

# Welcoming the Stranger

## Post 9-11



A KAIROS  
Workshop on  
Refugees and  
Migration



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This multi-exercise, participatory, 'train the trainer' workshop is designed to develop critical awareness and leadership in people involved in refugee and migration issues. The workshop examines the root causes of displacement and the shrinking range of options available to the world's refugees; unpacks common myths about refugees; and offers action strategies to increase acceptance of refugees and immigrants.

### WORKSHOP GOALS:

- (1) To improve the image and understanding of refugees and migrants in church communities and in society at large.
- (2) To model a participatory education process that participants can reproduce locally.
- (3) To equip participants to do advocacy around specific current issues.
- (4) To develop a critical analysis of the role of the media and to share tools for media action.

### TIME REQUIRED:

This workshop is one day in length. The exercises can also be used individually in a workshop of your own design.

### IDEAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:

15 to 30

# Exercise 1

## Introductory Ice Breaker: “Stand up if...”

### DESCRIPTION:

This is a way for the facilitator and the group to learn about one another’s back-grounds in relation to the theme — ADVOCATING FOR THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS.

### TIME REQUIRED:

Depends on the size of the group- try not to take more than 15 minutes.

### WHAT IS NEEDED:

A list of questions for the facilitator to ask the group as follows.

### HOW IT’S DONE:

Tell the group that you will ask a series of questions and ask individuals to stand up if applicable. When people stand up, ask them in turn to introduce themselves (give name and affiliation, if any, and where they are from) and to briefly explain the details of their response.

Sample questions follow (and it’s easy to make up your own):

STAND UP IF you have been involved with sponsoring a refugee to Canada...

STAND UP IF you have done volunteer or paid work with refugees...

STAND UP IF you know someone who has been a refugee...

STAND UP IF you are from the developing world...

STAND UP IF you have worked in or done extensive travel to a country in the developing world...

STAND UP IF you have read, seen or heard news coverage today relating to refugees and/or migrants...

STAND UP IF you have written a letter to the editor about refugee and migration issues (or otherwise)...

STAND UP IF you have written a letter to, or met with, a politician about refugee and migration issues (or otherwise)...

# Exercise 2

## Reading: “Refugees & Strangers”

### DESCRIPTION:

This reading, set in biblical times, offers a series of profiles of refugees and migrants and the public response to their plight. The objective is to examine the age-old plight of refugees and migrants and to reflect on how the problem of xenophobia (fear of the stranger) contributes to their suffering.

### TIME REQUIRED:

20 minutes

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

A photocopy of the reading for each participant.

### HOW IT'S DONE:

Ask each individual in turn to read the story of a **SPEAKER** and then for the whole group to respond in unison with the voice of the **PROTEST**.

When the reading is done, ask the group for their responses. What came to mind during the reading? What voice resonated with them? What conclusions did they draw from it?

## “Refugees and Strangers”

(From European Methodist Youth Council Network by Renate Becher)

### Speaker: My name is Abraham

We have recently arrived here in Canaan, a foreign land. We have possessions but we don't have relatives who could look after us and care for us if it comes to the time when we can't care for ourselves any longer. Back home we had a large family. God called us here. Do the people here understand that? Probably not. Will they be ready to care for us, or will they simply see us as troublesome foreigners and reject us?

**Protest:** Stop! There's no question of accepting people who can't care for themselves! Where would we be if all the old people, who can't work any longer, came to us? Are we supposed to provide old age insurance for them? We didn't ask you to come! It's up to you to sort yourselves out. It's nothing to do with us!

### Speaker: My name is Jacob.

I'm fleeing because I've got myself into all kinds of trouble at home. I can't go back; my brother would kill me. Now I'm in a strange land. What will the people here make of me? Will they give me work? Will they deal fairly with me, or will they try to cheat me?

**Protest:** Make sure you move on! We're decent citizens here and don't want anything to do with good-for-nothings like you. Who knows what you'll get up to here, and none of us will feel safe any more.

**Speaker: My name is Joseph.**

My brothers have sold me. They envied me, and I have to admit - I had a good life at their expense. Now I'm living here, with a certain 'Potiphar'. His wife tells nasty stories about me. Will Potiphar believe me? As a foreigner, will I get my rights, or will they credit me with every evil without thinking it through?

**Protest:** You can't expect us to believe everything you say: we've had some experience of foreigners. You'll have to stand the test, then we'll see.

**Speaker: My name is Moses.**

I wanted to fight for the freedom of my people. I struck an Egyptian. That was murder, political murder. Now I'm living here as a fugitive. What will become of me now?

**Protest:** Political murder, that's the last straw. There's no place for that kind of person here with us. We don't want thugs like that around here, under any circumstances.

**Speaker: My name is Ruth.**

I came to Bethlehem with my mother-in-law, Naomi. We are widows. We have no children, and no money. What can we live on? She can't work any more. Will anyone give me work, so that we both have something to eat?

**Protest:** Are we the poorhouse of the world? We've got enough poor people of our own!

**Speaker: My name is Daniel.**

I'm living here in the king's palace. My friends and I have a different faith and different customs from the people around us. Will they accept that?

**Protest:** You're foreigners! If you want to live here, you'll have to conform. Why do these foreigners always have to be different?

**Speaker: My name is Mary.**

I've come to Bethlehem with my husband, Joseph! We urgently need some decent accommodation for a while. My child could be born at any moment, and I must have a warm room and a good bed for the baby. We're poor. Will anyone take us in? I can't lie with the child in the open or in some shack.

**Protest:** Well, it's got to be said once and for all, you get nothing for nothing! Even one of our own people can't go into a hotel without paying. Yes, yes, we know that story — not a penny in your pockets, yet bringing children into the world. And then to demand luxury apartments!

**Speaker: My name is Joseph.**

I've fled as fast as possible with my wife Mary and our baby, Jesus. King Herod wanted to kill the child. Now we've reached the Egyptian border. What will happen to us if they send us back at the border?

**Protest:** Who knows what will come of this. Later he could plot a rising against Herod from here; and we'll be in political difficulties!

# Exercise 3

## “Basic Facts about Refugees, Migrants, Internally Displaced people and Immigrants”

As a context setting piece for Exercise 4, “Hot Seat”, distribute and go over the enclosed hand-out and highlight some relevant statistics and concepts to give some background to the issues.

### TIME REQUIRED:

20 minutes

## Basic Facts about Refugees, Migrants, Internally Displaced People and Immigrants

- 1) In the world today there are close to 15 million refugees and asylum seekers living outside their countries of origin.

The 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person who:

“owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his (or her) nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself (or herself) of the protection of that country...”

The vast majority of refugees, over 70%, are hosted by countries in the global south. For example, in 2001 Iran hosted about 1.9 million, Pakistan hosted over 2 million and Jordan hosted about 1.6 million refugees.

- 2) Internally displaced people are those fleeing war, famine and persecution who have not left their countries of origin. There are about 26 million internally displaced people in the world today and the number is growing. Internally displaced people are less likely than refugees to receive protection from the international community because there is no international agreement that gives them rights.
- 3) The biggest group of people who are displaced are migrants from poor countries of the global south. It is estimated that there are between 70 and 85 million migrant workers in the world. The vast majority migrate to find work in other countries. Many leave home to escape situations of poverty, famine or unemployment, caused for example, by environmental degradation or repressive economic policies.
- 4) Immigrants are people who choose to leave their home countries and qualify to live permanently in their new country.

## REFUGEES

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) promotes 3 permanent solutions (“Durable Solutions”) for refugees:

- a) Voluntary Repatriation: Going home. This is not an option for many.
- b) Local integration: Integrating into the country of asylum. This is offered by very few countries that host refugee populations.
- c) Resettlement: Being selected by one of about 16 countries that offer permanent resettlement. This is a limited option for a few who are determined to be unsafe in their country of asylum.

a. Less than 1% of the world’s refugees are resettled every year. For example, it is estimated that in 2003 only about 70,000 refugees will be offered resettlement to a third, permanent country of protection.

There are 2 ways for refugees to come to Canada

### 1) Resettlement:

Canada selects about 10,000 refugees from abroad for resettlement per year. These refugees can be either sponsored by the government or by a private sponsoring group. Special needs refugees are jointly sponsored. In recent years, about 2,500 privately sponsored refugees per year have been resettled to Canada.

Refugees selected abroad must be admissible to Canada; pass security and criminality screening and not pose a threat to public health and safety.

To be sponsored a person must be a Convention Refugee or a Member of the Country of Asylum Class (“outside their country of origin and seriously and personally affected by civil war, armed conflict or massive violation of human rights”) or a member of the Source Country Class (in need of protection and in side their country of origin, if their country is on a designated list).

### 2) Refugee claimants or Asylum seekers:

These are people who escape their home countries and are able to come to Canada to seek protection here. Canada has an international legal obligation to ensure that genuine refugees are not sent back to countries where they will be persecuted. We have a refugee determination system to consider the claims of people who come here. In the past several years the average number of refugee claims made in Canada or at our borders has been about 35,000. The acceptance rate is roughly 50%.

### Some Figures for 2001

The total number of newcomers landed in Canada in 2001 was about 250,000. This figure includes refugees, skilled workers, family class immigrants and business immigrants. Of this figure, the total number of refugees landed in 2001 was about 24,000 (about 12,000 landed in Canada and about 12,000 resettled) or a little more than 10%.

# Exercise 4

## Are you on a “Hot Seat”?



### TIME REQUIRED:

1 hour

### DESCRIPTION/GOALS:

Sitting in a circle, each participant is asked if they are sitting on a hot seat. The answer will lie under their seat. That is, 6 participants will find a refugee’s story under their seats. They will be asked to read the story and the group will be asked to find a remedy to the problems raised.

The exercise is designed to help people understand the many reasons why people are forced to flee their countries as refugees and to examine some of the protection options available, or not, to them. It also highlights the current issues of concern that the group will be called upon to take action on at the conclusion of the day.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- \* Photocopies of the 6 Stories below.
- \* Tape (for attaching the stories underneath the chairs).
- \* Flipchart paper
- \* Markers

### HOW IT’S DONE:

Before the workshop begins, photocopy the stories that follow and tape them randomly under the chair seats. The stories will relate the cause of the occupant’s displacement and his/her attempted solution. The chairs with the stories taped under them are considered “hot seats”.

While these stories are for the most part true, parts of them and the names have been changed to protect confidentiality. You may wish to use your own local stories, keeping in mind that the issues raised in the stories should be issues that lend themselves to current advocacy and action.

- a) Gather in a circle. Ask participants in turn, to first reflect on whether they have ever been displaced, and then to check under their chair seat. Those who find no card can rest easy. Those who find a card taped under their chair are on a “hot seat” and must stand up and share their story. Let suspense build as occupants wonder whether they are about to be displaced as you go round the circle.
- b) After each hot seat occupant reads their story, summarize the facts. Then ask the group what they can offer as possible options.

- c) After you have solicited ideas from the group, ask the hot seat participant to read from their story, what did they do? At this point the facilitator can draw out the advocacy issues, explain the issues, and flipchart them. Actions that participants can take to address the issues will be covered at the end of the day in Exercise 7.

See, for example, the Refugees and Migration section of the KAIROS website at [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org) for an update on current issues. Or visit one of the websites listed in this booklet below, for further information.

### **DEBRIEFING:**

Ask those on hot seats how they felt in their roles when doing the exercise? Ask the same of those who could rest easy on more comfortable chairs. Ask the group to share insights, observations, feelings and reflections. Did they learn anything that surprised them?



*God keeps faith forever, gives justice to the oppressed:  
God sets prisoners free and protects the stranger. (Psalm 146)*

## 1) Mary's story:



My name is Mary. I am from Somalia. I had to leave my home country when I was 14 years old. When I was walking home from school one afternoon with my friend and her mother, we heard guns and bombs and we could not go home. We ran in the opposite direction and I have not seen my home or my parents or most of my 5 sisters and brothers since that day. I escaped with my neighbours from Somalia and eventually went to Nairobi, Kenya where I lived with them until I turned 20 years old. Life was very hard in Nairobi because we were not allowed to be there; we were supposed to go to the refugee camp. In the city we were safer, but we had no status. This meant that I could not attend school and it was hard to find a job. When we did find work we were paid very little. We were often harassed by the police; we had to pay bribes and live under the threat of being arrested.

### OUTCOME:

I had relatives in Nairobi who raised money in the community for me to go to Canada where we found out my brother was living. I flew from Nairobi to New York and then took a bus to Fort Erie and made a refugee claim at the port of entry. After 3 years of waiting my claim was finally reviewed by a single member panel of the Immigration and Refugee Board. The member refused my case. The lawyer did a very bad job of presenting my case and the member did not believe my story. Under **The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act** there is currently no right to appeal a negative decision. I got legal aid to apply to the court for permission for them to review the negative decision (Judicial review) but that also failed. I got a removal order telling me I must leave Canada soon. I am afraid to return to Somalia. I don't know what to do next.

### ADVOCACY ISSUE RAISED:

#### **Non implementation of an appeal in our refugee determination system:**

On June 28, 2002, the Canadian government proclaimed the **Immigration and Refugee Protection Act** without implementing the right to appeal provision for refugees, even though the appeal was an integral part of the law. The part of the law that was detrimental to refugees — reducing the initial decision-maker panel from two board members to one — was left in place, while the part that was beneficial to refugees — the appeal — was left out. As a result, refugee protection decisions, on which a person's life may depend, are now made by a single decision-maker, with no right of appeal.

## 2) Ruth's story:



My name is Ruth. My husband is an important man in the Sudanese Liberation Army and has left me for his other wife. I do not know where he is; I do not hear from him and my own father is dead. I took my four children to live with family in Cairo. I could not find much work and there was not enough money to support all the family. I get some help from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). But there are many refugees in Cairo, and not enough help to go around. It is very hard for us Sudanese; we are harassed on the streets and our children cannot attend regular schools. My brother in Canada sends money for my children to go to special Sudanese schools. But when I got sick we used the money for medicine and food and then there was no money for school. I was alone with my children; we had no one to protect us. Since I had a brother in Canada, the UN man said he might ask Canada to help. But I waited many, many months and got sicker and sicker. No word came. When I go to the city to ask at the compound gate I am scolded away by the guards. I have no money or strong man to speak for me.

### **OUTCOME:**

I called my brother again to remind him that he has forgotten our family; to send more money and to bring us to Canada. After a long time, he called me to say we were coming. A church will sponsor us to Canada. Those church people called the UNHCR office and sent letters to the Embassy. Nothing happened. Months passed and finally the Canadian government officials called me for an interview and told us because we had a sponsor, we could go to Canada. Then we went for medical tests. Because I was still sick, there are more medical tests. These people said two of my children and I had tuberculosis and that we have to get well before we go to Canada. I cry to myself that if we do not leave soon, we will all be sent back to Sudan ... because of my sickness. But, if we get better, they said we will go to Canada.

### **ADVOCACY ISSUE RAISED:**

#### **Delays in Processing of Resettlement Cases**

Over the past year, the Canadian government has given low priority to processing refugees abroad for resettlement. As a result, there are concerns that the government will not meet its resettlement target in 2003 which means that hundreds or even thousands of refugees will lose the chance for a new life. Canadians wishing to sponsor refugees through the private sponsorship program are being asked to screen all applications carefully for refugee eligibility and are being discouraged from submitting too many applications. At the same time, private sponsors are becoming very discouraged because processing times can take as much as 3 years.

Note: Refugees, whether applying from inside or outside Canada are refused entry into Canada based on their medical condition if they are likely to be a threat to public health or safety. Refugees are exempt from the provision in the law which excludes those who would place excessive demands on government services.

### 3) Joseph's story:



My name is Joseph. I am from Jaffna, a city in northern Sri Lanka. I am a Tamil. I was detained by the government armed forces in Sri Lanka and tortured because they said that I was a collaborator with the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam ( the LTTE), better known as the Tamil Tigers, a guerilla group that is fighting against the government for independence for the Tamil people. They said that since I lived in a house in Colombo with 2 roommates who turned out to be Tamil Tigers, that I was a Tiger collaborator. This is not true, I am not a Tiger and I did not know that my roommates were Tigers. One day after the Tigers bombed the home of a government official in Colombo, the army was furiously rounding up all the young Tamil males, especially those whom were on their lists. I was afraid that I would be tortured again and desperately wanted to escape to a safe country to seek asylum.

#### **OUTCOME:**

In order to enter a country like Canada, a person from Sri Lanka needs a visitors visa. But the Canadian Embassy rarely issues Visitors Visas, especially if they think there is a possibility that one might claim asylum or try to stay in Canada. My father was able to borrow money to pay an agent \$10,000.00 U.S. to help me to get out of Sri Lanka. I left my family and went into hiding for 2 weeks. I then went in a ship with many other refugees and we travelled in the hold of the ship. There was very little water and after 5 days we ran out of food. Our ship stopped in North Africa en route. Canadian government authorities discovered we were there and that we were going to Canada. They intercepted the ship and forced me and the others to go back to Sri Lanka. I heard that the smugglers and the carrier ship were given fines. When I returned home I was detained again by government officials.

#### **ADVOCACY ISSUE RAISED:**

**Interdiction** (also known as interception).

Governments around the world put considerable resources into preventing refugees from arriving on their shores, through various means. For example, visas are required, immigration control officers are posted overseas, "safe third country" agreements are signed, airlines and ships are fined for bringing refugee claimants to Canada. Many refugees feel they have no choice but to turn to smugglers to help them to reach safety.

## 4) Maria's story:



My name is Maria. I am from El Salvador. I lived for many years with my two children and their father in San Salvador. Life in my country was very hard for me because my husband was an alcoholic and he beat me up whenever he got drunk. He beat me so bad that I had to go to the hospital many times. Once he broke my arm. He used to drag me by my hair and hit me with electrical cords and he broke mirrors and windows with my head. He told me that if I tried to leave him he would kill me. I went to the police for help but they would not do anything to make him stop. They told me that it's a domestic problem. We do not have women's shelters in El Salvador and I felt I had nowhere to turn for help. One night my husband came home very drunk; he hit me repeatedly and I thought he was going to kill me. I survived that night, but I knew I had to escape.

### **OUTCOME:**

My cousin in Toronto, Canada feared for my safety in El Salvador. She told me that it was possible for me to get refugee status in Canada if I could prove I was physically abused by my husband and that there was no state protection for me in El Salvador. I borrowed some money, left my children with a relative I could trust and took the bus to the U.S. Mexico border. I crossed illegally into the U.S. where I stayed with relatives. Now I am working as a house cleaner in Dallas, Texas to save money to go to Canada. It is risky for me to apply for asylum in the U.S. because the U.S., unlike Canada often denies asylum claims from women fleeing domestic violence. If I make a claim in the U.S. or am picked up without a 'green card', I will likely be deported back to El Salvador. I am told that Canada and the U.S. signed a "Safe Third Country" Agreement in 2002 that allows Canada to turn back refugee claimants who arrive from the U.S. Where will I be safe now?

### **ADVOCACY ISSUE RAISED:**

#### **Safe Third Country agreement**

In December 2002, the Canadian government signed a safe third country agreement with the US. Once this agreement is in force, many refugee claimants will be turned away at the border, without a chance to explain why they fear persecution, or why the US is not a safe country for them. Some of the refugee claimants turned back will not even be allowed to tell their story in the US, because of a rule requiring refugee claimants to apply within the first year of arrival. Women fleeing gender-related persecution stand to suffer on account of the agreement, because, as the Canadian government admits, US treatment of these claims is less sympathetic than the Canadian.

## 5) Suraia's story:



My name is Suraia. I am an old woman who needs her son. My son, Abrem, and I eke out a living in Peshawar, Pakistan with many other Afghani refugees. Some of my friends have returned home to Afghanistan, but we cannot. My husband and older sons were killed in the fighting; thanks be to God, my youngest escaped. We have been here for a year. They say it is peace now and time to rebuild, but the same warlord, who vowed to eliminate my family, is head-man. We have nothing to go back to but certain death. But Pakistan wants us to leave, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is paying for everyone to go back. I have little money to bribe the Pakistan police and to get my case story before the UN people. And now the sounds of war grow louder and there are many other refugees coming.

### **OUTCOME:**

I use the last of our resources to send my son, under cover, to speak for us with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It is so hard to get an appointment, to be heard, but when they hear our story and see our family name — they understand and promise to help. Praise God, we will be resettled somewhere out of this fighting. Finally, we meet with important foreign officials; they seem worried for my son. Does that mean they will move us quickly? We go ahead and pay for the medical tests and wait for clearances and stay in the shadows. We wait and wait ... I wonder do they understand the threat under which my son lives each day — even here in Pakistan? My poor boy, at 18, he is an escaped freedom fighter with no freedom. We wait and wait and wait — then we are told on paper that we cannot go to a new home. My son is a “security problem”; we cannot stay in Pakistan; we cannot go to a third country. Our only option is to go home and hide out in the hills.

### **ADVOCACY ISSUE RAISED:**

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act has many provisions which make people inadmissible on security and criminality grounds. They cover every conceivable security threat. The problem is the scope of the provisions penalize many innocent people. For example, all past and current members of the African National Congress, including “freedom fighter” Nelson Mandela who is now an honorary Canadian citizen, are technically inadmissible to Canada on security grounds (“except persons who have satisfied the Minister that their admission would not be detrimental to the national interest”).

## 6) Daniel's story:



My name is Daniel. I am from Medellín, Colombia where I was a union organizer for many years. I had to get out of Medellín because I was receiving death threats from both the army and the guerillas. The International Committee of the Red Cross helped me move to Bogotá and when the threats continued, they referred my case to the Canadian Embassy. My family went to live with my in-laws in another community and I went into hiding — never staying more than a few days at the same house.

### **OUTCOME:**

After several months under official protection — constantly changing my identity and whereabouts — I was interviewed by an official of the Canadian government. After several more months of medical tests and waiting for final clearance, security and criminality checks, my family and I were accepted as government sponsored refugees, issued visas and tickets (on a travel loan) to Quebec, Canada. We hope to be reunited and leave next week.

### **ADVOCACY ISSUE RAISED:**

**Delay in processing as per above.**

Other stories and advocacy issues can be added here. For example, detention is an emerging issue. Over the past year, the Canadian Government has detained more refugee claimants on arrival in Canada, mostly on the basis of lack of sufficient documentation. This means that many refugees who have had to flee persecution without time or ability to get proper identification documents find themselves behind bars in Canada. Even after they get identity documents sent to them, some claimants are being told that they won't be released from detention until they post a bond, an impossible task for many refugees.

# Exercise 5

## Practicing Myth Busting:

### DESCRIPTION:

A role play exercise to unpack and provide coherent counter-arguments regarding common misconceptions about refugees that promote xenophobia.

### TIME REQUIRED:

1 hour

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- A copy of the enclosed Myths Sheets (2 myths per group).
- Any props you want to provide for the role play.

### HOW ITS DONE:

Brainstorm some popular myths and list them on flipchart paper. They may or may not be the same myths that the group will unpack in this exercise.

Divide the group into small groups of 4 or 5 participants.

Two of the myths will be assigned to each group.

Each small group is asked to sub-divide into 2 teams. One myth-promoter team and one myth-buster team. Each team is to devise a set of arguments that supports their position.

### REPORT BACK:

Ask the groups to report back by doing a debate, or some type of role play (e.g. A conversation at the water cooler, at the local coffee shop or at a social event).

An essential part of the exercise is to de-brief each role play.

Ask the group questions such as (i) What myth do they think was being discussed? (ii) What arguments /comments would they like to add? (iii) Any other thought or ideas that come to mind?

### 1. I heard that there is no difference between immigrants and refugees. Is this true?

I don't think so, consider that...

- Immigrants are people who choose to apply to come to Canada through a number of programs that are offered to attract people here. They come to Canada as skilled workers, as entrepreneurs and as family members of those already here, to name a few categories.

- Unlike immigrants, refugees, by definition, are forced to leave their homes, they do not choose to do so. They suffer from human rights abuses that force them to seek safety and protection from persecution outside their countries of origin.
- Canada sets a target every year for the number of immigrants and refugees we will accept. The total number of newcomers landed in Canada in 2001 was about 250,000. This figure includes refugees, skilled workers, family class immigrants and business immigrants. Of this figure, the total number of refugees landed in 2001 was about 24,000 (about 12,000 landed in Canada and about 12,000 resettled) or a little more than 10% of the total.

**2. I heard that refugees who come to Canada to seek asylum are breaking the law and “jumping the queue”. Is this true?**

I don't think so, consider that...

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution”. Canada has an obligation in international law not to send refugees back to persecution.
- Refugees suffer due to human rights abuses that force them to leave their countries. If they are able to escape, some stay in camps or go to cities and towns in neighbouring countries. Asylum in camps and/or cities does not guarantee safety or protection. Others travel to countries like Canada to seek asylum. Neither group is more deserving than the other.
- Some refugees are selected overseas and offered resettlement or permanent protection in countries like Canada. But less than 1% of the world's refugees are resettled every year. For example, it is estimated that in 2003 only about 70,000 refugees in the world will be offered resettlement.
- Lack of options for refugees means that the decision to leave home as an “asylum seeker” is increasingly becoming the only hope to start a new life.

**3. I heard that Canada takes more than its fair share of the world's refugees and this is a drain on our economy. Is this true?**

I don't think so, consider that...

- There are about 15 million refugees and asylum seekers in the world today. The vast majority, over 70%, live in countries in the global south.
- has a humanitarian tradition of offering resettlement to a limited number of refugees overseas every year. For example, in 2001 about 9,000 refugees from abroad were selected by our government to be resettled to Canada under the government assisted program.

- In 2001 about 3,000 refugees come to Canada under Canada's unique private sponsorship program. Through this program, individual Canadians, faith groups and other community groups choose to provide full financial and personal support to refugee families and individuals during their first year in Canada.
- In 2001 the total number of refugees landed in Canada was about 24,000 (about 12,000 landed in Canada and about 12,000 resettled from abroad). This is about .0016% of the world's total refugee population and less than one tenth of one percent of Canada's total population.

#### **4. I heard that people who come to Canada with false I.D. are phony refugees. Is this true?**

I don't think so, consider that....

- The United Nations Refugee Convention recognizes that some refugees may need to enter other countries illegally or use false documents in order to leave their country and come to a safe place like Canada. For some people this is the only way to safety.
- Sometimes refugees are unable to get government issued identification from their countries. For example, in Somalia for many years there has been no functioning government to issue I.D.
- It is not reasonable to expect a person who is fleeing persecution from a government to apply to that government for a passport or other I.D. Such action could result in detention or other repercussions.
- In situations where people are fleeing their persecutors, they often have to leave their homes in a hurry with just the clothes on their backs. People in such situations cannot be expected to carry identification with them.

#### **5. I heard that Canada has a relaxed refugee determination system and is therefore a safe haven for terrorists. Is this true?**

I don't think so, consider that....

- Refugee claimants are fingerprinted, photographed upon arrival and interviewed at great length. It is not likely that terrorists would expose themselves to such scrutiny.
- The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, introduced in June 2002, includes a number of provisions that excludes refugee claimants from having their claim heard if they are found to be inadmissible on the basis of security, serious criminality, organized criminality or violating international or human rights.
- None of those who were responsible for the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States were refugees or refugee claimants. Yet since September 11, refugees have been unfairly targeted as security risks and potential terrorists all around the world.

- Refugees are vulnerable people who come to Canada to escape terror and violence. They are survivors of terrorism - not terrorists.

## **6. I heard that immigration makes Canada vulnerable to terrorism. Is this true?**

I don't think so. Consider that...

- There is no connection between immigration and violence. Many immigrants and refugees in fact come to Canada to escape from violence and to find freedom and peace.
- There are of course some violent immigrants, just as there are some violent non-immigrants: consider the Oklahoma City bombing or the FLQ, responsible for bombs and kidnappings in Québec.
- Canada, the US and Australia, three countries of immigration, have historically experienced relatively little terrorism. In contrast, various European countries that do not identify themselves as countries of immigration have experienced much more. It is arguable that a positive immigration program actually discourages violence by promoting an open, diverse, dynamic and tolerant society, with opportunities for all.

## **7. I heard that refused refugee claimants have access to numerous appeals that allow them to stay in Canada indefinitely. Is this true?**

I don't think so, consider that...

- There exists no right to appeal a negative decision in Canada's refugee determination process. This lack of a meaningful appeal is a serious flaw in the system that puts refugees at risk. The new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act includes a refugee appeal process but it has not yet been implemented by the government.
- The only recourse in the case of a bad decision is to ask the federal court for permission to "judicially review" negative decisions by the Immigration and Refugee Board, on narrow legal grounds. But this is costly and less than 10% of cases are given permission to proceed.
- There is a pre removal risk assessment, but only new evidence can be considered and the acceptance rate is very low.
- Once a deportation order is issued by the Immigration department, it is very difficult to stop a removal.
- Once a person is found eligible by Immigration Canada they are referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) for their claim to be considered. There is currently a backlog of more than 40,000 refugee claims awaiting a decision at the IRB. Some claims can take as much as 3 years before a hearing date is even set.

Claimants have no choice but to wait for their hearing date and the process to set a date can take up to 3 years in some cases. Individual refugee claimants have no choice but to wait for their hearings amidst the growing backlog of cases and long processing times.

- To discourage abuse of the refugee determination system by opportunists, a productive approach would be to speed up the process to determine refugee status. This would provide a more humane system where refugees are not forced to wait long periods for their fate to be decided and would allow the authorities to expeditiously remove those who are not genuine refugees.

**8. I heard that to keep Canadians safe, the government should detain all refugee claimants when they arrive. Is this true?**

I don't think so, consider that...

- While it is important to protect Canadians from criminals and terrorists, it is not fair to assume that all refugees represent a threat to Canadians. For example, about 45-55 % of refugee claimants are women and girls of all ages.
- Detaining everyone throws too wide a net and punishes innocent people in the process.
- Seeking asylum from persecution is not a crime and refugee claimants must not be treated as criminals. Liberty is a fundamental human right. Arbitrary imprisonment is one of the forms of persecution which refugees face in their home countries.
- In 1996 the U.S. implemented a new law which resulted in a large increase in detention of asylum seekers. Yet these measures did nothing to protect the U.S. from the attacks on September 11, 2001. At the same time, many innocent refugees have had to spend time in detention, often in appalling conditions.

**9. I heard that by welcoming refugees and immigrants who don't share our cultural heritage and religious values that social cohesion is being undermined and social problems are growing. Is this true?**

I don't think so, consider that...

- Canada was built by immigrants and refugees and continues to need newcomers to address our low birth rate and aging labour force and to develop our economy.
- Canada's diversity is our strength. It helps us to compete economically in both the domestic and international spheres. We can draw on our diversity to build understanding in the world.
- While not perfect, Canada is a world leader that is showing the rest of the world how people of different races and backgrounds can live together peacefully.

- Fears about immigration integration are not new. Generation after generation have worried about the presence of newcomers who are perceived by some to threaten their way of life. Yet time has shown that immigrants contribute immensely to our society.

**10. I heard that the United States is a safe place for refugees and that refugees there have the same rights as in Canada. Is this true?**

I don't think so, consider that...

- In 2001 about 35% of refugee claimants or about 14,000 people chose to come to Canada from the U.S. to make their refugee claims. Many come here because they believe that the refugee determination process here will treat them more fairly.
- Unlike the United States, Canada does allow asylum seekers the dignity to work once they have made their claim. Most refugees want to work and become self sufficient.
- U.S. asylum law and procedures fall short of international law and do not provide the procedural safeguards to ensure adequate protection. For example, the decision of whether a refugee claimant has a credible fear of persecution is made by a government officer, not an independent tribunal adjudicator like in Canada.
- Refugee claimants in the U.S. without identity documents are detained, often in jails with criminals, without access to state-funded legal counsel or interpreters. The U.S. tends to detain people for immigration purposes much more frequently than does Canada, and in the year 2001 it was reported some 4000 minor-aged children were in detention, some in juvenile criminal facilities.
- The U.S. generally does not accept asylum applications from people who have been in the country for more than a year. So people who fear persecution in their home country but do not make a refugee claim within one year, are usually prevented from doing so after one year.

# Exercise 6

## Media Analysis and Action (3 parts)

### DESCRIPTION/OBJECTIVE:

To help participants to think of ways we can use the media effectively to advance our goal of “welcoming the stranger”.

### TIME REQUIRED:

1/2 hour

### Part 1:

For starters, explain to the group the importance of being aware of our audiences when we do public education/ media work?

There is a continuum of public opinion that runs from close minded people who are firm in their opinions and unwilling to listen to ours at one extreme to the people who are fully on our side at the other. We want to reach the people in the middle; those whose opinions are formed by the mainstream media and, with access to alternative information, are willing to open their minds and alter their views. As refugee and migration advocates, we need to spend less time engaging with and responding to those who are firmly opposed to our views and spend more time with those we are more likely to make an impact on.

### Part 2:

Is the Media doing a Good Job of Portraying Refugees and Migrants? A Brainstorming exercise.

All too often the media image of refugees and migrants is negative and helps to reinforce negative stereotypes and myths.

Ask participants in the large group the following question and flipchart the answers:

How does the media portray refugees and migrants and the issues concerning them?

If possible, organizers could scan local newspapers for several weeks preceding the workshop to clip examples of media coverage of refugee and migration issues. These could then be photocopied and shared with the group to affirm the above conclusions.

With respect to a critique of the national media, distribute a copy of the enclosed article entitled “The National Post on Immigrants and Refugees: A review”, by Patrick Hunter from the Canadian Race Relations Foundation.

## Part 3:

How to take media action.

What types of media action can you take? Brainstorm the various ways to get our message out to the media. Then go back to the ideas and discuss the details.

- a) Write a letter to editor (this is the most read section of the newspaper).
- b) Submit a feature article or an Op ed opinion piece (“opposite the editorial page”).
- c) Meet with newspaper’s editorial staff and explain the issues in person.
- d) Organize a media event and invite the media ( press conference, etc.)
- e) Collect positive stories of refugees and migrants (with their permission of course) and ask the local media to publish the stories.
- f) Alternative media. Don’t forget church, labour and other community newsletters, cable tv and community radio stations.

Consider distributing the media excerpt from the KAIROS Network Handbook 2003 (Becoming KAIROS: Taking Faithful Action for Justice in your Community”) for follow-up and reference.

***“When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the stranger. The aliens who reside with you shall be to you as the citizens among you, and you shall love them as yourselves, for you were once aliens in the land of Egypt”.***

*Leviticus 19:33-34*

# Exercise 7

## Follow-up Action and Education: What can people do in their churches/communities?

### DESCRIPTION:

This is an opportunity to talk about follow up action. The actions will be related to the current advocacy issues as discussed in the Hot Seat exercise above (Exercise 4).

### TIME REQUIRED:

30 minutes

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

Flipchart paper and markers.

### HOW IT'S DONE:

Divide the group into small groups of 5 and ask them to focus discussion and initial plans of action on one of the following. Ask them to flipchart their plans and be prepared to report back to the group.

- a) Workshops/educational events
- b) Advocacy: letters to politicians/meetings with politicians.
- c) Local media work
- d) Promote private sponsorship of refugees

After 20 minutes of small group discussion, invite the groups to give a 3-5 minute report back on follow-up actions.

Following the report-backs, in plenary, take a few minutes to record a few key action follow-up commitments and the names of those who are keen to follow up.

### EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

List 2 columns on a flipchart with the following 2 headings: "What did you like/what worked"? and "What would you like to see differently"? Ask the group for feedback so you can improve the workshop next time, and flipchart the answers.



## Web Sites on Refugees and Migration

KAIROS-Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives  
[www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org)

Amnesty International Canada  
[www.amnesty.ca/refugee/](http://www.amnesty.ca/refugee/)

Canadian Council for Refugees  
[www.web.net/~ccr/](http://www.web.net/~ccr/)

Department of Citizenship and Immigration  
Canada Refugee Protection  
[www.cic.gc.ca/ref-protection](http://www.cic.gc.ca/ref-protection)

Global Refugee Statistics 2001  
[www.unhcr.ch/statistcs](http://www.unhcr.ch/statistcs)

Human Rights Watch  
[www.hrw.org/campaign/migrants](http://www.hrw.org/campaign/migrants)

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada  
[www.irb.gc.ca/](http://www.irb.gc.ca/)

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children  
[www.womenscommission.org/](http://www.womenscommission.org/)

World Council of Churches  
Uprooted People - E-Newsletter  
[www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/uprooted/upindex.html](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/uprooted/upindex.html)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
[www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch)

With special thanks to the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) as considerable content of this workshop was borrowed from the following CCR educational resources: "Facing Facts, Myths and Misconceptions about Refugees and Immigrants in Canada", "Post September 11: Questions about Refugees and Refugee Policies" and "The State of Refugees in Canada".

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