



**Canadian Council for Refugees Fall 2009 Consultation
“Building Welcoming Communities”
3-5 December 2009, Windsor
Conference Report**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Council for Refugees’ 2009 Fall Consultation was held 3-5 December at Caesar’s hotel in Windsor, Ontario. The Consultation was a success on many levels, including attendance, content, refugee participation, bilingualism and outcomes. The Consultation also successfully met its objectives of providing a unique opportunity for information-exchange, networking, strategy development and discussion. Over 350 participants from across Canada attended the Consultation, with both Francophone and Anglophone participants. Reflecting the focus on settlement issues, the theme of the Consultation was “Building Welcoming Communities”. The Government of Canada provided funding to support the parts of the Consultation related to settlement and integration.

Participants at the Windsor 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.

The Canadian Council for Refugees also organized a National Forum on Trafficking that took place 2-3 December in Windsor, and attracted people from across Canada. This allowed for those concerned about human trafficking to participate in the consultation and for settlement service providers to familiarize themselves with various aspects of this important issue.

The 2009 Fall Consultation addressed newcomer and community needs by providing a space for a wide range of stakeholders, including newcomers themselves, to meet and discuss priority issues and service gaps, leading to the development of strategies and concerted actions, as identified by participants themselves.

33 sessions were offered during the three days of the consultation, consisting of three plenary sessions, three working group meetings, 19 workshops and training sessions, 5 caucuses and the Annual General Meeting. The program included three or four concurrent workshops in any given time period, apart from the times when participants met in plenary. Workshop streams focused on (a) immigrant and refugee settlement and integration, (b) refugee resettlement and (c) refugee protection. Simultaneous translation between English and French was available in all plenary sessions, and half of the workshops, facilitating participation in both official languages. In each session time was allotted for question and answer periods or for breaking into small groups for discussion in order to allow for the inclusion and participation of all those attending.

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.

Workshop topics were chosen during the CCR's September Working Group meetings, in which participants identified topics that responded to current needs, and selected volunteers to plan the workshops. The resource persons chosen to speak at Consultation sessions represented different perspectives: service providers, refugee advocates, government, lawyers, youth, refugees, labour, academics, etc. They were chosen by taking into consideration different factors: participation of refugees, immigrants and people from racialized communities; gender balance; regional diversity; balance between English and French speakers; representation of local resource people; a youth perspective, and experience and knowledge of the issues.

The Working Group meetings held during the Consultation gave participants the opportunity to discuss emerging issues and share information, best practices and initiatives with others from across Canada. They also offered an opportunity to prepare resolutions to be presented at the Annual General Meeting, and to develop strategies for action to address issues emerging from the discussion. Gender-based and anti-racist perspectives were included in discussions about the direction of future work.

Participants' oral and written evaluations were overall extremely positive. Participants appreciated the networking opportunities offered by the Consultation, the diversity of participants, the good organization, the content of the workshops, the quality of presentations and the bilingualism of the event.

The success of the Consultation was made possible thanks to the hard work of the local organizing committee, made up of staff, volunteers and Board members from the New Canadian's Centre for Excellence, Inc., as well as several other Windsor based settlement organizations including the Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County, YMCA, and Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women. Participants were also very fortunate to be welcomed by a wonderful team of more than 50 volunteers, who created a friendly atmosphere throughout the event.

II. SUMMARY OF THE PLENARY DISCUSSIONS

Opening plenary

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

Deborah Tunis, Director General, Integration, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, gave a presentation on the consultation theme, *Building Welcoming Communities*. She highlighted CIC's commitment to building welcoming communities and programs that serve this objective. She underlined the importance of the two-way approach to integration and of strengthening partnerships. She argued that to continue to build welcoming communities, we need better understanding, new partnerships, innovative approaches and demonstrated results.

Naomi Minwalla, lawyer, Vancouver, made a presentation as part of the Trafficking Forum. Next to arms and drugs trafficking, human trafficking is the third most lucrative crime in the world. Canadian legislation does not offer protection to trafficked persons, nor are services in place to assist them. A trafficking policy framework should include the 3 Ps: Prevention, Protection and Prosecution. Trafficking is a complex community issue requiring a community response. Government cannot take on the issue alone. This means the trafficking policy framework needs a 4th P: Partnership. Government and the community must work in collaboration in order to achieve prevention, protection and prosecution.

CCR President Elizabeth McWeeny reviewed recent Canadian policy developments affecting refugee claimants and noted the government's plan to introduce legislation to reform the refugee determination system. She regretted the fact that the NGO sector has not been consulted on proposed new directions. The extremely negative public rhetoric that has vilified asylum seekers is completely unfair and has been very damaging. Another recent development is the publication of proposed changes to the Temporary Foreign Workers Program. The CCR has made comments on the proposal, regretting the failure to question the basic policy of relying on temporary migration to fill employers' demands for labour. Because of their lack of permanent status, Temporary Foreign Workers are in a vulnerable situation and their rights are not fully protected.

Moderators: Shelley Gilbert, Legal Assistance of Windsor, and Georges Bahaya, Centre d'accueil et d'établissement d'Edmonton

Thursday evening plenary session: Building Welcoming Communities

Debbie Douglas, Executive Director, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), spoke about the particularly harsh impact of the economic crisis on immigrants, refugees and members of racialized communities. It is important to bring a racial justice approach to this issue, although we face resistance from some quarters. There is an urgent need for government engagement with employers to change the unwelcoming labour market in Canada. The government needs to work with employers through education programs, through incentives and through enforcement. With respect to public opinion, the government needs to be exemplary itself and undertake public education. It should recognize and promote the engagement of new Canadians as co-architects of this country and its future. The success of our immigration

program depends on the actual fairness of how we treat refugees and select, settle and foster the integration of immigrants. In this context we urgently need to shift away from the dramatic growth in the Temporary Foreign Workers program.

Audrey Macklin, Professor of Law, University of Toronto, began by exploring the way in which refugees are being made to disappear in discourse as a prelude to making them actually disappear from our midst. Once we have been encouraged to think that claimants are not refugees, but economic migrants or abusers, we easily accept new measures that prevent them from arriving. Secondly, she presented a recent article from the Toronto Star about education challenges relating Roma refugee children. This can be seen as a positive example of how to address issues: it recognizes the refugee realities, without shying away from the integration challenges. The article accepts that things are complicated and avoids facile answers. Finally, she reflected on the pros and cons of identifying people closely with their legal category of entry. On the one hand, it is important to remind the public of the distinctiveness of refugee status and experience. On the other hand, it is important that people not be reduced to their status (or lack of status): we need to be aware that non-citizens are “whole” people, not just workers, or refugees, or members of the Family Class.

The evening concluded with a time of appreciation and thanks for Elizabeth McWeeny, who was completing her four years as CCR President.

Moderators: Roberto Jovel, CCR Vice-President and Lisa Wyndels, CCR Secretary

Developing CCR policy – Plenary session

This session provided members with guidance about how to contribute effectively to CCR policy development. In particular, members were provided with a checklist for reviewing resolutions and given an opportunity to practise using the checklist by applying it to some previously adopted resolutions.

Moderators: Lisa Wyndels and Gloria Nafziger, CCR Executive Committee

Annual General Meeting

The Consultation concluded with the CCR Annual General Meeting. Elections were held for the Executive Committee. Wanda Yamamoto was elected as President. Three resolutions were adopted. The resolutions can be found at <http://www.ccrweb.ca/documents/resdec09.htm>

III. SYNTHESIS OF WORKSHOPS

Migrant workers

In recent years, the number of people in Canada as temporary foreign workers has more than doubled. This workshop looked at the impact of temporary migration on the Windsor community and on Canada as a whole.

Rene Vidal made a presentation on the situation of migrant workers in South-western Ontario and the myriad issues they face in their work environment. He also spoke about the importance of assistance in basic needs provision. He introduced the Leamington migrant worker support program where he works.

Tanya Basok gave a broad overview of the recent trends in migration to Canada, including the prevalence of temporary migration over permanent immigration. She articulated problems associated with temporary work for migrants, such as:

- Enforcement of the temporary migrant worker program's provisions for the defence of workers' rights and labour conditions.
- Barriers that workers face, such as access to services, knowledge of rights, etc.
- Powerlessness to complain about bad conditions due to oppression by employer and threat of being sent home.

The human rights perspective of UN treaties was also discussed as it is applicable to the increase in promotion of temporary migrant labour.

Recommendations were made during the workshop for the following day's Immigration and Settlement Working Group. It was suggested that a resolution be created regarding the recent changes to the temporary worker program by the Minister of immigration, to be adopted as CCR policy.

It was also recommended that there be a process of dialogue with employers in order to gather recommendations for a program of outreach and education for employers of temporary migrant workers.

Resource persons:

Rene Vidal, Agricultural Worker Alliance Support Centre, Leamington

Tanya Basok, Director, Centre for Studies in Social Justice, Windsor

Roberto Jovel, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Toronto

Moderators: Georges Bahaya, Centre d'accueil et d'établissement, Edmonton and Shelley Gilbert, Legal Assistance of Windsor

The Border: Protection Issues for Refugee Claimants

Recent government restrictions at the U.S. border directed at persons seeking Canada's protection have added new difficulties, challenges and dangers. Potential future measures also cause concern. This workshop presented the view from front-line agencies serving refugee claimants on both sides of the border.

Presentations in this workshop included reports from Detroit, Buffalo and Windsor. The presenters outlined various issues faced by refugee claimants at the border, such as the lack of counselling services, the requests for DNA testing now being made by the government, the inconsistency in Canada Border Services Agency officers' behaviour and attitudes (including reports of rude or insulting behaviour, and arbitrary decisions regarding eligibility of claims), and rejections of sworn evidence. The point was made that nowhere in the law does it say that documents must be produced to prove credibility. The lack of consistency in treatment by CBSA leads people to seek more dangerous options. It was recommended that the UNHCR handbook should be a guide for CBSA.

All participants were encouraged to add information about trends and problems they had observed, and then consider ideas for new initiatives and actions. This was a fruitful workshop that resulted in several recommendations, including suggestions for:

- CCR to advocate for point of entry interviews to be audio-taped
- The CCR legal affairs committee to revisit the Deghani case and consider legal action regarding the right to counsel at point of entry interviews
- The possibility of writing a report on CBSA (mis)handling of interviews should be considered, with recommendations as to the establishment of a protocol
- Participants should be encouraged to document incidents at points of entry on the border – these should be as detailed as possible to show systemic problems. These should be sent to the CCR office, to be used to substantiate the report/submission to the CBSA
- The same standards as are applied to the IRB model of interviewing should be applied to interviews at the border.
- The CCR resolution regarding DNA testing should be referred to.
- The rejection of sworn evidence must be contested, highlighting the fact that this type of evidence is used both in courts and refugee hearings.

Resource persons:

Peter Murrett, Vive la Casa, Buffalo

Deb Drennan, Freedom House, Detroit

Sr Helen Petrimoulx, Diocese of London Ministry to Refugee Claimants

Heather Mantle, Matthew House, Windsor

Hy Shelow, UNHCR, Ottawa (respondent)

Moderator: Rivka Auginfeld

Two-tier citizenship

This session consisted of a debate about the Canadian government's failure to consistently protect its citizens traveling abroad.

This workshop included presentations on a disturbing rise in failures by the Canadian government to protect its citizens while they are abroad, since 9-11. The workshop highlighted the disproportionate number of non-Caucasian Canadians affected by these failures.

Abdullah Al Malki was supposed to present in this workshop but was unable to travel to Windsor as planned when Air Canada prohibited him from flying, citing the fact that he is on the U.S. no-fly list, and that the plane from Toronto to Windsor flies over U.S. territory. This restriction on Al Malki's travel provided fodder for the discussion, and was a timely reminder of the realities of two-tier citizenship in Canada.

The conclusions of this workshop were that public safety should not trump human rights, citing that there can be no real security without human rights. Participants also emphasized that citizens must continue to demand accountability of their government. It was also concluded that the position of the Canadian government that it will not accept that torture has occurred unless there is independent corroboration of the victims of rendition is unacceptable and could amount to re-victimization of victims of rendition.

Resource persons:

Emily Carasco, Faculty of Law, University of Windsor
Hasnubja Jaladjic, Faculty of Law, University of Windsor
Yasminka Kalajdzic, Faculty of Law, University of Windsor

Moderators: Anne-Marie Kabongo and Paul D. Ocheje, Faculty of Law, University of Windsor

Busting myths about refugees and immigrants

This workshop highlighted local strategies to bust myths about refugees and immigrants, specifically local advocacy networks that have developed to work together to educate the public. After hearing about several examples from across Canada, participants created a plan to encourage organizations in other communities to gather allies and build similar local advocacy/public education coalitions and strategies.

Following presentations, workshop participants were divided into small groups and asked to reflect on a series of questions (provided below with some of the responses).

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the myth-busting strategies presented?

Strengths:

- organized groups
- collaboration
- youth involvement

- (public) education aspect
- Diversity of groups
- Strength of partnerships
- Variety of channels (including ethnic groups)
- Involving newcomers themselves
- Showing real situations

Weaknesses:

- Need to focus on accomplishments of newcomers
- Maintaining momentum, sustainability and continuity
- Problems of seniors overlooked
- More challenges in larger cities with many more groups
- Need for more communication about these ideas
- Lack of resources, time, space, funds

2. What ideas do you want to take home?

- Storytelling
- Exhibits
- “24-hour exile” to be included in curriculum
- Computer/video game of 24-hour exile (CIC funding?)
- Work in partnerships with local arts councils
- Ambassadors come from communities, not from agencies

3. How can CCR members and allies better share ideas to build coalitions? What recommendations do you have for CCR?

- Online resource database; need to be able to link and share materials from across the country
- Travelling exhibit
- Make the multimedia exhibit “Sous le bleu du ciel” widely available
- Need to fundraise for public education work; how can groups get funding for these kinds of projects? Need CCR assistance for this
- CCR should advocate for federal government to promote positive messages about refugees and immigrants
- Translate some of these materials in languages other than English or French?
- CCR needs to expand messages to mainstream organizations (outside of traditional allies); extend CCR invitations to other organizations (teachers, nurses, etc.)
- CCR can be promoted at other national conferences.
- CCR needs to travel to the West (e.g. CCR president travels); needs to be mobile.
- Include these resources in curricula.

The outcomes of workshop included a resolution on “migration curriculum” to encourage provincial Ministries of Education and other groups to integrate context on the lived experiences of refugees and immigrants into school curricula. In addition, many workshop participants were interested in establishing a resource database to exchange ideas and best practices for promoting positive messages about refugees and immigrants in local communities.

Resource persons:

Sylvain Thibault, Mission communautaire de Montréal

Noëlle DePape, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba, Inc. (IRCOM), Winnipeg

Mary Fiakpui and Daniet Kidane, Strategic Alliance for the Advancement of Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth, Edmonton

Moderator: Helen Smith-McIntyre, Saskatoon Refugee Coalition

Overseas refugees versus inland refugees

Responding to suggestions that Canada should prefer resettled refugees over those who make claims here, this workshop examined myths and realities about overseas and inland refugees and invited participants to consider ways of working together to keep Canada's doors open to refugees in need of protection.

The workshop outlined the problem with the two refugee streams and the need for the refugee serving community to remain cohesive so that all refugees in need of protection have access to protection, that eligibility myths are debunked, and that decision-making delays and obfuscation are addressed.

The presentations by Fraidoon and Nineveh highlighted the human cost of the problems in the asylum and resettlement streams and the need for solidarity in our response.

A resolution addressing the issues discussed in this session was already passed in May 2009. Some of the outcomes of the workshop were calls for mobilization to vocalize the concerns around Canada's "preference" for overseas refugees. These included:

- Writing to/visiting MPs to make it known that refugees have rights and that undermining rights hurts all refugees.
- Holding letter-writing parties
- Asking Sponsorship agreement holders to write neighbours and ethnic organizations to try to keep unified

Resource persons:

Lisa Wyndels, CCR Executive

Barbara Treviranus

Fraidoon and Nineveh, refugees from Iraq who arrived separately, one as a claimant and the other as a UNHCR referred refugee

Moderators: Heather Macdonald and Susan Ferguson

Applying Anti-Oppression in Your Everyday Work

This session offered popular theatre skits as a means of looking at different ways in which oppression affects immigrants and refugees. Based on the skits, participants were invited to join a conversation on how our everyday practices can be transformed to address the various forms of oppression facing the people that we work for.

The short theatre piece reading addressed issues of difficult topics to address in an open manner in the context of frontline worker/service user interactions. The two case studies looked at different sets of interlocking forms of oppression, including ableism, transphobia, and Islamophobia, among others.

Workshop participants appreciated the opportunity to learn and share, and looked forward to future such opportunities to gain awareness and skills in anti-oppression. There was a strong recommendation that we not focus only on barriers, but consider also power and privilege, and the structures that perpetuate them.

Resource persons:

Stephanie Lyanga, Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County

Mary Pam Vincer, COSTI

Moderators: Roberto Jovel and Yasmine Dossal

Access to post-secondary education for youth

This workshop highlighted strategies and programs to help newcomer youth pursue postsecondary education, taking into consideration financial, language and educational recognition barriers they face. What services and programs are available locally? What is still needed? How can we work together at a national level to address these needs?

Participants in the workshop broke into smaller discussion groups to share knowledge and ideas on the programs that should be focused on in each of these categories, the gaps that exist in addressing these barriers, and ideas for what can be done to address the issues at the national level, despite the fact that education is a provincial jurisdiction. Here is a synopsis of some of the ideas that came up:

Language barriers

- Programs
 - ESL/LINC
 - Enhanced language training
 - OSAP
 - University partnerships
- Gaps
 - Access for refugee claimants
 - After school hours for programs
 - Specific programs lacking in some communities

- No OSAP or bursaries for claimants
- Professional training
- National level
 - Access to programs

Financial barriers

- Programs
 - More scholarships
 - Settlement organizations could offer bursaries or scholarships to clients who don't qualify for other opportunities
- Gaps
 - Social gaps (lack of cultural knowledge – e.g. hesitance to take out loans because of different perceptions of usury)
 - Age limitation – there should be more opportunities made available to adults
 - Many newcomers avoid loans for fear of debt and inability to help their parents and themselves later on.
 - Refugee claimants pay international student fees and cannot get access to loans or bursaries
 - Education is provincial but programs for newcomer youth access to education should work at the national level

(Lack of) Recognition of educational attainments as a barrier

- Some newcomers are sent back to finish high school and not allowed to do post-secondary education even though high school was already completed.
- Best practices should be collected from the different provinces in order to have a learning exchange on this issue.

Resource person:

Gudelia Morency, Student Access and Success Project Coordinator, Hamilton

Moderators: Steven Rempel and Oana Grigorescu

Drafting a Code of Ethics: Participatory Workshop for Sponsoring Groups

What ethical principles should guide sponsors in their interactions with the people they have agreed to assist? This participatory workshop invited participants, working in small groups, to review draft ethical principles for sponsors and to identify some of the important applications for different kinds of sponsorship groups. The workshop was intended to contribute to the efforts of the CCR to produce a resource document for sponsoring organizations.

This workshop provided participants with an opportunity to discuss and “test” the draft code of ethics developed by the CCR. Participants were asked:

- 1) Are the preamble and principles clear and sufficient?
- 2) Is the document with its suggested applications useful in the context in which you work?
Can you imagine other applications?

It was agreed that after suggestions have been reviewed and the draft “tweaked”, it should be circulated among those who wish to give it another look, and then posted on the website or circulated on the listserv – or both – for the membership at large, as a tool for sponsoring groups.

Resource persons:

Asni Mekonnen, WUSC, Ottawa

Elaine Harder, Mennonite Central Committee, Saskatoon

Heather Macdonald, co-chair, Overseas Protection and Sponsorship Working Group

Moderator: Mary Purkey

Determining the best interests of the child

This training workshop focused on how to conduct Best Interest Determinations for separated children. Recommended guidelines and tips were provided for implementing best interest assessments and determinations based on programmatic experience with separated children in the United States.

Liz McWeeny gave an overview of CCR initiatives to date with regards to best interests of the child. She outlined the gaps that still require attention, and highlighted the need to develop tools to determine the best interests of the child in Canada.

The presenters gave an overview of the UNHCR guidelines on best interests of the child, and the different steps in the determination procedure. The fundamental principles in determining the best interests are based on permanency, safety and well-being of the child.

During the course of the workshop a UNHCR document called the “heightened risk identification tool”, was identified as a useful tool, and it was agreed that education is highly needed with children’s services regarding best interest determination. It was proposed that a resolution on this be tabled.

The HBO film “Which Way Home?” which shows the difficulties faced by children on the migration route, was recommended by the resource persons.

The question was asked of whose mandate it is in Canada to ensure the best interests of the child – whether this is a federal or provincial jurisdiction, or both. It was concluded that Canada needs to have national legislation outlining the responsibilities and identifying the key stakeholders.

Resource persons:

Nathalie Lummert, Associate Director, Children’s Services Migration and Refugee Services,
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Hilary Chester, Assistant Director, Family Reunification Migration and Refugee Services,
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops

Liz McWeeny, CCR President

Moderator: Fikre Tsehai

When Home is Not a Haven: Domestic Violence and Refugee Women

This workshop provided an overview of the complex issue of how violence may impact refugee women prior to, and after their arrival in Canada. It also offered information about web-based and community resources that service providers can use to enhance their own knowledge about domestic violence, and share with refugee women and families.

The role of service providers was discussed, and a handout with a case study scenario was distributed to participants to be discussed. A handout with different resources on domestic violence was also distributed.

The outcome of the workshop was the recommendation of an action item for the CCR to create a working group to bring forward migrant and refugee women's issues with regards to violence against women. This recommendation was later accepted in the Immigration and Settlement working group meeting.

Resource persons:

Farishta Murzban Dinshaw, COSTI Immigrant Services, Family and Mental Health Centre
Aline Beaulieu, Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County, Windsor

Moderators: Shashi Assanand, Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services

Rita Acosta, Mouvement contre le viol et l'inceste, Montréal

Are You Missing Anything?: Creating Safe, Welcoming Spaces to Enhance Service Provision to LGBTQ

This workshop presented results of research on the realities of LGBTQ refugees in Canada, as well as tools that can assist service providers in responding to LGBTQ newcomers.

First, researcher Ed Lee presented his initial findings from "LGBTQ Refugees in Canada: Exploring Intersections of Sexual, Gender and Cultural Diversity". The presentation included a summary of methodologies, personal statements and a draft version of a community zine.

In the second part, Annemarie Shrouder and Stacia Stewart facilitated segments of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) new training on creating Positive Spaces for LGBTQ newcomers in Ontario, which examines the lived realities and issues impacting LGBTQ newcomers in Ontario. Participants were able to carry out 2-3 facilitated exercises with an opportunity to provide OCASI with feedback on the exercises. The exercises used in the workshop included definitions of key terms and concepts and determining the building blocks needed to build Positive Spaces in immigrant and refugee serving agencies.

Participants responded very positively to the training. They requested to be notified when the trainings were completed, and requested further training on these issues throughout Ontario for all settlement services. Participants from outside of Ontario requested that OCASI consider

sharing these trainings with other provinces. Also, participants requested to be informed when the final research being carried out by Ed Lee is completed and the zines are distributed.

Resource persons:

Ed Lee, researcher, Montreal

Annemarie Shrouder, Building Equitable Environments, Toronto

Stacia Stewart, OCASI - Positive Spaces Initiative, Toronto

Core principles of refugee determination

This workshop helped participants understand the essential principles of refugee protection as articulated in international human rights law. These principles were then used to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the current Canadian system and potential changes to that system.

After the presentations by Hy Shylow, Naomi Minwalla and Heather Neufeld, there was a discussion on CCR advocacy in terms of Canadian refugee protection, and a question and answer session.

Recommendations were made for advocacy for an ombudsperson for complaints about CIC (including visa posts) and CBSA. It was also suggested that in the interest of consistency, training sessions on the principles of protection be replicated for government agency employees across Canada, and that an audio-recording be made of every CIC-CBSA-visa office interview.

Resource persons:

Naomi Minwalla, Vancouver lawyer

Hy Shylow, UNHCR, Ottawa

Heather Neufeld, South Ottawa Community Legal Services

Moderators: Gloria Nafziger and Eunice Valenzuela

Iraqi Refugees

This workshop focused on the present situation of Iraqi refugees and developments since the 2007 CCR Call to Action. Using footage from Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy's film "The Lost Generation" and others, participants were able to see and hear the realities of Iraqi refugees. There was also an update on the Canadian government's response to the crisis.

Numerous topics for action items were brought to the table in this workshop. Some recommendations included:

- Processing of Privately Sponsored Refugee applications should be sped up but not at the expense of other PSR applications.
- The limit for Sponsorship Agreement Holders should be increased to allow for more undertakings.

- Youth participants proposed that high school students be exposed to the realities of youth refugees overseas. It was proposed that videos such as the one presented be used.
- CIDA aid to Syria, Jordan, etc. should be increased
- Settlement services need to be ready to deal with increased medical (physical and psychological) needs. There should be federal-provincial collaboration on this. Funding for these agencies should be increased

Resource persons:

Louis Azzaria, Secretary / Treasurer, The Good Samaritan Relief Fund

Derek Künsken, Refugees Branch, CIC

Moderator: Glynis Williams

Gender and poverty

Statistics show that women experience higher rates and deeper depths of poverty than men, and that members of racialized communities are over-represented among the poor. Of these, refugee and immigrant women are particularly disadvantaged. The panelists discussed the intersection of gender and poverty and its impact on this population, and shared local experiences and strategies to respond.

Resource persons looked closely at the situation of racialized immigrant and refugee women in their respective regions and described various initiatives that local networks or organizations have undertaken to respond to this trend.

Aside from the fruitful discussion and sharing of experiences around this issue, workshop participants supported the idea of a CCR ad hoc group to work on issue of violence against refugee and immigrant women.

Resource persons:

Marisa Rojas, Multicultural Association of Fredericton

Sungee John, Colour of Poverty, Windsor-Essex

Moderator: Afua Marcus, OCASI, Toronto

Update on Somalia

This workshop focused on various refugee protection issues faced by Somali refugees. It looked into the protracted situations of Somali refugees in Kenya, escape from Somalia across the Gulf of Aden and the questionable practice of deportation to Somalia.

A presentation was made on the protracted refugee situation in Kenya. This included an overview of the magnitude of the situation that currently sees 200,000-300,000 refugees living in Kenya. Some of the contributing factors to the protracted nature of Somali refugees include the political insecurity in the country that has been a reality for almost two decades, and the

encampment policy of the Kenyan government. Effects on the population of this protracted refugee situation were listed, including social and economic deprivation (as refugees are dependent on rations), and inadequate resources to cover basic needs (which leads to donor fatigue and a population that is dependent on aid agencies as well as being vulnerable to sexual and physical violence). Another effect is depersonalization, where the refugee becomes an object that is assisted by aid agencies, and is no longer seen as a productive individual. Solutions to the situation were identified as being local integration and resettlement, and it was agreed that the encampment policy must not continue. It was also concluded that aid must be linked to development.

The second presentation looked at the situation of Somali refugees in Yemen. The lengths that individuals will go to in order to take the journey across the Gulf of Aden to arrive in Yemen were identified – many of those who embark on the journey do not arrive. The problem has been intensified, with a 70% increase from 2007 to 2008 in the number of individuals who cross the gulf from Bosaso, Somalia to Aden, Yemen. 95% of refugees currently in Yemen are Somali, with a smaller group composed of Ethiopians, Eritreans and Iraqis, and the resettlement rate out of Yemen is very low, with only about 200 Somalis given UNHCR and resettlement country capacity. The point was made that it is necessary to bring more attention to the situation – in order to educate people on the situation, and ultimately to increase resettlement. The presentation highlighted the traumatic experiences of Somali refugees that crossed the Gulf of Aden, and how their needs remained unmet.

The final presentation was on the deportation of Somalis to Puntland, Somaliland and Mogadishu. It was explained that individuals, and particularly youth involved in crime are being deported back to Somalia. One individual in particular was deported and a few weeks later was killed in Somalia. Most of the people affected by these deportations are young people who have been in Canada since they were small children, who then get involved in crime as adolescents. They are then deported since they are not citizens. Most of these people do not speak Somali and have little knowledge of the culture – they are Canadian in every sense but the legal sense. The point was made that a solution to this problem needs to be found, and that by deporting youth because of their involvement in crime or consideration of them as a security risk, Canada is creating a fertile group for terrorist organizations to recruit and thereby become a threat to international security.

A fruitful discussion and question and answer period followed the presentations, during which many issues were highlighted. The question of risk to youth was brought up, and it was indicated that there is a larger problem to be addressed concerning why immigrant and refugee youth are turning to gangs and criminal activity. The point was brought up that most youth are not even aware of the process to gain citizenship in Canada: this is mostly dealt with by their parents. Where parents do not seek citizenship for them and they get in trouble with the law, they may risk being deported.

The outcomes of the workshop included one action item, which was to re-emphasize the resolution already passed by the CCR to add Somalia to the list of moratorium countries in subsequent meetings and communications with Canadian government officials. It was also agreed that a more concerted campaign would be put together on Somalia in regard to the various

issues and recommendations raised in the meeting, and a group of volunteers signed up to work together with the CCR office on this campaign.

Other ideas discussed and recommendations were:

- Increase resettlement out of Yemen
- Increase resources to the protracted situations, both to the UNHCR for relief efforts as well as for development activities.
- Address the broader issue of Canada removing people, since adding Somalia to the moratorium list would not help those with criminal records.
- Request the Canadian government to increase global resettlement targets and respond to the situation of the Somali refugee crisis.

There were many proposed future workshop ideas linked to this topic including a workshop on the causes of alienation and criminality, not only for Somalis but other newcomer youth, and a workshop on criminality and deportation.

Resource persons:

Shukria Dini, doctoral candidate, York University

Mahad Yusuf, Executive Director and Abdulkadir Ali, Settlement Worker, Midaynta Community Services, Toronto

Hassan Adan, CultureLink, Toronto

Abdulkadir Ali

Sadiya Noor

Liban Abokor

Moderator: Nicole Desmarais

Effective networking and communication: Using new media

This workshop session was inspired by the present anti-refugee climate in Canada and the CCR's strategy to promote refugee protection. It focused on how to bridge the distance between reality and public opinion using new media techniques. Participants left the session with skills and strategies to implement a CCR campaign in their own community.

A poll was distributed to participants asking how participants had learned of various news story themes such as: "bogus" vs. "real" refugees; the refugee process as "broken" and needing fixing; the suggestion to follow the UK model; temporary foreign workers to be able to get extensions for up to 4 years and then be banned for 6 years, etc. Participants were asked to check off the various news media from which they had learned of these stories, including national newspaper, ethnic community newspaper, other print brochures, reports, newsletters, internet (emails and newsletters), web-based information (listserves, websites), and other sources – radio, friends, and refugees themselves. Most respondents included national press and internet.

Geraldine Sadoway gave a short summary of the serious and relentless attacks on refugees in Canada by the government and the erosion of refugee protection over the past year: visas

imposed on Mexico and the Czech Republic; the canceling of exemptions from Safe Third Country for moratoria countries; the removal of Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia from the moratorium country list; the defeat of the Refugee Appeal Division; new measures to restrict Temporary Foreign Workers, etc.

Colleen French, CCR staff, gave a short slide presentation in French and English on the “Erosion of Refugee Rights” describing the context (government policy and discourse) and CCR campaign, challenges, and resources to address these changes (short films, calls to action, media releases, media articles; website, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter; CCR weblog.

Some observations from the discussion:

- Most participants had not gone beyond the CCR webpage to use the other resources
- Most participants didn’t make use of the media releases done by CCR to send to their own media contacts
- Most participants were not actively using Facebook, Twitter or blogs

Nidhi Tandon then gave presentation on the value of using new media, particularly Facebook. She noted that there are already a number of Facebook sites in Canada against refugees. “Social media” is important: we care about what our friends think and what they are concerned about, and are therefore more likely to sign on to a Facebook action than one sent out to an impersonal listserv. It is important to look at communication as a “wave”, and use different media. Among participants, there was very strong response to new media from younger members including some who had organized and funded a project through new media techniques. The CCR webpage could be easier to use and have more connections to member organizations of CCR. Good websites designed for campaigns include Greenpeace, the Obama presidential campaign website and Moveon.org.

Google Analytics is useful and free tool to tell you how many people read a website. It is important to use what is appropriate for a particular organization (photos, videos, newsletters, websites, etc.). CCR member groups can put a human face on the issues because they are in direct contact with the affected refugees.

The principal outcome of this workshop was that many participants indicated that they were convinced that they need to start using new media more effectively. Considerable interest was expressed in local training sessions for NGOs to do this, and it was suggested that this could take place at the February working group meetings in Toronto. Some challenges identified included getting airtime, as there is so much information out there; collecting “real” stories and sharing them effectively through social media; using CCR resources more effectively, and partnering with tech savvy groups to improve communication techniques.

Resource persons:

Nidhi Tandon, Networked Intelligence for Development
Geraldine Sadoway, Parkdale Community Legal Services

Moderator: Debbie Hill-Corrigan