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INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES NEWSLETTER

Editorial

“Refugee status” has been redefined by the Geneva Convention, passed in 1951, following the atrocities from World War II and the exodus of millions of Jews, Gypsies or other ethnic groups, whose request for asylum was often refused by our virtuous free nations. However, the concept of seeking asylum, has existed for years.

In Ancient Greece, temples were seen as places that were inviolable by the others cities. Afterwards, The First Council of Orléans in 511 granted fugitives, including criminals, the right of asylum in a Christian church. Centuries later, the French Revolution provided the right of asylum to freedom advocates driven out of their country. The Nansen Passport, created in 1922, allowed the Russian refugees who fled from the Bolshevik Revolution to find asylum in one of the 54 signatory countries. However, during the 1930s, the Jews fleeing from Nazi Germany were considered as “inadmissible” by most western countries, including Canada. But, in 1951, the Geneva Convention established the definition of a refugee, but not the right of asylum, thus allowing states significant jurisdiction to interpret and apply this convention.

The right of asylum is deeply anchored in human nature; it is even the basis of many children’s games. However, this right often evokes another aspect of the human nature: fear of the Other.

Michel Forgues

Summary

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World refugee Day Did you know ?

By the end of 2008, there were about 42 million of refugees throughout the world:

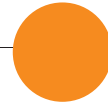
- of which 16 million had refugee status or were asylum seekers
- of which 26 million were displaced within their own country
- 80% of the refugees are in the developing countries
- The majority of displaced people within their country are in developing countries.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a UN agency mandated to protect and support refugees, to find a long-term solution to these issues, and to monitor the application of the laws from Geneva Convention, which were passed in 1951.

The major hosting countries for refugees in 2008 were Pakistan, Syria, Iran, Germany, Jordan, Chad, Tanzania and Kenya.

The main origin countries for refugees are Afghanistan and Iraq, both representing 45% of all refugees depending from UNHCR. Other countries are Somalia, Sudan, Colombia and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).





The Y Residence

The Y supports refugees

The Y Residence hosts, amongst other groups of people, asylum seekers. The Residence's Community Initiatives aim to support the individuals and families staying there by welcoming and encouraging their integration.

A large part of the activities are conducted in partnership with C35 PRAIDA Montagne. These collaborative services offer socio-educational, recreational and cultural activities which foster the development of children and growth of families.

The Day Centre is more than just a meeting place where participants can share experiences, or break social isolation; the centre also provides a multitude of services which foster the integration of asylum seekers within Quebec society. Multiple no-cost activities and services are offered by specialists dedicated to providing refugees with a successful integration.

PRAIDA and the YMCA co-coordinate various information workshops. Moreover, the Community Initiatives provide a childcare service to enable parents to participate in various activities.

Many services are offered, including information sessions on renters' rights, legal clinics on immigration, job search groups, health and wellbeing workshops, English and French conversation groups, and a women's group, Women in Action.

The Residence's Community Initiatives offer services to families who seek a stable and stimulating environment for both children and parents. Children can play, learn and socialize, while parents receive support and are able to spend quality time with their children.

"I fled from Guatemala with my mother and my sister in 1986, because of the oppression that was taking place in my country. I am now a Youth Coordinator with The YMCA of Québec, at the Saint-Laurent Y centre"

Ruben



A few definitions

Refugee: a person who, due to a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, and/or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is no longer in the country of his nationality and cannot, owing to such fear, and/or is unwilling to claim the protection of that country.

Asylum Seeker (asking for refugee status): a person who fled his or her country and asks protection in another country.

Protected Person: Refugee in accordance to the Geneva Convention, or a person to be protected (for instance, a person who is at risk of torture if he or she is expelled).

Internal Displaced Person: a person forced to move, but who stays inside his or her original country.

Person without status: a person who is not allowed to stay in the country or who stayed longer than her or his visa allowed.



Refugees in Canada.

We cannot accommodate all of the world's misery.' This phrase raises many questions as it implies that Canada and other western countries are the main places of refuge. However, only a small number of refugees and asylum seekers apply to the world's richest countries.

Canada is often cited as a model nation for granting asylum, specifically due to its ability to recognize women and homosexuals as groups in their own right.

However, certain limitations have come to light during the past ten years. The creation of the Refugee Appeal Division to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada as established under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, was adopted by Parliament in 2001. However, in March 2002, without consulting Parliament, the government announced that various immigration laws and the protection of refugees will be implemented without the sections of the law which grant asylum seekers the right of appeal if they do not agree with the decision.

The government established laws which reduce the number of commissioners who are involved in an application revision from two commissioners to one. This decision means that only one person decides the fate of an applicant's refugee status. Under the Refugees Section of Appeal, the unapproved requests for asylum are not able to challenge the decision rendered and in turn, unjust decisions are never changed.

Canada has been criticized by several international human rights organizations due to its lack of appeal mechanisms.



"I fled from Burundi for Rwanda in 1997 and then I left for Canada in 2006. My wife and I had to leave our one-year-old child in Rwanda.

I am currently studying social work at the University of Montreal. I am the Founder and President of Familles de l'Espoir pour les Nations, an organisation which aims to ease the integration of families from the Great Lakes Region in Africa. My family is very important for me: my wife and I have two children."

Marcel

From Mexico to Montréal

"We arrived from Mexico three years ago; we were in danger, especially my children. We were lucky to have been welcomed at the Y Residence when we arrived in Montreal.

The YMCA provided us with information so we could integrate within Montreal society. We went to school to learn French, and our children went to a special stream in school. We also found jobs.

Our children are now attending our neighbourhood school, they are involved in activities, like skating, cooking and baseball... My 11 year-old son goes to the summer camp at Kanawana. Sometimes, we volunteer for the YMCA.

My husband works full-time, and he is one of the baseball trainers for our neighbourhood. He is also a volunteer for Downtown Radio.

I work at the library. I give a workshop for parents and young children (0 to 3 years old) where we share the oral tradition of singing and telling stories. It's a special opportunity to make friends; we learn to be with other children, to share, to discover literature, books and stories.

I will follow French classes at the CEGEP near our home and I am also interested in pursuing professional training; I would like to become a first grade teacher.

That is our life now, we re looking forward to summer in Montreal for its parks, festivals, swimming pools and all the outside activities!

Eco-Refugees?

According to the UN, climate change could force the relocation of 250 million people by 2050.

Victims of environmental disasters are called “Eco-Refugees”. These individuals had to leave their area of residence due to gradual or significant environmental degradation in which they are no longer able to live in security as well as meet their basic needs.

They are often referred to as “refugees” as there is no specific juridical status for this group. The UN lobbies for the recognition of a juridical status for eco-refugees, which is similar to the status for the political refugees.



Refugees...

The issue of refugees is not only a question of status or of international law, and is not limited to the increasing number of people looking for a refuge.

This issue evokes many questions, as to why these people leave their country, their lands, and their family? The refugee issue is strongly linked to the political, economic and financial interests of the biggest powers of the world.

Volunteering at the Marche 2/3

Every year, the Marche 2/3 mobilizes thousands of youth to celebrate their solidarity with people throughout the world.

Individuals from the Y Residence have volunteered to help with the success of the Marche 2/3. Here are some of their experiences:

“Walking 4.6 km is quite something; they were tired, but determined to reach their goal. They wanted to change the stereotypes by proving that they are full of energy, friendship, solidarity, love and a willingness to change.”



“Respecting human rights, specifically the right to speak and to demonstrate are irrefutable indicators of democracy. Moreover, in a calm and secure manner, youth have demonstrated several issues without fear of repression. However, in my country, protesting issues and the concept of democracy concept is not put into practice; they are conscious of it, which is why they seek democracy in other countries still under dictatorships.

“I gladly accompanied and encouraged the youth in their commitment for a noble cause. They fight for solidarity and partnership when they could have been otherwise indifferent. I was pleasantly surprised about the security measures, compared to my home country where demonstrations get out of hand and create a weakened people, due to fear of repression. I am reiterating my commitment in the Marche 2/3, because I can't wait to see things change and the world to be founded on solid and deep values.”

Events Calendar

August 9 : International day of Native People

August 12 to 14: First Youth Forum of First Nations

References :

- United Nations
- Canadian Council for Refugees
- www.aidh.org
- www.cicr.org

We would like to thank all the people that accepted to share their experiences in this newsletter!

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Mission

The YMCAs of Québec is a charitable organization that, beyond the physical fitness activities it offers, helps children, youth, adults and seniors improve their well-being.

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