



**Canadian Council for Refugees Spring 2010 Consultation
“Solidarity and Protection: Our Obligations at Home and Abroad”
3-5 June 2010, Ottawa
Conference Report**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Council for Refugees’ 2010 Spring Consultation was held June 3-5 at the downtown Marriott hotel in Ottawa, Ontario. The Consultation provided an opportunity for networking, professional development and information-exchange, as well as the identification of emerging needs. Over 375 participants from across Canada attended the Consultation.

The consultation brought together diverse participants from different regions and many sectors. Participants at the Ottawa Consultation included refugees, immigrants, staff and volunteers at organizations serving newcomers and ethnocultural organizations, youth, students, private sponsors of refugees, representatives of various levels of government and of UNHCR and the IOM, lawyers, academics, labour representatives and others involved in refugee and immigrant issues. There was strong youth participation, and the Ottawa location facilitated a strong presence of government officials, both as resource persons and participants. Diverse participation was enhanced by opportunities such as the grants made available for a number of settlement workers and youth, the Amina Malko Fund for refugee participation, the registration fee waiver for refugee participants, and the low registration fees for youth and people with low incomes.

The Consultation sessions offered a participatory format intended to be particularly inclusive of those who are new to Canada and new to the CCR. Moderators were informed and trained to promote CCR’s commitment to provide an environment that is free of racism, sexism, discrimination and bias, where all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. The CCR’s Anti-Oppression Policy, adopted May 2009, guided meeting conduct.

The success of the Consultation was made possible thanks to the very efficient work of the local organizing committee, made up of staff from various organizations in Ottawa, as well as some interested individuals. Participants were also very fortunate to be welcomed by a wonderful team of more than 25 volunteers, who contributed to the friendly atmosphere of the event.

II. EMERGING NEEDS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

Through workshops, caucus sessions, plenaries and the written feedback we received on the Consultation, a number of emerging needs and priorities in the newcomer settlement sector have been identified.

Education:

- Participants from across the country agreed that it is important to educate Canadian-born youth about the realities of immigrants and refugees. CCR members propose that these issues be part of the general curriculum, as a way of encouraging positive attitudes towards cultural diversity, and cross-cultural communication. This would appropriately reflect the principle that integration is a two-way street.
- Gaps in services for newcomer youth and young adults with low literacy levels and language barriers were identified, and it was agreed that they need to be more effectively addressed.
- The point was also raised that there should be increased funding for accommodation in English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes for newcomers with disabilities.

Health:

- Gaps in mental health services for newcomers were identified, including the need to address linguistic and cultural barriers to communication, and the lack of access to counselling and therapy in general for many newcomers, especially refugees, who have been through considerable trauma.
 - o mental health services often focus on addiction and people with mental health diagnoses, but counselling and therapy are necessary for many newcomers, including women who are victims of domestic violence, and should be funded under settlement programs
- Gaps in services were identified with regards to refugees and immigrants with special needs, and the elderly were also identified.

Law enforcement and issues relating to criminality:

- Many inter-connected concerns were raised about the impact of law enforcement activities on newcomers, particularly youth. Strong frustrations were expressed about perceived inequality of protection offered by police to newcomer youth, especially racialized youth; furthermore there are concerns that police are sometimes racially profiling and targeting youth based on immigration status. Prejudices about newcomer youth being members of gangs continue to be reported as frequent. Needless to say, these concerns seriously undermine newcomers' sense of security and of belonging.
- In cases where criminal convictions lead to the deportation of a young person born abroad, there is a strong sense of injustice, particularly when the person has lived most of their life in Canada.
- It is felt that the approach that should be promoted for newcomer youth with issues of criminality is one of restorative justice.

Domestic Violence:

It is felt that there are gaps in services with regards to newcomer women in situations of violence.

- There is a lack of information on legal issues provided to newcomer women (e.g. what is considered abuse in Canada, what sort of abuse is considered criminal, what sort of recourse is possible, etc.)
 - o such information should be provided on arrival in the preferred language
 - o there should be follow-up government-sponsored educational initiatives on laws, for newcomer communities
 - o training on the specific challenges faced by newcomer women in domestic violence situations should be extended to all frontline workers, including immigration officers and lawyers
 - o education about rights and options should be a staple for participants in the live-in caregiver program
- non-status women have no access to services – including policing and legal recourse – because of their lack of status.
- Concern was raised over reports of a CBSA raid on a women’s shelter. News of such practices will discourage women suffering abuse from seeking shelter outside the home.

III. SUMMARY OF THE PLENARY DISCUSSION

Opening plenary

This session served as a welcome and introduction to the consultation.

Participants heard from Neil Yeates, Deputy Minister, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and CCR President, Wanda Yamamoto. They each gave remarks commenting from their perspective on developments over the past six months, including of course the tabling and progress through Parliament of Bill C-11, amending the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act with respect to the refugee determination process.

Karen Cocq of Inter Pares gave the keynote speech on the conference theme: “Solidarity and Protection: Our Obligations at Home and Abroad”. She highlighted how Canadian organizations, advocates, support workers, lawyers and community activists can and must act in solidarity with displaced peoples in Canada and abroad. She made three main points, in favour of a) supporting the self-organization of displaced peoples to advocate on their own behalf for their own demands; b) supporting the collective and political organizing of displaced peoples, rather than just individual and case-based work, and c) looking at “refugee rights” as part of a bigger picture, which is that of migrant justice.

Ms. Cocq used the examples of Guatemalan, Salvadoran and Burmese refugee situations in the past decades to illustrate the sort of support that can be offered to displaced people who are organizing themselves for their own defence, and to make collective demands for justice. Even closer to home, she gave the example of the Committee of Non-status Algerians here in Canada who mobilized against the lifting of the moratorium on deportations to Algeria in 2002.

She discussed the importance of looking not only at refugee issues, but at migrant justice in general. This means looking at the question of displaced people generally, and understanding the rights of displaced people in broader terms: the right to stay, the right to return, and the right to move and to resettle. She urged that we fulfil our responsibility to support migrants and displaced persons by acts of solidarity with their efforts to organize themselves to seek justice for their communities.

Moderators: Marija Gojmerac and Antoine Rukebesha, Ottawa CCR local organizing committee

General Meeting

The Consultation concluded with the CCR General Meeting. Two resolutions were adopted. The resolutions can be found at <http://www.ccrweb.ca/documents/resjune10.htm>. The members also approved a new internal structure to ensure that issues of inclusion and anti-oppression are integrated into the discussions and activities of the CCR.

IV. SYNTHESIS OF WORKSHOPS

Mental Health of Refugees

With a diverse array of backgrounds and experiences, refugees arrive in Canada looking for a new start. Often it is difficult to leave the past behind, as refugees sometimes face seemingly insurmountable mental health obstacles that are part and parcel of having experienced war and trauma. The types and degrees of mental health experiences are as diverse as the refugees' own histories. This workshop explored the mental health of refugees through new research and presentations, as a way of addressing the health and stabilization of refugees.

Jaime Carrasco from the Mount Carmel Clinic's Multicultural Wellness Program in Winnipeg gave a presentation on the work being done at his clinic. He emphasized the use of the "bio-psycho-social-spiritual model", which examines all four areas or quadrants as having significant impacts on health-related quality of life. The model focuses on physical health, mental health, social health and spiritual health. Mr. Carrasco explained some of the different approaches being employed at the clinic to address different problems experienced in specific ways by newcomer communities, from post-traumatic stress disorder to domestic violence. It was expressed that in the case of domestic violence, research should be community-based, with an emphasis on educating families about domestic violence. The strong relationship between torture and family abuse was also pointed out, framed as "interrogational torture and the subsequent need for coping strategies with stressful family situations." Some of the treatment methodology being explored includes separating the genders and carefully considering the origins and history of the interviewer/interviewee relationship.

Martha Ocampo from Across Boundaries in Toronto discussed the anti-oppression/anti-racist approach to community mental health services espoused by her organization. She emphasized the inherent bias in the education and health systems, in that they are built from Eurocentric foundations, and she emphasized that community-based research and ongoing training are very important in order to attain the goal of providing holistic care, which is central for often marginalized newcomer and racialized populations. She also underlined that the needs of this diverse community are not static, and so needs assessments of both clients and service providers should be done regularly because of the changing nature of these needs.

Hsiao d'Ailly from CURA (Community-University Research Alliance) in Waterloo gave recommendations both for actions for policy, and for mental health and service providers. In terms of policy, she suggested changes at the structural level, including the creation of flexible funding structures for service provision. She talked about the importance of collaborative and inter-connected programming and policy-making in order to eliminate service and policy gaps. Collaboration and participation must be supported by encouraging representation and power-sharing for cultural-linguistic communities. When discussing what mental health and service providers could do, she talked about the importance of mobilizing cultural communities and using community-based research, as well as following a participatory action research framework. Another point was the need to increase dialogue to de-stigmatize mental health issues.

Some resources recommended during this session were:

Minister of Supply and Services Canada. *After the door has been opened: mental health issues affecting immigrants and refugees in Canada, Report of the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees*. Ottawa: Health and Welfare Canada, 1988.

Hansson E, Tuck A, Lurie S and McKenzie K, for the Task Group of the Services Systems Advisory Committee, Mental Health Commission of Canada. *Improving mental health services for immigrant, refugee, ethno-cultural and racialized groups: Issues and options for service improvement*. 2010. Website access: http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Key_Documents/en/2010/Issues_Options_FINAL_English%2012Nov09.pdf

Kappel Ramji Consulting Group, for Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *Framework to Guide Planning for Community Mental Health Supports for Government Assisted Refugees*. 2010.

Resource persons:

Dr. Hsiao d'Ailly, Chair, Social Development Studies, Renison University College, University of Waterloo

Martha Ocampo, Across Boundaries, Toronto

Jaime Carrasco, Mount Carmel Clinic Multicultural Wellness Program, Winnipeg

Moderators: Monica Abdelkader and Ihab El-Mlafi

Update on C-11

This session provided an overview of the proposed changes to the refugee determination system contained in Bill C-11 and an update on the progress of the bill through Parliament.

The workshop began with an overview of the context leading up to the tabling of Bill C-11 in order to bring participants up to date. Concerns about the impact of Bill C-11 on refugees and refugee claimants were discussed, with an emphasis on issues of importance to the CCR. There was an update by Janet Dench on the latest developments among with political parties, especially the liberal caucus, after the previous night's meeting.

No resolutions were tabled during this session, but it was proposed that this issue be brought forward for discussion in the Inland Protection working group.

Resource Persons:

Mitch Goldberg, lawyer

Gloria Nafziger, Amnesty International

Moderators: Rivka Auginfeld and Ibrahim Absiye

Flight from Sudan, including Nuba Mountains

This workshop posed two questions: 1) What does the Peace Accord and Referendum hold for the people of Sudan? 2) As Canadians, what are our responsibilities to the displaced people of Sudan? Using both a personal lens and professional overview, this session offered perspectives into Sudan and the displacement of its people, and on our responsibility as refugee advocates to act, respond and protect.

A background was given on the history and problems of South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, as well as a history of the Nuba Mountains people. The current situation of violence and neglect of this population by the Sudanese government was described in the context of the upcoming elections, and the current political and economic situation of the region was explained, citing wealth from oil as the primary reason for the conflict.

The outcomes of the workshop included the intent to develop a resolution about Canada becoming involved in monitoring the upcoming referendum in Sudan, as well as paying more attention to the displaced people and the issue of disarmament. It was also suggested that an ad hoc group be created in the Overland Protection and Sponsorship working group to monitor the situation. The point was made that in no action or resolution taken should Nuban people and Darfurians be left out.

Resource Persons :

Sherri McFarland, National Defense Intelligence College, USA

Amal Kago, MOSAIC

Moses Moini, Mennonite Central Committee

John Lewis, International human Rights Program, KAIROS

Moderators: Sister Deborah Isaacs and Jennifer Mpungu

What does Youth Engagement look like? Examples from newcomer youth and other national youth networks (Part I)

This was the first of a two-part workshop series. This workshop looked at the examples of youth engagement in local groups and within national networks. What can we learn from their experience in working with newcomer youth locally and nationally (within the CCR)?

This workshop focused on the experiences of youth representatives from different organizations who participated in engaging youth from their communities. Each participant talked about the history, mission and vision of their organization, and their experiences engaging youth. As an example, IRCOM's youth ambassador, Faiza, spoke about how story-telling and spoken-word are the key activities that are engaging youth in her organization in Winnipeg. Discussion was generated around strategies for engaging youth on the local level.

Resource Persons:

Faiza Hargaiya, IRCOM Youth Ambassadors, Winnipeg

Elana Wright, Rights and Democracy Network, Montreal

Chloe Raxlen, Campus Engagement Liaison Officer – Quebec and the Atlantic, WUSC

Moderator: Mustafa Delsoz, Youth Connexion, Immigrant Services Society of BC

Session with the Government

This session consisted of a discussion with Dawn Edlund from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, where dialogue was created on issues of importance to the CCR. Issues discussed were processing delays at the Canadian visa office in Nairobi; processing issues for applications on Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds; problems with the decision-making on refugee cases at Cairo; barriers to family reunification because of R. 117(9)(d) (excluded family members); the administration of settlement funding.

1. Processing delays at Nairobi

CCR participants requested more details about the measures that would be taken to improve the processing times in Nairobi. Will these measures bring Nairobi into line with other missions in terms of processing times?

2. Processing issues for Humanitarian & Compassionate applications

Two issues of concern were brought up: Concurrent processing for family members overseas, and the extremely slow processing of Humanitarian and Compassionate applications in Canada. In what ways might CIC streamline concurrent processing for family members overseas? Does CIC have plans in place to ensure Humanitarian and Compassionate applications are studied in a reasonable time, in all parts of Canada?

3. Decision-making on refugee cases at Cairo

Participants asked the CIC representative what CIC is doing to address the specific situation in Cairo, with respect to some extremely problematic decisions made on refugee cases. This issue has not yet been resolved. The CCR has also asked that the quality assurance report be published and that CIC adopt a series of measures to address refugee decision-making at visa offices.

4. R. 117(9)(d) cases

Participants asked the CIC representative to respond to the concerns raised by the CCR about difficulty in access and inconsistency of decision-making. What next steps will CIC commit to in order to find some solutions to the problems raised by these cases?

5. Administration of settlement funding and Blue Ribbon report

Participants asked in what ways CIC is implementing the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon report. What is CIC's view of the role and contribution of NGOs in implementing settlement programs.

As outcomes of the session, Dawn Edlund undertook to get back to the CCR on specific streamlining measures proposed for Concurrent processing (H&C applications), and on follow up on R. 117(9)(d). She also reported that the Quality Assurance report on visa office decision making will be released in 4-6 weeks.

Resource Persons:

Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, CIC

Rick Goldman, CCR Inland Protection Working Group co-chair

Jennifer Mpungu, CCR Overseas Protection and Sponsorship Working Group co-chair

Moderator: Francisco Rico-Martinez

Educating Canadians about Refugees

The Canadian education system has primarily focused on educating refugees about Canadian society, but little has been done to incorporate into curricula the realities of migrants and refugees, and the diversity of Canada. This workshop explored efforts to incorporate these realities into Canadian schools, and strategies for working with school boards and Ministries of Education to improve Canadians' understanding of refugees.

The workshop explored the need to educate Canadian students about migration and refugees issues in order to reflect the nature and reality of refugee and immigrant youth. A skit by Ottawa area youth explored the many different perspectives encountered by youth in the education system – refugee youth, immigrant youth, Canadian-born youth, parents and teachers. The skit included singing a song that reworded K'naan's Waving Flag to reflect these realities.

Marta Kalita of the Manitoba Interfaith Immigrant Centre presented on three Manitoba programs that reflect youth refugee realities:

- Youth Ambassadors Program
- Peaceful Village
- Global Issues Course – new for the Grade 12 curriculum

She discussed the need for education programs that are driven by the youth themselves, and pointed out that real change in education would need the involvement of all stakeholders and support from the School Boards and Ministries of Education.

Following the presentations by Ottawa youth and Ms. Kalita, there was a group discussion based on the following questions: 1) What types of resources have been created for classrooms? 2) What type of curriculum pieces are needed and what are the best way to develop these? 3) How is knowledge transferred from refugee-serving-agencies to school boards and ministries of education? 4) Are agencies engaged with school boards?

Regarding resources on immigrant and refugee realities that have been created for the classroom, some cited were those produced by UNHCR, RESPECT (Refugee Education Sponsorship Program), the Canadian Council of Muslim Women's My Canada Project and Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21st Century, as well as a resource kit about refugees made by the United Nations Association in Canada for teachers. The Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc.'s Ambassador Program has also produced a teachers' manual with lesson plans integrating newcomer issues for kindergarten to grade 12. Finally, it was mentioned that Quebec has a course being offered in high schools called *Éthique et cultures religieuses* that touches on these themes.

In response to the questions about the type of curriculum pieces needed and the best way to develop these, many different ideas were brought up, including possible teaching tools such as stories, folk tales and novels that deal with refugee and immigrant issues, field trips, and multi-media forums. Some things that it was felt important to emphasize were global geography, history and politics, and a generally more global theme-based curriculum.

On the question about how knowledge is transferred from refugee-serving-agencies to school boards and ministries of education, it was mentioned that agencies are sometimes engaged with school boards, but not necessarily enough. Participants from Ontario said that there was not enough contact in that province, and that more "global education" initiatives are being pushed by organizations like Free the Children who have direct links with school boards. A participant from Montreal said that in that city there is a good level of contact, with the Corporation de développement économique communautaire. The consensus was that this sort of contact is not readily available, but that there are available channels through teachers' federations and unions that are dedicated to this sort of work.

The suggestion that this issue be looked at more closely at the next CCR consultation was forwarded to the Immigration and Settlement Working Group.

Resource Persons:

Marta Kalita, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc., Winnipeg
Yodit Girmay, Catholic Immigration Services, Toronto

Moderators: Monica Abdelkader and Zoreen Velji

Criminality and Immigration (training workshop)

This workshop was given to teach participants about the criminal inadmissibility provisions in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act – what crimes make a person criminally inadmissible and what the consequences are.

Participants were given an overview and some case examples to discuss. Participants also had the opportunity to share some of their own stories and cases for discussion.

Resource Person: Mitch Goldberg, lawyer

Moderator: Jacquie Rumiell

Refugee Women Reuniting with Their Families

Many immigrant and refugee women must wait years to be reunited with spouses and children. In this workshop, immigrant and refugee women had the opportunity to discuss this issue, share experiences, and consider strategies to use for their own case and to make the government of Canada more aware of this problem.

Participants discussed the challenges for sponsored persons of being in a situation of dependence, as well as family reunification timelines. Experience, strategies and stories were shared about filling out applications and the emotional effects that separation has on the family.

The session encouraged participation and many questions were raised. The resource persons as well as the moderators provided feedback and advice. This was a good session to raise awareness on the different challenges and emotional impact faced by families with the delays in the processing Permanent Residence applications.

Resource persons:

Blanca Lopez, Catholic Immigration Centre, Ottawa

Lisa Wyndels, lawyer, Neighbourhood Legal Services, Toronto

Moderators: Heather Neufeld and Loly Rico

Access to Trades and Professions

The panellists of this workshop presented the results from research concerning access to trades and regulated professions in Canada. This recent information served to give the participants the opportunity to examine the integration into the labour market of the refugee and immigrant professionals trained abroad.

Adnan Türeğün presented on a study carried out by the Centre for International Migration and Settlement Studies (Carleton University) on immigrant professionals working in the Ontario settlement sector. He discussed the challenges and difficulties faced by these immigrants.

Nuzhat Jafri of the Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC) in Ontario presented on the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act (2006). She discussed various reports carried out by the OFC on access for newcomers to trades and services, focusing on a recent study entitled *Getting Your Professional Licence: the Experiences of International and Canadian Applicants*. This study found that immigrant professionals face many challenges in accessing trades and

professions, and that there is still much room for improvement on facilitating this process. Some of these challenges include not having Canadian work experience, the lack of job and volunteer opportunities, lack of access to documents, references and proof of credentials demanded by potential employers, and financial burdens.

Resource Persons:

Adnan Türegün, Centre for International Migration and Settlement Studies, Ottawa
Nuzhat Jafri, Office of the Fairness Commissioner of Ontario

Moderator: Georges Bahaya

CIDA and Canada's humanitarian assistance to refugees: Priorities and Practice

This workshop addressed the question of how Canadian government humanitarian assistance reaches refugee communities abroad and how effectively it responds to their needs. It provided an overview of CIDA funding priorities with respect to aid for refugees and in particular, its multilateral initiatives on their behalf. Participants heard different perspectives on issues and problems related to the delivery of aid to refugees and areas of care that are overlooked or that need further attention.

The workshop covered a range of issues from the funding schemes, operational delivery perspective, the overarching trends, challenges and global perspective and the personal experience and perspectives of a refugee as a “beneficiary”.

Jean-Stephane Counture clarified the way in which CIDA humanitarian aid is disbursed, explaining the focus on 20 countries (rather than on refugees in general). Refugees in these countries may be helped but only incidentally. He talked about the policy of not earmarking aid to the UNHCR in order to allow for maximum flexibility, and gave a variety of numbers regarding other contributions (World Food Programme, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, etc.) and noted other partners (World Bank) that can sometimes do things the UNHCR cannot do.

James Milner talked about the need to be able to access development funding in order to find solutions to protracted refugee situations. He noted the structural constraints faced by the UNHCR because of its mandate and funding through voluntary contributions. Some countries earmark their funding. He then used the cases of Tanzania and Burundi to show how development aid plays a fundamental role in promoting durable solutions.

Frederick Wangabo MweneNgabo explained a survey he did to gather information on what refugees know about funding. He discovered that for the most part they do not know where funding comes from. He questioned the criteria used to give aid, the lack of sustainability of most aid, the failure to take advantage of refugees' knowledge and skills and to foster economic independence. He described protracted refugee situations as at least partially the result of aid choices that have been made.

Leslye Rost van Tonningen talked about program accountability and quality in the context of Kenya and Chad. She described a number of challenges: refugees' lack of knowledge of their

own rights (although she also said that they are very prepared to tell NGOs what they want), resentments among host populations and the need to provide services to both host populations and refugees, the limitations of what aid can do, and the high operational costs in remote locations. She emphasized that education is a high priority for refugees in protracted refugee situations but that lack of funding makes it difficult to respond to this need.

During the discussion period a variety of issues were raised. Perhaps of most interest was the idea of “silos” in the refugee system and the attitude that “if it concerns refugees, leave it to the UNHCR.” It was expressed that we need to get refugee issues out of the refugee silo and connect them to other development-related issues (poverty reduction, etc.) in order to address protracted refugee situations.

It was agreed that advocates need to continue to develop our thinking and advocacy around the rights of refugees, especially rights to education and self-reliance activities as well as ways to bridge assistance to development including to the host communities and the economic benefits and social benefits.

Resource Persons:

Jean-Stephane Counture, International Humanitarian Assistance Directorate, CIDA
James Milner, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Carleton University
Leslye Rost van Tonningen, Senior Emergency Programme Manager, CARE Canada
Frederick Wangabo MweneNgabo, Multicultural Association of Fredericton

Moderator: Liz McWeeny, CCR Past President

Roma refugees

Roma refugees face considerable prejudice both here and in Europe. In countries such as Hungary and the Czech Republic they are highly marginalized as a result of their ethnic background. This workshop examined the settlement challenges faced by Roma refugees as well as the Canadian response to claims of persecution from the “heart of Europe”. It demonstrated the impact of the Canadian government’s description of the Roma as bogus and the imposition of visa restrictions.

In this workshop some of the prejudice and discrimination Roma refugees have endured in their respective countries was identified, as was the lack of adequate support here in Canada. The lack of recognition of these issues by the government of Canada was also discussed. The presenters expressed their concern that the Roma community is living in a post-oppression trauma and emphasized that support is very much needed, in the form of education, health care and social services geared toward their needs.

Resource persons:

Paul St. Clair, CultureLink/Roma Community Centre
Hajnalka Klein, CultureLink
Dr. Gerald Kernerman, York University

Moderators: Ibrahim Absiye and Azaria Wolday

Impact of Criminal Inadmissibility

This workshop explored the impact on non-citizens of criminal inadmissibility measures. It focused on two different groups: youth who come to Canada at a young age and get involved in criminality in their adolescence and end up being deported to a country they barely know, and women who hesitate to report domestic violence because they are without status or because they don't want a family member to be deported.

The presenters emphasized the importance of a restorative justice approach, especially in the case of youth at risk. They also discussed at length the reasons that women in situations of domestic violence often do not report abuse, and the effects on newcomers of making reports and risking deportation upon conviction.

It was stated that the CCR resolution on restorative justice for youth from May 2002 must be implemented.

Resource Persons:

Soheila Pashang, Member of the Rights of Non-Status Women Network and Seneca College professor
Hassan Adan, CultureLink

Moderators: Linda Minuk and Kamal El Khaj

What does Youth Engagement look like? Inside the CCR Youth Network (Part II)

This was the second part of the two part workshop series. Drawing on lessons from part I of the workshop, participants in this session helped to draft a CCR youth engagement action plan.

Using a participatory approach, participants divided into the four small groups with discussions led by Ihab (Hamilton), Daniet (Edmonton), Mustafa (BC), and Stephen (Waterloo). Three Activities were used to examine Youth Engagement Issues within the CCR. First, the CCR Youth Network and Youth Engagement were examined using a SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) analysis. Second, pertinent issues that CCR Youth Network should take action on were examined using a Dot-map exercise. Each group was given small, medium and large circles, and asked to discuss and outline what issues they considered most-to-least important. Finally youth were asked: "what would you need to get more involved with the CCR Youth Network?" Participants gave their responses one by one, and then discussed as a group. Each youth was asked to introduce themselves, say where they were from, and answer the question.

New directions, and concrete possible actions were suggested, and will be followed up by the CCR staff youth coordinator and communications and networking coordinator, and the CCR Youth Network.

Facilitators:

Monica Abdelkader, London Cross Cultural Learning Centre, London
Shauna MacLean, Youth and Student Coordinator, Amnesty International, Ottawa

Youth, Gender and Recreation

Jean Séguin presented a modernized approach on integration, describing how recreation and sports could be used as a tool for integration of newcomer youth, and how youth programming would be affected. He said there were many ways under this new approach to include youth and recreation, and he emphasized the benefits, which entail the inclusion of youth and a strong youth support systems. He also pointed out the need to get diverse organizations involved, such as the National Coaches Federation.

Trilby McGaw discussed refugee youth as symbolic “free runners”, and talked about the importance of recreational activities as channels for stress relief. She pointed out that upon arrival, refugee youth often aren’t interested in recreational activities because of the pressures of life as a newcomer, but that recreation should be disguised as education in order to draw youth to it. She emphasized the importance of a needs-driven approach, and stated that both the journey and the goal are important to youth, so experiential learning and recreation should be prioritized. However, she also pointed out that quick outcomes are important to ensure that all youth gain something, because of the instability in the lives of this client group.

Suhail Abualsameed brought an LGBTQ perspective to the issue of refugee and newcomer youth and recreation. He began by presenting some of the difficulties faced by LGBTQ refugee claimants, who often do not reveal their sexual orientation or identity in their country of origin because of the homophobia present in refugee agencies such as UNHCR. He pointed out that the majority of his clients are refugee claimants and non-status youth, whose needs are extremely under-served. Mr. Abualsameed discussed the difficult situation of newcomer LGBTQ youth who often not only experience homophobia in their own communities, but also racism within mainstream LGBTQ programming. He discussed the importance of creating safe spaces for LGBTQ youth, and of integrating and establishing youth into these spaces – then connecting with their communities. He pointed out that youth in his program have an 80% success rate at IRB hearings, as compared with the average 40-50% - a figure that reflects the importance of having a supportive community.

Resources Recommended:

Mulholland, Elizabeth. *What Sport Can Do. The True Sport Report*. Canadian Centre for Ethic in Sport, September 2008. www.truesport.ca

Mulholland, Elizabeth. *L’influence du sport. Le Rapport Sport Pur*. Centre canadien pour l’éthique dans le sport, septembre 2008. www.sportpur.ca

Resource Persons:

Jean Séguin, Director of Integration, CIC

Trilby McGaw, FreeRunning Program for Refugee Youth, BC

Suhail Abualsameed, Express Newcomer and Immigrant Youth Project – Supporting Our LGBTQ Youth Initiative

Moderator: Monica Abdelkader and Ihab El Mlafi

Domestic Violence: Next Steps

This workshop explored the challenges faced by immigrant and refugee women who have experienced abuse, focusing first on issues in the service delivery sector, and then addressing key legal issues confronted by such women, with a focus on immigration status.

Harmy Mendoza discussed issues of concern in terms of providing services to newcomer women facing violence. Issues such as language barriers, access to information about rights and services for women in these situations, and Don't Ask Don't Tell policies among service providers.

Heather Neufeld discussed legal issues newcomer women facing abuse deal with, looking extensively at issues that arise from sponsorship breakdowns. She brought up diverse scenarios of policy gaps and problems that have arisen, such as with the Ontario Child Tax Benefit, which is only collectable based on the mother's status in Canada (not the child's), yet women are often told that they can receive it even if they do not have status in Canada. When the mistake is discovered the women are forced to pay it back.

An interesting discussion ensued, and the Violence Against Women (VAW) approach was examined. It was recognized that violence against women is a cross-cutting issue that needs to be addressed in all three of the CCR working groups.

Resource Persons:

Harmy Mendoza, Toronto Woman Abuse Council and CCR intern
Heather Neufeld, South Ottawa Community Legal Services

Moderator: Lisa Wyndels

Port of Entry Interviews for Claimants

This workshop explored Canadian government policy on port of entry interviews for refugee claimants, along with the experiences of refugee claimants themselves. It also touched on the plans for a research project being put together to gather information on these experiences.

Sharon McLetchie presented on CBSA's policies regarding interviews for refugee claimants at the port of entry. This was followed by presentations by the other resource persons on different issues raised by experiences of port of entry interviews across the country. Some of the issues and concerns raised were: problems of interpretation (whether purely linguistic or cultural barriers to effective communication); retraumatization of claimants as a result of port of entry interviews; issues of accountability in terms of the behaviour of CBSA officials and the lack of recourse and channels for complaints; the use of notes from the interview and the often negative effect on the claimant's outcome; the presence of CSIS officials during interviews; the appropriateness of questions asked; misinformation provided by CBSA officers.

These presentations were followed by a discussion and question and answer period. It was felt that there was a gap between the CBSA policy and practice, and that this required legislative change. Ms. McLetchie stated that CBSA would look into issues regarding interpreters and legal

aid and relay concerns to the “operations division”, and would be in touch with the CCR about who should be contacted to file complaints.

Resource Persons:

Sharon McLetchie, Traveller Border Programs Directorate, CBSA, Ottawa
Julie Chamagne, Halifax Refugee Clinic
Maude Côté, Action Réfugiés Montréal
Sister Judith Carroll, Casa El Norte, Fort Erie
Sister Deborah Isaacs, MOSAIC, Vancouver
Louis Century, intern at CCR and Sojourn House

Challenges for Tamil Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

This workshop examined the impact of the Sri Lankan civil war on Tamils internally displaced and refugees in neighbouring countries. Aspects covered included Canadian overseas processing of Tamil refugees and the role of human rights and refugee advocates in relation to Tamil refugees and internally displaced people.

Resource people presented on the current situation of Tamil refugees, including the Tamil refugees landing in Australia and Indonesia. Issues of admissibility because of links between Tamil refugee claimants and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were discussed, and concerns over biases of visa officers were explored. Issues surrounding the processing of Tamil cases were raised, and the need for countries such as Canada to push for an independent review of recent events in Sri Lanka was underlined.

The conclusions of the workshop were that the CCR and other interested groups should demand from the government accountability of visa offices, and that there needs to be better training of visa officers. It was agreed that there should be a way to override bad case decisions by National Headquarters, and that there needs to be an inexpensive mechanism to dispute “bad” decisions. It was also stated that the recommendations from the International Crisis Group report should be adopted. More generally, it was agreed that strategies need to be found to raise the issues of Tamil refugees in a public way.

Resource Persons:

Anitta Satkunarajah, Canadian Hart
Sri-Guggan Sri-Skanda-Rajah, Urban Alliance of Race Relations of Toronto
Raoul Boulakia, lawyer

Moderators: Gloria Nafziger and Alexandra Kotyk

Post Secondary Education Access Challenges

This workshop discussed the challenges faced by youth in accessing post-secondary education, with a particular focus on the integration of new immigrant and refugee youth living in disadvantaged, high-risk communities. Issues of focus included poverty, lack of educational attainment, and a lack of labour market integration among recent immigrant youth.

Ihab El Mlafi shared his personal experience regarding his struggles to access post-secondary education in Canada.

Jai Sahak shared his experience working with non-status youth in Canada, discussing barriers faced by non-status youth in Ontario. He explored the way Canada “creates” non-status people and the challenges faced by them. He also discussed the laws that are pertinent for non-status pupils.

Resource persons:

Ihab El Mlafi, SISO, Hamilton

Jai Sahak, Master’s Degree in Immigration and Settlement Studies, Ryerson University

Moderators: Oana Grigorescu and Jennifer Rajasekar

Challenges Relating to Identity Affecting Somali Newcomers

Somalis have long faced particular challenges because of the absence or perceived inadequacy of their identity documents. This workshop looked at some current challenges and explored how the CCR could work with the Somali communities to address them.

Presenters discussed the problematic issue of lack of identity documents for Somali newcomers and the impact of requests for DNA on family sponsorships. Strategies were discussed for forging trust between the Somali community, CCR and decision-makers.

Some conclusions of the workshop were that the legislated definition of family should be changed to be equal to family law definition, and that follow-up should be done on what happens to DNA samples provided for family sponsorship testing, after the testing has been carried out.

Participants were also interested in seeing CIC held accountable for the discriminatory demands for DNA of Somali applicants. Follow-up on this issue was recommended in the form of information gathering on the economic and human costs of demanding DNA and the link between racial profiling and DNA requests. At the provincial level it was suggested that an information kit be created on how to change erroneous ages on ID in order to access benefits such as old age security, driver’s license, etc. It was also suggested that immigration officials be given information on why refugees sometimes have incorrect dates of birth on the identification.

Resource persons:

Mohamed Abdurahman, Catholic Immigration Centre, Ottawa

Sadiya Noor, Midaynta, Toronto

Chantal Tie, South Ottawa Community Legal Services

Moderators: Gloria Nafziger and David Celis

Raising the NGO Voice Internationally

This workshop focused on the opportunities for effective Canadian NGO input and involvement in international fora relating to refugees, in particular the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Refugees (ATCR) and the UNHCR Executive Committee (EXCOM) process. Participants will also hear a report on an ATCR twinning project undertaken by CCR last year with NGOs in Brazil.

Patricia Atkinson gave an overview of government participation in UNHCR meetings. CIC, CBSA, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada and CIDA are all organizations which participate. She stated that the government of Canada feels that the NGO perspective is important and would like NGO participation in the meetings.

Carolina Gajardo presented on the twinning project that was initiated with NGOs in Brazil to foster an exchange of best practices knowledge. Participants broke into groups to discuss the ATCR and consultation between the UNHCR and NGOs.

Ideas were gathered on recruiting interested people who can participate in these dialogues as members of the CCR.

The following issues were recommended for raising by Canadian NGOs:

- That the Canadian government and private groups increase the numbers of resettled refugees;
- That the strategic direction for global resettlement take into consideration geographic equities.

Finally, interest was shown in reviving the CCR's international affairs committee, and recruitment of potential members was suggested.

Resource persons:

Patricia Atkinson, Foreign Affairs Canada
Carolina Gajardo, COSTI
Elizabeth McWeeny, Past President, CCR

Moderator: Fikre Tsehai

Bill C-11: an Anti-Oppression Analysis

Bill C-11, if adopted, will significantly change the rules for people making a refugee claim in Canada. This workshop explored whether aspects of the bill as tabled might disadvantage particular groups or categories of claimants.

This popular session provided information on the impact of Bill C-11 on LGBTQ refugees, women, and children, and discussed the intersection of these oppressions. The panel also included an anti-racist analysis. The presenters focused on problematic stipulations of the bill: interviews within eight days of arrival; hearings within sixty days; the lack of access to

humanitarian and compassionate grounds applications, and the safe country list. [NB subsequent to the session, the bill was amended in some important ways.]

Resource persons:

Loly Rico, FCJ Refugee Centre, Toronto

Edward Lee, AGIR

Leo Zuniga, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, Toronto.

Moderators: Amy Casipullai and Jacquie Rumiel

Equitable Access to Services

Equitable service access for refugees and immigrants is a long-standing concern of the CCR. This workshop gave participants the opportunity to look at new viewpoints and consider current concerns. Panellists shared their experiences of the challenges of obtaining French-language services outside of Quebec, a client-centred and inclusive service model, services for LGBTQ refugees and immigrants, and the challenges of building equity in service access for people without status.

Presenters in this session looked at a case management approach to services, involving multidisciplinary partnerships including “mainstream” organizations. Georges Bahaya discussed increasing recognition and development of services for French-speaking Albertan residents regardless of status.

Ontario’s Local Immigration partnerships (LIPs) was brought up as an opportunity for planning and services for non-status people, and concerns were raised regarding the increase in policing and racial profiling of Caribbeans and Latin Americans in Toronto.

Resource persons:

Georges Bahaya, Centre d’accueil et d’établissement, Edmonton

Aurelio M. Danto, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc., Winnipeg

Loly Rico, FCJ Refugee Centre, Toronto

Moderators: Sylvie Laurion and Debbie Douglas

Eritrea

Participants in this workshop heard about some of the challenges faced by Eritrean refugees outside Canada. These include numerous difficulties accessing protection in countries of asylum, and the impact of Canadian inadmissibility provisions.

Michael Casasola gave the UNHCR perspective, addressing obstacles and issues facing Eritrean refugees in Eastern Africa. Aaron Berhane spoke about his own experience of fleeing Eritrea and the repression of journalists and political activists both in Eritrea and after they have fled to neighbouring countries. He also talked about the experiences of oppression of Eritreans in Canada by agents of the Eritrean government here. Catherine Bruce explored the issue of

exclusion and inadmissibility to Canada for Eritreans who have been supporters of organizations engaged in the liberation struggle.

Presenters and participants at this workshop felt that steps should be taken to acknowledge and identify the agents of persecution from the Eritrean government in Canada who are harassing and threatening Eritreans in Canada who speak out against the regime.

Recommended resources:

“*From Liberation to Limbo*”, CCR report available here:
http://ccrweb.ca/files/From_Liberation_to_Limbo.pdf

Resource Persons:

Aaron Berhane, award winning journalist
Catherine Bruce, immigrant and refugee Lawyer, Toronto
Michael Casasola, UNHCR

Moderators: Julie Chamagne and Gilbert Iyamuremye

Making Refugee Rights a Public Issue: Strategizing for the Future

Workshop participants heard about a suggested strategy for promoting refugee rights in Canada based on a public opinion survey conducted for the CCR. This session was principally geared towards strategizing on communications to influence public opinion in favor of refugees.

A PowerPoint presentation was made on the findings of a communications firm. This was followed by small group discussion.

The outcomes of the workshop included a long list of suggestions, including the recommendation that there be an ad hoc expert communications group within the CCR to ensure development and promotion of the communications strategy, including social media tools.

Facilitators:

Gloria Nafziger, Amnesty International
Rick Goldman, Committee to Aid Refugees
Wanda Yamamoto, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council and CCR President