

REFUGEE UPDATE

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INSIDE:

DOING THE PONTIUS.
BY TOM DENTON
P. 1-2

EDITORIAL: THE SERIOUS LOSS
OF DEMOCRATIC SPACE IN
CANADA
P. 3

THE REFUGEE RESEARCH NET-
WORK AND INSTITUTIONAL
REPOSITORIES
P. 4-5

NATIONAL FORUM:
IMPROVING SERVICES AND
PROTECTION FOR TRAFFICKED
PERSONS. BY MICHELE MILLARD
P. 6-7

AGRICULTURAL MIGRANT
WORKERS IN CANADA.
BY ALFREDO BARAHONA
P. 8

CANADIAN IMMIGRATION SYS-
TEM IS CRUMBLING.
BY CAROLINA TEVES
P. 9-10

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE
BOARD STATISTICS FOR
2009 .
P. 11

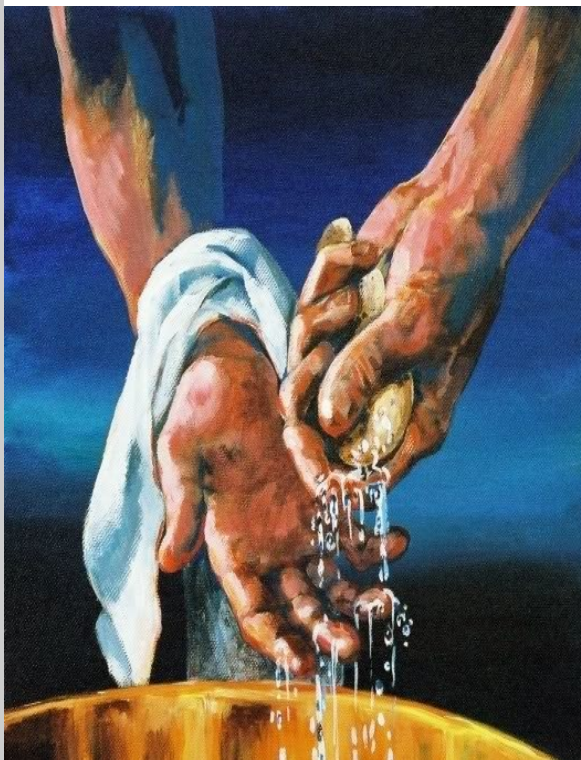
NEW CCR PRESIDENT:
WANDA YAMAMOTO.
P. 12

DOING THE PONTIUS

TOM DENTON

In the Easter season certain Biblical figures come into sharper focus. One of these is Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea who presided over the trial of Jesus.

Pontius Pilate could find no fault in Jesus, but listened to the mob demanding his death, and thus allowed his crucifixion. He called for a basin of water and symbolically washed his hands of the matter.



A minor figure, one that should long ago have been forgotten, through this single incident has become one of history's best remembered; Pontius Pilate's is a name that lives in infamy.

It's that washing-the-hands bit that gets to me. It's an ancient shoulder shrug. Pontius absolved himself of culpability. What else could he do? He had a restive country to govern. Sacrificing one trouble maker was a small matter.

There are days when I feel like Pontius. Through my work I sponsor refugees to come here under Canada's unique program for the private sponsorship of refugees. I get hundreds of email entreaties to be res-

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

cued, horrific stories of persecution and suffering. What can any one person or agency do? I have to say no. Am I washing my hands of the problem? Am I shrugging my shoulders?

It comes down to capacity. I have the will but lack the means. Pontius Pilate had the capacity but not the will, and for this he will be forever condemned. Washing his hands didn't remove his guilt.

When it comes to its treatment of refugees, whether among us or trying to get here, is Canada sometimes "doing the Pontius"? Let's be more specific; are there people with the capacity to decide and to help who have instead washed their hands of the challenge, shrugged their shoulders? Are there Pontius Pilates here?

I don't want to be unfair. Canada has a praiseworthy record of receiving and resettling refugees. Unfortunately the flip side of this coin shows us as also rejecting many. What happens to these as they go on to confront life's little and large crucifixions - like hope destroyed or return to imprisonment, torture and maybe death? If we accept an "official" notion that this is someone else's problem, then are we not Pilate's children, washing our hands?

Rejection rates trouble me, whether they are in-Canada rates applying to refugee claimants or overseas rates applying to privately sponsored refugees.

Here at home, why do rates vary widely between decision makers? Maybe some are more afflicted with the Pontius syndrome than others. And maybe it's just human nature. But if this is the case, why have successive government's refused to implement the statute-authorized Refugee Appeal Decision? Is the opposition of the Department or the Treasury Board so implacable (like the crowd that called for the death of Jesus) that governments of different stripes have to date done a Pontius, shrugging their shoulders and washing their hands?

Overseas there is no appeal from egregious decisions of case processing officers who reject refugees, apart from expensive recourse to convoluted legal processes. How does one explain the refugee processing centre in London, UK, rejecting all 45 of its refugee cases in 2009? It is fair to observe that most of these would not actually have been in the United Kingdom but would have been in other European countries served by this post – countries that by-and-large pay only lip service to their refugee obligations and reject almost everyone. If London is treating these rejections as a *prima facie* reason for doing the same, then we have a clear example of the Pontius Pilate syndrome at work; it's someone else's problem, and hands are washed.

And what about those of us with the legal authority to sponsor refugees here; some of us do a lot, but others do very little. Do we truly lack the capacity or are we letting it be someone else's problem; if the latter, are we doing a Pontius?

There is another Biblical character that still regularly makes the news. He's the Good Samaritan. The phrase has entered our language as a descriptor for one who comes upon and generously and selflessly helps a stranger. Maybe it's time to begin to use "Doing the Pontius" for those who do the opposite, who have the capacity, but who side-step helping because it is someone else's problem, or because, like Pilate they think they have some restive constituency to placate.

The refugee scene seems to have its share of those who are "doing the Pontius".

February 24, 2010

[* Tom Denton is Coordinator of the work of Hospitality House Refugee Ministry in Winnipeg]



THE SERIOUS LOSS OF DEMOCRATIC SPACE IN CANADA

EDITORIAL

Last year was quite a year: CIC funding cuts for agencies that have been critical of the government; CIC cut its funding to the Canadian Arab Federation due to inappropriate accusation of links to “terrorist organizations”; CIDA funding cuts to KAIROS with inaccurate political grandstanding; political interests in appointing directors to Rights and Democracy; CIDA cuts to UNRWA – UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

In Canada we have aimed to create a politically neutral bureaucracy with corresponding decision making. The public interest - what we the people deserve – points in favour of that. The agency best situated to deliver services to refugees should get the CIC funds. The Canadian Arab Federation is uniquely situated with respect to some services for a particular refugee population in Canada but the funding was cut for political reasons. KAIROS should receive funding for its unique partnership relationships with church linked NGOs in countries around the world. Attacking KAIROS as anti-Semitic is absurd. Some could even view KAIROS’ position supporting the right of the population to enjoy an Israeli state as pro Israel! The attack on KAIROS funding has resulted in a loss of human rights funding to KAIROS’ partners around the world. This will play out not just in the everyday lives of farmers in Palestine, but also in Colombia, Mexico, Sudan, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

The shifting of funding for UNRWA from general aid to food aid alone is misguided. Last

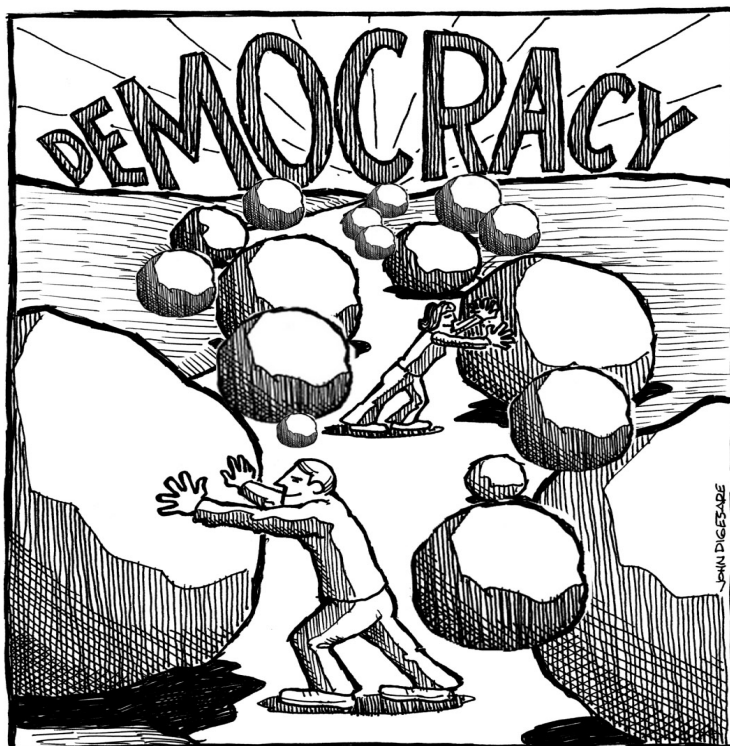
year the US government reported better efforts by UNRWA to insulate itself from possible influence by UN designated terrorist groups. Canada’s shift is hardly encouragement for this effort. We must remember that the UN, of which Canada is a part, retains responsibility for the former British protectorate of Palestine and that the UN created the UNRWA. Despite some legitimate criticism, the UN is made up of the elected and de-facto governments of states comprising the political globe.

With the possible exception of the International Court of Justice, there is no other body which can come close to arguing that it has some kind of balanced position on Israel/Palestine.

The biggest loss in all this is democratic space in Canada. Fear about funding cuts blocks needed feedback to government about the impact of policies and programs. It hurts the ability of those closest to them to speak out on serious human

rights and refugee rights issues. It hurts the ability of international Canadian NGOs to support partners in the Global South working to end poverty and oppression. It makes our parliamentary democracy look absurd when a minority government can impose its political view on Canada’s long established and balanced foreign policy on Israel/Palestine. Of course, the prorogation of Parliament is not different.

As refugee advocates, the biggest loss is the ability of our system to protect refugees from some countries like Mexico or the Czech Republic. Refugees are not simply human beings escaping persecution any longer. They must now meet the political priorities of the current government of Canada.



JOHN DIESCHADE

THE REFUGEE RESEARCH NETWORK AND INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORIES

BY MICHELE MILLARD

In 2008, the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University received a \$2.1 million grant over 7 years from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to develop a global refugee research network. The purpose of the project is to mobilize and sustain a Canadian and international network of researchers and research centres committed to the study of refugee and forced migration issues and to finding solutions to the plight of refugees. The www.refugeereseach.net site was created to encourage as much online collaboration, networking and information-sharing among these researchers and centres. We use the term "researcher" quite broadly - it encompasses academics affiliated with universities, colleges and other research institutes, field- and community-based researchers, and individuals working within the I/NGO, grass-roots and governmental sectors who produce various kinds of theoretical and/or policy relevant and practice-based research.

The RRN is designed to be as independent, self-directing and self-managing as possible, offering many ways to get involved, contribute and collaborate. The core interactive tools on the website are **blogs** (personal web journals), **forums** (or discussion lists), **pages** and **stories** (adding content to the site). In addition, you will be able to **list** any refugee and forced migration relevant event, new publication, education/training programs, syllabi as well as other resources - video, podcasts, etc. If you are a researcher, you will be able to include yourself in the online, searchable **Researcher Profile** database (our admittedly ambitious goal is to map the entire refugee research community), and if you are interested in actively collaborating with other scholars in developing research initiatives, you will be able to **create and manage your own networks, working groups and research clusters**. If you are a refugee, community member or staff working in an organization, you will be able to **connect to researchers**, or groups of researchers, who may be able to respond to your research re-

quests or assist you in developing your own initiatives. Graduate students will also have significant opportunities to get involved with the networks, working groups and research clusters through the **New Scholars Network**.

As part of its mandate, the RRN supports the digitization and dissemination of research currently housed at multiple sites throughout Canada and the rest of the world. A key tool on the RRN website is the online Resource Centre. The philosophical approach is one of "Open Source, Open Access." We strongly encourage institutions and individuals to make their work openly and freely accessible, particularly to those colleagues from the Global South. Equally important is that research coming out of the Global South is as widely disseminated and easily available to those from the Global North. Some RRN partners have already created institutional repositories and regional hubs are being developed where research and other resources from particular regions will be gathered, digitized and disseminated.

Currently, the idea of an online RRN Resource Centre is conceived of the following elements:

online resources already held in various existing online databases that can be connected by a common interface or search engine. This interface will be able to search multiple databases at once, and all search results would be displayed together in one page, rather than having to search through website after website,

the ability to directly submit new online resources, particularly unpublished material

to permanently store electronic resources in an institutional repository where the link to the record may still point to the website of origin, but if that link breaks, then a user can still find the resource in the repository

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

A fundamental support to the Resource Centre is the RRN Institutional Repository. The growth of institutional repositories comes out of a crisis in the late 1980's where people could no longer afford access to scholarship. Publishers were increasing their prices, and libraries couldn't afford to buy subscriptions. The Internet was far less expensive, and there was a growing recognition that while publishers were needed for dissemination, other models were becoming available. Why not share information in a more economical manner? Results from studies done in the late 1990's and early 2000's indicated that work deposited into institutional repositories that were easily accessible were more visible and preferentially ranked online. Works are also cited earlier and more frequently and they are used more than traditional publications. More and more funders, particularly those disbursing funds from public monies, are insisting that all research papers generated through their funding are freely accessible through the publisher's website or an online repository within six months of publication. Publishers themselves are becoming more open to self-archiving. And after all, scholars do not publish to get wealthy – they publish to be cited and to have impact.

**THE REFUGEE
RESEARCH NETWORK
(RRN) AIMS TO
CONTRIBUTE TO THE
IMPROVEMENT OF THE
WELL-BEING OF
REFUGEES AND FORCED
MIGRANTS AROUND THE
WORLD.**



Institutional repositories can be very helpful in collecting and permanently storing regionally based resources that are not readily available otherwise. This would include academic scholarship, resources and research produced by grassroots and community based organizations as well as international NGOs and other relevant agencies – all of which produce important resources, but may not have put them into permanent storage (lack of capacity, partnerships, etc.). Websites come and go, organizations come and go, books and journals go out of print, war breaks out or a natural disaster occurs and everything is destroyed. Permanent loss of research and knowledge is a real risk. Our regional partners will be supported in the development of their collection of materials from their regional networks. These regional repositories will be accessible throughout the RRN thus improving the availability and accessibility of research as well as strengthening regional and global research capacity. The RRN is expected to contribute towards a more equitable dissemination of knowledge throughout the Global North and South.

To find out more about the Refugee Research Network, please visit the website at www.refugeersearch.net. Consider becoming a member of the site by registering as a user. Once registered, you may start to add content onto the site - discussion forums, blogs, listing events, new publications, educational and training programs, submitting resources to the online library, and much more.

If you or your institution are interested in having your resources permanently stored in an institutional repository (at no charge), please contact Michele Millard at mmillard@yorku.ca or telephone 416-736-2100 ext. 30391.

NATIONAL FORUM: IMPROVING SERVICES AND PROTECTION FOR TRAFFICKED PERSONS

2-3 DECEMBER 2009, WINDSOR, ONTARIO

BY VARKA KALAYDZHIEVA

The National Forum on Improving Services and Protection for Trafficked Persons was a pan-Canadian initiative led by Canadian Council for Refugees. Approximately 100 individuals participated in the Forum. The participants were mainly NGO representatives, government officials, lawyers, academics and UNHCR representatives.

The Forum consisted of two days. The first day was dedicated to networking, information exchange, strategizing among NGOs. The objective was to elaborate recommendations to be presented at the roundtable in the next day. The second day involved participation of government officials, academics and other interested parties. In addition to presentations, a roundtable was held with open discussion between all participants.

Various concerns were raised by NGOs during the first day discussions. Some of those issues were framed as recommendations for government.

Key points:

- Prosecution has not been so effective. According to NGOs, a major reason is the lack of protection available to victims of the crime of trafficking.
- Lack of clear protection also leads to barriers to identifying trafficked persons. There is little incentive for trafficked persons to come forward and acknowledge that they are being trafficked. Traffickers can threaten the people they exploit with being detained and deported if they try to run away.
- The definition of trafficking is complex and NGOs may have different interpretations or at least emphases from the government or law enforcement. We need to keep discussing the definition.
- The big increase in the numbers of Temporary Foreign Workers may have consequences for trafficking as foreign workers

without permanent status are vulnerable to exploitation which sometimes may reach the definition of trafficking. If the proposed changes to the regulations are adopted and Temporary Foreign Workers can't renew their permits after 4 years in Canada, we foresee an increased risk of some of them staying undocumented and therefore being even more vulnerable to exploitation.

- The cooperation and collaboration between NGOs, government and all other players is essential as well as the respect of each others' roles and mandates.
- We must not re-invent the wheel – we must respond to trafficked persons by recognizing and building on existing capacities.

Recommendations

Awareness-Raising

- 1 CCR take lead in gathering together regional coalitions for education of general public, agencies and then victims. Meet together regularly. Once a coalition formed, seek funding from government sources. Have one central number available.
- 2 Need to promote awareness of trafficking in our own service agencies. There should be policies in place. This is a responsibility each agency can take on.
- 3 Do Public Service Announcements (PSA) about trafficking. At the end of the announcement can have the number to call or a website (with all the services available to victims) to visit.

Services

- 1 Creation of national network for referrals and access to service issues to allow sharing of best practices through a national network
- 2 National advocacy for greater financial resources for protection and service provision
- 3 More opportunity for face-to-face information-exchange

Continued on page 7



Protection

- 1 International law to be incorporated into national law - rights based approach (including racialization and gender)
- 2 CCR proposal - definition of trafficking - shared understanding, clear definition of coercion, consistency in the application of definition, clear criteria, rights based approach
- 3 Education among NGOs/enforcement/government and protection

Children

- 1 Inter-governmental agreements and protocols to ensure children's best interests are protected when suspicion of trafficking
- 2 National policy for consistent treatment, across country
- 3 Build relationships with Youth protection services (education, partnerships).

The roundtable discussion on the second day was dedicated to sharing information and strategizing on how to better serve and protect trafficked persons, including through improved collaboration and coordination in all regions.

Conclusion and next steps

Many participants felt that the National Forum was an important step towards an improved open dialogue between NGOs and government agencies. It was suggested that the CCR focus efforts towards establishing a national coalition with participation of federal, provincial and municipal agencies. Government representatives expressed their willingness to engage in further discussions with CCR and make further efforts towards partnerships.

Acknowledgements

The project was made possible by the generous financial support of Department of Justice Canada, United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees, Société de Marie Réparatrice, Les Soeurs de Notre-Dame du St-Rosaire, Moniales Carmélites de Trois-Rivières, Fonds d'aide F.É.C./ Frères des Écoles chrétiennes, Les Soeurs de St-François d'Assise, Les Filles de Marie-de- L'Assomption.

The report does not necessarily reflect the views of any of the funders.

Full version of the report can be found at:
<http://ccrweb.ca/files/traffickingforumreport09.pdf>

GRACIAS POR VENIR A VISITARNOS (THANKS FOR COMING TO VISIT US) AGRICULTURAL MIGRANT WORKERS IN CANADA

BY ALFREDO BARAHONA

“Some one has to make the sacrifice”, said Rogelio. His voice trembling as he fought to keep composure.

“We have no choice,” said Ruben.

“Some one has to make the sacrifice if you want your children to go to school and have a better life than you had” concludes Rogelio.

Rogelio and Ruben* are just two, out of thousands of migrant agricultural workers from Mexico, who come to work in Canada every year. Their story is one of courage, struggle, sacrifice and survival.

Members of MESA (Movement for a Solidarity Economy in the Americas), an ecumenical group from Mexico, Canada and the United States, visiting the Agricultural Workers Alliance support centre in Leamington, Ontario in October 2009, could hardly contain our tears as we listened to Rogelio and Ruben’s story.

Think about it. For eight to nine months each year, Rogelio and Ruben live separated from their wives and children. And they have been doing this for 22 and 19 years respectively.

“Your children get older and you’re not there to see them grow. Your wife grows old and you are not there to enjoy life with her. They get sick and I am not there to help them. I get sick and I am alone.” Said Ruben, as he puts his head down to hide his teary eyes.

Despite the pain and suffering of family separation, there is a sense of pride and dignity in the words of these two migrant agricultural workers. They are proud of the sacrifice they’ve made to provide basic needs for their families. They are proud that they have earned their children’s opportunity to go to school with their bare hands. There is no hesitation in their face. They do what they have to do.

But they also ask why? Why do they have to endure this pain? Why would Canada not allow them to come as permanent residents and bring their families with them? After all, they spent more time here than in Mexico. We simply have no answers. There is no simple answer. The issue of “temporary migration” is not a simple one. Politics, economics and even perhaps racism are at the root of temporary migration.

“Gracias por venir a visitarnos, (thanks for coming to visit us)”, Says Rogelio with a generous smile in his face.

“It gives us courage to know that Rene and Marie (the support centre’s staff) are not alone. They need help, to help us. Without them who knows what would happen to us? Who would take us to the doctor? Who would translate for us? They are true angels”.

I was with the MESA group representing KAIROS, a partnership of eleven Canadian churches and church agencies working for human rights and ecological justice in Canada and around the world. KAIROS promotes the rights of refugees and migrants in the context of the human rights of all peoples. Migrant workers and undocumented people are a hidden workforce whose role is invaluable to Canada, yet they are excluded from the basic justice provided for Canadian citizens.

KAIROS is part of a migrant justice network in Canada, which brings together the concerns of live-in caregivers, seasonal agricultural workers, non-status immigrants, as well as the advocacy experiences of migrant organizations, faith groups, unions, community activists and university researchers.

Alfredo Barahona, is part of the Dignity and Rights team at KAIROS. His work focuses on migration and human rights. Contact information: Tel. 416-463-5312 Ext. 251 or abarahona@kairoscanada.org

* These are not the real names to protect the workers’ identity.

CANADIAN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM IS CRUMBLING: A YEAR IN REVIEW

CAROLINA TEVES

Sometimes there is a huge gap between theory and reality: the Canadian Immigration system is facing this situation.

The separation of a family without reason is one of many sad examples that illustrate the way that the [immigration system is currently crumbling](#). The family came to Canada seeking refugee protection from Colombia, and because of The Safe Third Country Agreement, they were refused. As a result, the father was detained (October 2009) and since then, the mother, who is expecting a baby, with her 3 years old child, have been waiting for his release. The whole family has submitted the PRRA application, but the father is not allowed to join his family. It seems that the authorities just want to set a precedent for families that are coming to Canada seeking protection.

Forty years ago, Canada started to build a reputation as a world leader in protecting refugees. On 4 June 1969, Canada signed the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 18 years after it was adopted by the United Nations.

Since then, Canada had successes. The Canadian Council for Refugees has said that Canada has become a model around the world in the use of decision-making by an independent quasi-judicial tribunal, the Immigration and Refugee Board. Canada has also been a leader in recognizing protection needs based on gender and sexual orientation and has broadened the definition of those needing protection to cover those facing a return to torture or a risk to life.

However, the Canada's "world model" has been crumbling. The [Canadian Council for Refugees](#) (CCR) annual report 2008-2009 describes the situation, stating that the model refugee protection system is under threat. Many of these threats are listed in: "A Year in Review: Concerns in 2009", published on the CCR website. Some of the changes to the immigration system are:

Immigration plan (lower end range)				
	2009	%	2010	%
Economic Class	140,300	58%	156,300	65%
Family Class	68,000	28%	57,000	24%
Refugees	23,600	10%	19,600	8%
Others	8,100	3%	7,100	3%
Total	240,000	100%	240,000	100%

1. Closing Canada's Doors to Refugees:

In the summer of 2009, the Canadian government dramatically closed the door on people seeking Canada's protection, by imposing visa requirements on the Czech Republic and Mexico, and by turning back nationals of moratoria countries (Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Iraq and Zimbabwe) who make claims at the US-Canada border.

2. Erosion of Government Commitment to Refugee Rights:

Refugees have been hurt by the highly negative language used to discuss them publicly.

3. Overseas Processing Delays: Long delays are a well-known feature of Canadian immigration processing. Nairobi visa office stands out for its extraordinarily long processing times.

4. Children's Rights in Focus:

Non-citizen children, along with aboriginal children, continue to suffer the most serious breaches of Canada's obligations towards children's rights.

5. Temporary workers:

Traditionally Canada has welcomed immigrants on a permanent basis, with most of them becoming citizens. The recent shift to temporary migration marks a dramatic change in policy.

6. Two-tier citizenship called into question:

2009 saw increasing concerns that not all Canadian citizens are considered equal. Changes to the Citizenship Act create two classes of citizenship, with a lower class that has no right to pass on their Canadian citizenship to their children.

Continued on page 10

7. Parliament and courts fail refugees:

The year began and ended with significant blows to refugees, delivered by Canada's institutions. In February (2010), the Supreme Court of Canada refused to hear an appeal of the safe third country legal challenge, leaving in place the lower court ruling that allowed the government to send refugees back to the US whether or not that country is safe. That the Federal Court of Appeal had ruled that the fact "that the US does not 'actually' comply [with its obligations to refugees] is irrelevant.

8. Government to reduce refugee and family numbers:

The government's 2010 immigration plan maintains the same total number of immigrants, but reduces the numbers of refugees and Family Class immigrants. The government plans that, of new permanent residents in 2010, only 8% will be refugees. This is the lowest proportion given to refugees in at least 20 years (down from an average of 12% in the past two decades).

9. Transportation Loans: Heavy burdens in tough economic times.

There were increasing calls in 2009 for the Canadian government to absorb the costs of transportation loans for refugees and refugee families. Media across the country have depicted the dramatic impacts of the transportation debt on resettled refugees and their families.

The Canadian Council for Refugees rates these actions as a threat that undermines the fragile refugee determination system, which 40 years ago arose promising protection to refugees who come to Canada.

The Minister's recent negative comments about seven people who are seeking refugee status, after coming to Canada to watch the Vancouver Winter Olympics, is an indication that the erosion of Government commitment to Refugee Rights will continue throughout this year.

Take Action! CCR Campaign Updates and Activities:



Join the Canadian Council for Refugees in raising public awareness of challenges to refugee rights and successful integration in Canada. Here are some areas where your actions can make a difference:

Take Action -

Refugee Rights Day – Guaranteeing Life, Liberty, Security and Humanity for Refugees in Canada for 25 years. For a brochure on Refugee Rights Day and what the Singh decision means for refugees in Canada, see: <http://www.ccrweb.ca/documents/RRDAYpamphletEN.pdf>

Save the dates!

The 2010 CCR Spring Consultation will take place in **Ottawa, 3-5 June**. The theme of the Consultation is "Solidarity and Protection: Our obligations at home and abroad".

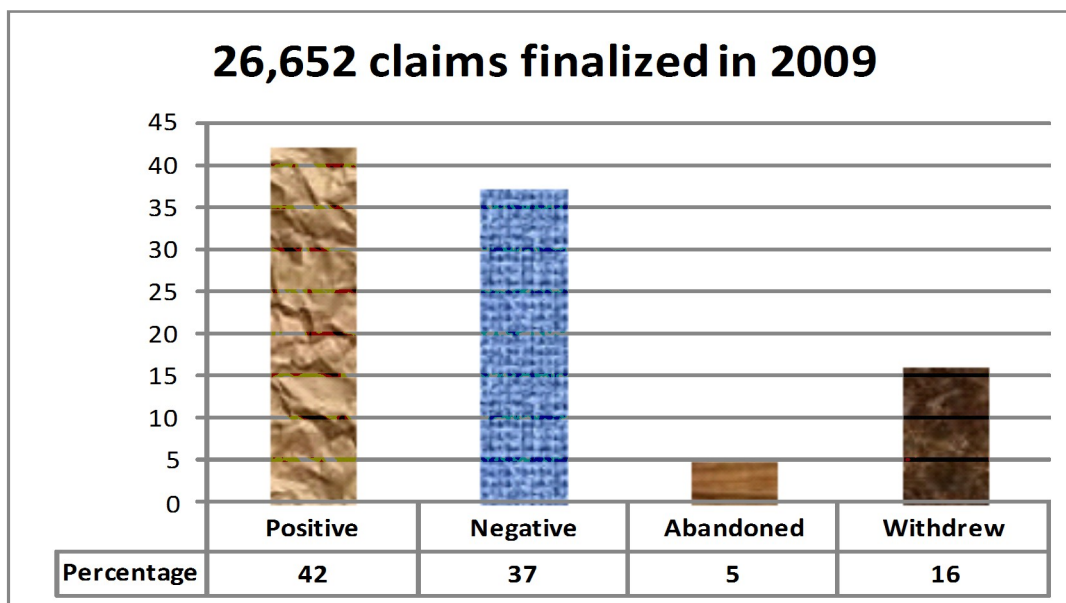


Details about the Consultation, including registration information, is available on the CCR website at: <http://www.ccrweb.ca/meetings>

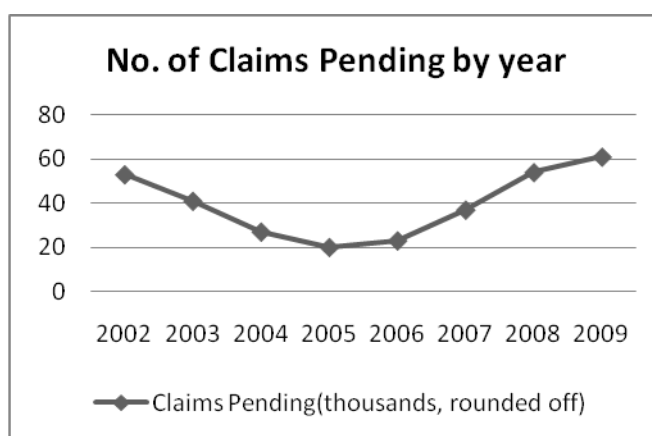
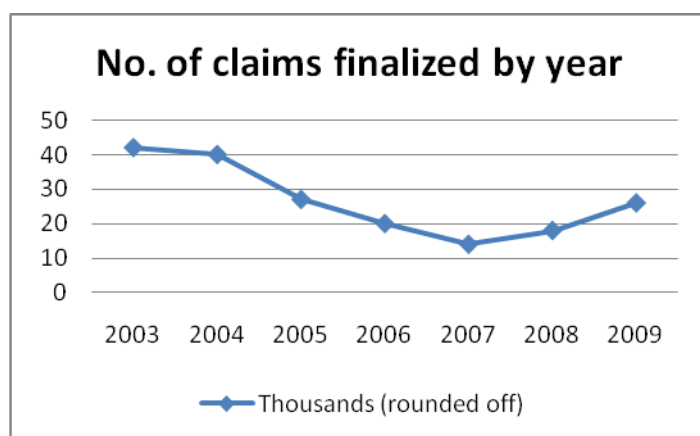
Nairobi: Protection delayed, protection denied. Refugees seeking family reunification or resettlement in Canada face extraordinarily long waits if their case is being processed at the Nairobi visa office.

Take action: a) Write to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and your Member of Parliament to urge adoption of the recommendations in the report. Find a model letter and other important information at: <http://ccrweb.ca/en/nairobi-protection-delayed-action>. **b)** Invite others in your community to take action. See a letter written by adoptive parents of Ethiopian twins: : <http://bit.ly/cIsTru>

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD STATISTICS FOR 2009 DECISIONS OF REFUGEE PROTECTION DIVISION



2009 saw a continued increase in numbers of cases finalized, largely as a result of the government finally appointing more board members:



The number of claims referred went down, (33,970 claims referred in 2009; 34,800 claims referred in 2008) as a result of the measures taken by the government mid-2009 to prevent claimants arriving (visa imposition for Mexico and Czech Republic; elimination of the safe third exemption for moratoria nationals).
The acceptance rate remained steady from 2008.

The percentage of withdrawn claims continues to climb, from 7% in 2006 to 13% in 2007 and 15% in 2008, and now to 16% in 2009. 65% of the withdrawals in 2009 came from 4 countries with large numbers of claims and higher than average withdrawal rates: Mexico (29% withdrawal); Czech Republic (78% withdrawal); Hungary (76% withdrawal) USA (22% withdrawal).

These statistics are prepared by CCR for its members from data provided by IRB. Any media inquiries about statistics should be referred to the IRB.

NEW CCR PRESIDENT

WANDA YAMAMOTO

Greetings to the Refugee Update readership. As I start my term as the President of the Canadian Council for Refugees I would like to begin by thanking the CCR member agencies, family and friends for your support. Most importantly, I want to acknowledge the tireless work and accomplishments of the individuals and agencies who work with and for refugees and immigrants, without you these newcomers would be in a far worse situation. It is your expertise we rely on to move the issues forward and to find a just, compassionate and humanitarian response.

Being a third generation Japanese – Canadian and hearing the life stories of the generations who suffered through the war and were internally displaced within Canada (my parents and grandparents), has made the work of the CCR so very important to me. My paternal Grandpa and maternal Grandma taught me to value human life and respect other cultures and religions. I grew up in a Christian and Buddhist family and understood there were many common values. My upbringing has brought me to working in the refugee field, far from my initial career in the corporate world. My current work is frustrating but fulfilling. Both Grandparents taught me it's hard to work for justice but in the end rewarding when you have moved forward. They also taught me to listen to the quiet voices as they have a strong and loud message which has been very true when working with refugees.

I was asked to reflect and begin to determine what goals I hope to accomplish during my tenure and too many issues come to mind. This year we celebrate the 25th an-

niversary of the Singh Decision where: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice." As well, our sector waits for the details of the "Refugee Reform" and how the Singh Decision will be upheld.

The Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH) has also made many contributions in lives of refugees for the past 30+ years. The sponsors have welcomed thousands of refugees and have reunited many families through this program. The benefits to the families, the communities and the growth of Canada cannot be ignored, so thank you to all of the SAH's and the many volunteers for your compassionate response to the needs of refugees.

There are many issues and all of them are important as it affects the lives of people trying to find "the right to life, liberty and security". The CCR network is growing stronger, the expertise unlimited, the voices louder and it takes all of us to unite and stand together to address and support the many issues. My goal is to continue encouraging the network to stand together on all of the issues we face and to educate me on the issues that affect your communities. Without your input the CCR cannot advocate on your behalf or on behalf of the newcomers suffering through the governmental political hoops. We elect the politicians and we need to keep them informed on how the government policies affect the lives of newcomers and New Canadians.

Platforms.... maybe I'll leave that to the politicians. Goals... one of my goals is to continue to build a strong CCR network.

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Agree or disagree?

We welcome letters to the editor with your comments.

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