview. If accepted:
- Medical, security and criminality checks. If cleared:
- Refugee signs Immigrant Loan Forms (if relevant) and then receives visa.
- Travel to Canada is organized.

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<sup>3</sup> *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, 3(2)(a) and (b).

## STATISTICS

Processing times have been an ongoing concern for sponsors and the refugees waiting for resettlement to Canada. Unfortunately the waiting times have been getting longer. As the chart below shows, the mean processing time of 13 months in 2002 has increased to 18 months in the year from July 2003 to June 2004. Some regions are markedly worse than others: the mean in Africa and the Middle East is 22 months, compared to 7 months in the Western Hemisphere.

It is important to note that the processing times below do not cover the full period from the submission of the application for sponsorship. For these statistics, the clock starts only when the refugee's IMM008 (application form) is received at the visa post. It does not include the time taken to process the sponsorship application in Canada or, where relevant, time for the refugee to receive and return the IMM008.

<b>Processing times for privately sponsored refugees</b>				
	<b>2002</b>		<b>July 2003 - June 2004</b>	
	# of months to process 50% of cases	# of months to process 80% of cases	# of months to process 50% of cases	# of months to process 80% of cases
<b>World</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>28</b>
Africa & Middle East	14	20	22	29
Asia Pacific	16	22	17	24
Europe	9	17	10	21
Western Hemisphere	6	13	7	12

Not all cases take over a year to complete. From July 2003 to June 2004, 30% of cases were completed within 11 months. In Bogota, 30% of cases were completed within 3 months, 80% within 11 months. This report, however, is about the majority of cases that take more than a year – and often two, three or even more years.

<b>Processing times by visa post (visa posts with 100 or more cases)</b>					
<b>July 2003 - June 2004</b>					
	# of months to process 20% of cases	# of months to process 30% of cases	# of months to process 50% of cases	# of months to process 70% of cases	# of months to process 80% of cases
<b>All Points of Service</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>
Accra	9	10	14	24	27
Cairo	20	22	24	26	29
Damascus	8	11	16	18	20
Nairobi	17	23	27	29	30
Pretoria	13	23	32	34	37
Islamabad	11	14	18	22	24
Ankara	6	8	10	13	18
London	4	6	8	11	16
Bogota	1	3	7	9	11

*International context*

Compared to the total number of refugees in the world, few refugees benefit from resettlement to Canada through the private sponsorship program (or indeed, from resettlement of any kind). For the last five years, on average approximately 3,000 refugees have been privately sponsored each year. Compared to the 9,672,000 refugees in the world, estimated by the UNHCR (as of end 2003), this number is small.

However, Canada's private sponsorship program accounts for a significant percentage of the refugees resettled each year. In 2002, a total of 50,600 refugees were resettled to 10 countries. With just over 3,000 arrivals in that year, the Canadian private sponsorship program represented 6% of the global resettlement numbers.<sup>4</sup>

*One sponsor's experience*

One Sponsor Agreement Holder with constituent groups in most provinces has collected statistics on processing times for refugees they sponsored who arrived between July 2002 and July 2004. Most of their cases were processed through the visa posts in Nairobi, Damascus and Ankara: the processing times for those posts are shown below.

<b>Processing times by principal posts for one sponsor, for arrivals July 2002 - July 2004</b>				
	Number of arrivals (cases)	Average processing time	Shortest processing time	Longest processing time
Nairobi	40	31 months	18 months	48 months
Damascus	35	22 months	14 months	41 months
Ankara	22	23 months	8 months	39 months

A representative of the organization reflects on the difficulty of encouraging member groups to take on a sponsorship when you must tell them that they can expect to wait two and a half or three years for the refugee family to arrive. "Knowing that the refugees are living in such difficult circumstances, sometimes not getting enough to eat or drink, it's an intolerable situation."

<sup>4</sup> Global resettlement numbers are taken from the UNHCR, *Statistical Yearbook 2002*, July 2004. 2002 is the most recent year for which such statistics have been published.

### TIMELINE OF A SPONSORSHIP

January 2001	A sponsorship group in Saskatoon applied to sponsor a Congolese woman and her 5 children. They were refugees in Kenya.
February 2002	The sponsor wrote to the local Citizenship and Immigration (CIC) office: "As it has now been a full year since our sponsorship application for the above files was approved, we are eager for news on the status..."
December 2002	The sponsor wrote to local CIC: "It is very nearly two years since our sponsorship was approved [...], and we have had no news whatsoever from Citizenship and Immigration Canada [...] It is proving very difficult indeed to maintain the commitment needed to sponsor such a large group over such a long waiting period with no indication of progress from CIC whatsoever. We have tried to be patient, but our patience is wearing thin [...] We are also deeply concerned about the living conditions of the -- family living in Kenya and want urgently to bring them to a safer place. Is there no faster way than this to process vulnerable families...?"
March 2003	The family was called for an interview. Unfortunately their contact in Nairobi, whose mailing address they were using, had moved, so the letter calling them to the interview never reached them.
April 2003	The sponsor wrote to the Nairobi visa office: "After over two years of waiting, any assistance you can give to help this process to move as quickly as possible will be much appreciated."
May 2003	The interview was rescheduled.
Early 2004	Having received no further communication, the sponsor contacted their local Member of Parliament.
February 2004	The sponsorship group received notification that the family would be arriving.
March 2004	The mother and five children arrived, tired but excited. The sponsors were elated. Unfortunately the painful three years of waiting has taken its toll on the family, leaving them bruised and demoralized. This is making the integration process more difficult.

## IMPACTS OF DELAYS ON REFUGEES

*“The impact of this delay on the refugee is unbearable. The refugee is living every day with hope and great expectation but the delay cuts his/her hope down. By the time the refugees are coming here, they have exhausted all their energy and it has an impact on their resettlement process.”* Representative of a community association involved in private sponsorships.

*“CIC feels that a year is a quick processing time but when you are the woman living those months it is far too slow a process.”* Comment by the sponsor of a Colombian woman whose life is under threat.

*“Their lives have been on hold for many years and they would wish to marry and have families but this is not wise when at any time they can be deported should the temporary papers not be renewed.”* Comment by the sponsor of two Sudanese men who have been in process for three years.

The delays in processing have a wide range of impacts on the refugees who are hoping that Canada will offer them protection and a permanent home. Often they are living in circumstances that are inherently restricted and even dangerous. They may face:

- Threat of deportation back to persecution in their home country.
- Armed conflict.
- Harassment by local police due to their lack of status in the country, including extortion and imprisonment.
- Restricted movement (either by law if local rules prevent refugees moving around freely, or because it is unsafe to go out – some virtually live in hiding).
- Difficult and insecure conditions in refugee camps.
- Insufficient food in camps.
- Inadequate health care.
- No legal right to work.
- Poverty.
- Loneliness.
- Separation from family and other support networks.
- Lack of access to schooling for children.
- Xenophobic attacks.
- Particular vulnerability for women and girls, who may be at risk of sexual exploitation and rape.

On being offered breakfast after arrival in Canada, a refugee child, whose sponsorship application had taken nearly three years to process, told the sponsor: “I am used to eating only one meal a day.”



In January 2002, a group in Canada applied to sponsor a Sierra Leonian family of four (a woman with her husband, daughter and mother). The family had taken refuge in Liberia. A year and a half later, they had still not had an interview when war broke out in Liberia and a number of Sierra Leonian refugees, including the husband, were killed (in July 2003). The rest of the family fled to the neighbouring country, Ivory Coast. Their file was transferred there. Processing still did not move forward. Armed conflict then broke out in Ivory Coast as well. In April 2004, unknown persons forced the door of the house where the three women were living alone, and, under gunpoint, raped them all. This took place two years and three months after their sponsorship had been submitted. The sponsor kept CIC informed about the events and requested special attention to the case. As of September 2004, the family still had not been interviewed.

Refugees who have family in Canada almost always depend on financial support from those relatives, who often themselves have very limited income. The relatives in Canada may be obliged to work more than one job so that they can send money overseas. They must put off getting on with their own lives until their relatives arrive and can be independent.

One sponsor reports hearing family members in Canada say they no longer answer the phone at certain times of day because they know it's their relative and they simply cannot bear to hear again what misery they are suffering.

In addition to the dangers and difficulties associated with their current situation, the long periods of waiting have devastating psychological effects, including frustration, anger and anxiety about the future.

### **IMPACTS OF DELAYS ON PRIVATE SPONSORS**

*“In a recent situation, a church had sponsored a family three years before. After such a long wait, the committee had given away the furniture they had collected and was no longer meeting. The deacon was no longer on council. Word was received on a Thursday that the family was arriving the next Tuesday. They did an incredible job of pulling the committee back together and finding a house, clothing, furniture within four days. But it was very stressful.”* Comment from a sponsorship coordinator.

The long processing delays also cause serious problems for the private sponsors and make it much more difficult to interest groups in putting their energies into private sponsorship.

The problems are both practical and psychological:

- A sponsorship group needs to have in place plans for supporting the refugee on arrival, but when two or three years go by, many aspects of the plan become out of date. For example, it is difficult to make plans for housing when the date of arrival is so uncertain.
- The people involved in making the sponsorship application may move, change jobs, get involved in other activities, take on new financial obligations or even become sick or die. When the sponsored refugees finally arrive, it may be difficult to re-convene the support committee, especially if, as sometimes happens, there is very little advance warning of the arrival.
- In some churches, outreach work such as refugee sponsorships is overseen by deacons, who are in office for three years. This means that, if processing times are long, the deacon has probably been replaced by the time the refugee arrives.
- The long waiting period, usually with little news of progress, means that it is difficult to sustain volunteers' interest.
- Volunteers may feel duped if they have been encouraged to make the sponsorship commitment because of the refugees' pressing need and they then find that the process does not reflect the urgency.
- Sponsors feel powerless because of their inability to make the process move faster, or even know what is happening.
- Sponsors feel particularly discouraged if they invest their energies in a sponsorship, only to have the refugees refused years later on the grounds that the situation in the home country has improved in the meantime.

Promoting private sponsorship is a particular challenge when groups must be advised that the process is very long. Many groups that have had a frustrating experience are unwilling to try another time, and don't encourage others to get involved. Even if groups do keep going, the length of the process reduces the number of refugees sponsored, since many groups cannot afford to take on more than one sponsorship commitment at a time. If a group sponsors a family, waits three years for their arrival, supports them for a year after arrival, and then starts the process again, the result is that they have only resettled two families in seven or eight years. They might have been willing and able to do more.

## **PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM**

### **COMMUNICATION**

One of the most frequent complaints from sponsors struggling with the long processing delays concerns the lack of effective communication. Often it is difficult, if not impossible, to find out what is happening in a case. Information sent to the visa office sometimes seems to go astray. Requests for information often go unanswered. Years can go by with no news on a case. Sponsors are discouraged from seeking updates on the grounds that the time visa officers spend answering questions is time taken away from processing cases. Too often the sponsor is left unsure whether the file has got lost or whether the delays are "normal."

The examples that follow are only a few out of hundreds of cases where lack of communication led to great frustration.

<b>COMMUNICATIONS ON A CASE: A TIMELINE</b>	
April 2002	A sponsorship was submitted for Abdi, a Somali refugee in Nairobi. The file was sent to the visa post in Nairobi and the sponsor was told to expect the interview in about a year (i.e. approximately April 2003).
August 2002	Worried that Abdi still hadn't received the application form (IMM008) or any correspondence, the sponsor sent an email to the Nairobi visa office. The visa office responded that they had sent a request for the applicant's mailing address but had received no reply. (The sponsor had never received such a request and in any case the address was on the application form.) The sponsor immediately replied with contact information (two mailing addresses and two email addresses for Abdi).
September 2002	Since Abdi still had not received the application form, the sponsor sent the email with the contact information a second time. Despite this, the local CIC office in Canada subsequently reported that the visa office still needed Abdi's address.
October 2002	The sponsor faxed the contact information to the local CIC office. Abdi finally received the application forms.
November 2002	Abdi submitted the completed IMM008 to the Nairobi visa office.
March 2003	The local CIC office informed the sponsor that the computer system showed nothing yet about an interview date.
July 2003	The local CIC office informed the sponsor that there was now a 14 month wait for interviews. The starting point was now apparently the date at which the completed IMM008 was received, meaning an interview could be expected in January 2004.
January 2004	The sponsor sent an email to the local CIC office to check on the file.
February 2004	The local CIC responded that they had sent a request for information to Nairobi but had received no response.
March 2004	The sponsor wrote a letter to a Member of Parliament and received back the information that the interview would be "two years from the file being opened" which would place the interview date in the fall 2004.
April 2004	Abdi received a letter from the Nairobi visa office asking him to bring several documents (ID, passport, driver's license, proof that he is recognized by UNHCR and police certificate from Kenyan government). He submitted the documents requested. He has heard nothing further from the visa office since then.

A widow from Eritrea who fled to Egypt was sponsored in April 2001. In October 2001, the visa office in Cairo informed the sponsor that the application was received and that the interview would take place within two months.

Months and years went by and no interview was scheduled. The refugee applicant became more and more agitated. The sponsor's requests for updates were not answered. In May 2004 the local CIC informed the sponsor that there was no information on the computer system about the case and sent an email to Cairo. There was still no answer.

The refugee applicants also experience considerable difficulty in getting accurate and timely information on the processing of their case. Among the problems are the following:

- Refugees on occasion visit the visa post and are told that there is no sponsorship for them, even though they present photocopies of the letter of approval and undertaking.
- Refugees sometimes don't receive communications asking for extra information from the visa post. The visa post reports that the mail was undeliverable, although outside mail to the same address was being received.
- Some refugees receive the letter informing them of an appointment for an interview after the date has passed.
- On occasion a refugee will receive a letter notifying them that their sponsorship has been denied because the applicant had not appeared for an interview, when the refugee had not received any information about an appointment for an interview and had not changed address.

A Sudanese woman with two children was sponsored in November 2000. After a 16-month silence, the sponsor received an email from the Cairo visa post in March 2002, saying that the interview would take place within two months. However, nothing happened. Finally, in September 2003, Cairo advised the sponsor through the local CIC that it takes up to a year to schedule an interview. A year later, there was still no interview date.

The refugee meanwhile was trying her best to find out when the interview would take place. She explained in an email to the sponsor: "In April 2003 I went to inquire from the embassy about my file again, I was told to go and they are going to call me very soon for an interview, in which I was not called. In June 2003, I made a written inquiry which I took to the embassy. I was told my file is ready for interview the only thing missing was the date for the interview which was not fixed. I was told to go and they will call me for the interview, again that one never happen. In August 2003, again my file number was [not] among the files posted outside on the embassy bulletin board with a note, this are the files for interview and no body should come to the embassy to inquire. [...] we do not know what to do next."

Sometimes the sponsor or the refugee tries to communicate vital information about the case, but it doesn't seem to get through, leading to serious consequences. For example, in one case the sponsor contacted the local CIC to inform them that the applicant had had a baby. The local CIC contacted the visa post about this, but when the family was ready to travel, there was no visa for the baby and no record of the birth in the file.

### **APPEARANCE OF ARBITRARINESS IN PROCESSING**

The frustration related to slow processing is compounded in some cases by the fact that apparently similar cases take widely varying lengths of time, giving the impression of arbitrariness. Sponsors and refugees naturally feel that there is something unfair when, of two people sponsored at the same time, one arrives in Canada within thirteen months and the other after three years. In some of these cases, there may be good reasons for the different processing times, but in the absence of any explanation, it is the impression of arbitrariness that prevails.

A sponsorship was submitted in November 2001 for a family of four Ethiopian siblings, of whom the oldest was 19 years and the youngest 8. The family had been living without legal status in Nairobi, in constant fear of being stopped by police and extorted for money or thrown in jail. To reduce risks, the siblings avoided leaving the apartment unless necessary. The eldest brother, with the burden of responsibility caring for his siblings, was desperate for their security. The children could not go out to school: their brother paid for a tutor to come to the apartment to give them lessons.

Given the lack of a mature adult to take charge, the sponsor suggested that this be treated as a vulnerable case. Yet the sponsor saw other refugees who were less vulnerable processed more quickly.

Finally, after many inquiries, most of which went unanswered, the family arrived in September 2004, nearly three years after the sponsorship was submitted.

### **CASES IN LIMBO**

Some sponsors have the impression that a few cases get set aside, especially if there is anything slightly unusual and requiring further attention. For example, if a child is born, the refugee marries or there is a change of address, this appears, in some cases, to lead to the file being stalled.

Fatima, originally from Sierra Leone, was a refugee in Guinea, when a sponsorship was submitted in May 2001 for herself and her children. In 2002 she was interviewed. After that, nothing happened. In April 2003, in response to an update request, the sponsor learned that the visa officer had been confused at the interview by Fatima's apparent reluctance to bring her elderly mother (also a refugee) with her. Having learned this information, the sponsor sent an email explaining that there had obviously been a misunderstanding because Fatima's mother had been sponsored in a separate application and had in fact already arrived in Canada!

Fatima and her children finally arrived in February 2004.

### **SECURITY ISSUES**

Refugees being resettled to Canada, like other prospective immigrants, must receive a security clearance. Usually this is a straightforward process, but in a minority of cases, the security screening process includes an interview. When this happens, there are often years of additional delays, with very little explanation given to the refugee. The year's wait in the case example below is shorter than many other cases involving security interviews of which we are aware.

The extra time might seem more justified if it were being used to do active security investigations, but to the outside observer the impression is rather that there are simply insufficient security officers available to do timely interviews and investigations.

Ruth is the widow of a trade union activist assassinated by the paramilitary in their home country of Colombia. Having received threats against herself, she fled with her two children, first to the capital city, Bogota, and then to Central America. However, she was not safe there as the threats followed her. A group in Canada applied to sponsor the family and within a few months, Ruth was given an interview and had her medical exam. (This is consistent with the processing times for Central America which are relatively short.)

However, in October 2003, she was told that she needed to undergo a second interview on security matters, which it was suggested would take place within two weeks. Months went by with no further news. In February 2004, the sponsoring organization, concerned about the case, wrote a letter to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration asking for her intervention to speed up the case. No answer was received, although the sponsor also followed up with calls to the Minister's office. Finally in June 2004, Ruth had the second interview. She was shocked by the aggressive and unsympathetic questioning and left wondering whether she would ever go to Canada. In fact, there were clearly no security concerns about her because a visa was issued for Ruth and her children in October 2004. The security interview appears to have added a year to the processing time.

## CONCLUSION

The Canadian Council for Refugees believes that the vast majority of Canadians would agree that the delays for privately sponsored refugees described in this report are unacceptable. Refugees seeking protection and a new home should not have to wait years for processing, particularly when Canadians are ready to put up their own resources to welcome them here.

Over the past several years, private sponsors have worked with the government to try to streamline procedures and reduce the long waiting times. These efforts have not been successful. It has become evident that the problem cannot be solved by tinkering with procedures.

**The Canadian Council for Refugees therefore calls on the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to initiate a study of the processing problems in the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.**