

NEW VOICES



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are we
**losing
ground?**

**REFUGEE RIGHTS
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
WOMEN'S RIGHTS
EMPLOYMENT EQUITY**

NEW VOICES

Editor:

Carlyn Zwarenstein
bleedingheartcommunications.com

Creative Team:

Tanya Chute Molina
Adriana Salazar
Jessica Farias
Chad Mohr (Design)

Photos:

Gerardo Correa
Luis Horacio Nájera

Contributing Writers:

Debbie Douglas
Stephen Kaduuli
Luis Horacio Nájera
Sunny Wang
Natalia Durango Vásquez

The creative team would like to thank:



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Tel: (416) 699-4527
mnlct@mnlct.org
www.mnlct.org

Message from The Executive Director

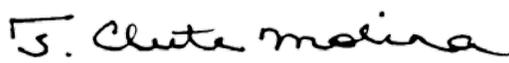
In 1918, women won the right to vote in Canada. In 1969, aboriginal communities secured a decision to close the residential schools. In 1984, the Singh decision granted refugee claimants the right to an oral hearing. Two years later, the original federal Employment Equity Act set out to correct the disadvantage experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities.

The struggle for equity is not new. Every generation plays its own role in this struggle, challenging the elected government of the day to deepen our national commitment to democracy, equity and social inclusion. Every government has a responsibility to address equity concerns, and does so best in an environment of dialogue and consultation with equity seeking groups.

In response to community campaigns for redress, our current government has made some important public apologies for historical wrongs. On June 22, 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered an apology for the head tax once paid by Chinese immigrants. On June 11, 2008, Harper offered another apology to former students of residential schools in Canada. Both apologies have been accompanied by limited compensation packages.

But equity requires much more than apologies and compensation for past wrongs. It requires vigorous and proactive strategies to address the ongoing legacy of historic injustices, ensuring that present and future generations have equitable opportunities to realize their potential and reach for their dreams. Challenging economic times test our commitment to our values - and to each other. This edition of New Voices examines the current state of equity in Canada, through a series of articles on refugee policy, employment equity, women's rights and freedom of expression.

Deeply committed to the issues they write about, our contributors challenge us to do better. They remind us that we are all responsible for advancing equity in Canada. Our writers reaffirm the critical importance of freedom of expression to healthy, democratic debate, and invite discussion between communities and elected decision makers. May the discussion be fruitful...


Tanya Chute Molina, Executive Director

Do you want to write for New Voices Spring Edition?

Contact: asalazar@mnlct.org

EDITORIAL: LOSING GROUND OR NOT?

By Debbie Douglas, Executive Director of OCASI

In November, the chairperson of the Public Service Commission found herself in the unusual position of having to remind senior civil servants that they had an obligation to follow through on Canada's Employment Equity legislation. The need for this reminder arose from comments made in the House of Commons by Minister Stockwell Day, President of Treasury Board, to the effect that all federal government positions were to be open to everyone and that hiring decisions would be based on merit.

The discussion of merit in hiring as it relates to Employment Equity or Affirmative Action is not new. It has often been used by those who oppose anti-discrimination regulations put in place to remedy historical and present day wrongs.

Enacted in 1995, the Federal Employment Equity framework seeks to ensure that Aboriginals, Women, Visible Minorities and People with Disabilities have equal opportunities in the workplace and that their representation in the federal civil service is reflective of their representation in the general population. It recognizes the existence of discriminatory practices in hiring and promotion within government, and attempts to level the playing field.

While Employment Equity has always been open to attack from a vocal minority who oppose multiculturalism, open immigration and programs for redress of historical wrongs, the very public musings from Day and Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney about reviewing and possibly revoking this legislation marked a worrying development. It was particularly troubling as it occurred in the midst of public outcry against the government's decision to do away with the mandatory long-form census, replacing it with a voluntary Household Survey. This move away from mandatory reporting threatens the accuracy of national data - particularly in the areas of ethnicity, race, and immigration status.

The two moves - doing away with the mandatory long-form census and announcing a review of Employment Equity legislation - came on top of a series of cuts over the past few years to the Court Challenges program, Status of Women Canada, the Law Reform Commission of Canada, and other progressive programs. This series of events led some to believe that the federal government was out to undermine public policies that support Canada's multi-racial, multi-

ethnic and multi-lingual makeup and that facilitate active engagement in our democracy by all citizens.

Communities and sectors concerned with issues of equity, social inclusion, and democracy, mounted a campaign on two fronts - to have the decision on the long-form census overturned, or at the least to have critical questions on race, ethnicity and language included in the mandatory short-form census, and also to prevent a review (and possible revocation) of existing Employment Equity legislation.

Have the advocacy campaigns been successful? At this time the answer will have to a qualified no. On the Census, public education and the national discussion that ensued on the importance of knowing who we are as a country was a win in and of itself. And while we have lost one court case, questions on language are to be included in the mandatory short-form census. Meanwhile, cases for the inclusion of ethnicity and race on the short form are still before the courts. But the outcry for a reversal of the decision from a broad cross-section of Canadians has gone unheeded by the federal government. Even the resignation of the chief statistician was met with a political shrug by the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada.

In the case of Employment Equity, Minister Day's comments are deeply troubling, particularly the assumption that merit is not considered when hiring within an equity framework. The fact that no formal review of the legislation has been announced can be directly attributed to the loud outcry from concerned communities who know that employment equity is critically important if equity-seeking groups are to continue making strides inside and outside of government.

The last few years have shown us that we must always be vigilant about group and individual rights. We have seen too many regressive decisions that chip away at hard fought for progress. As a collective we must continue to raise our voices to demand accountability from those we have elected to represent us. Whether it's immigration and refugee protection legislation or a woman's right to choose; the right to be counted in a national census or the right to opportunities for equitable participation in the labour market, we all have a responsibility to ensure that our policies and our governments are responsive to the many voices who share a vision of an inclusive, pluralistic Canada.

Debating the proper bounds of national generosity



Refugee claimants struggle with uncertainty in a rapidly shifting policy environment.

Much has changed since 1986, when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded its annual Nansen Refugee Award to “the people of Canada”. Over the past ten years, a series of policy reforms have increasingly limited access to the refugee determination system, provoking vociferous debate as to the proper bounds of national generosity and the profile of asylum seekers truly in need of protection.

First, the Safe Third Country agreement closed the door to most refugee claimants travelling through the United States to get to Canada, on the premise that asylum seekers could file a refugee claim in the United States – a country that treats refugee claims differently, in many respects, than Canada. A few years later, Canada slapped new visa requirements on visitors from Mexico and the Czech Republic, amidst official allegations of abuse of the refugee determination system by “bogus” claimants from “democratic” countries. Instead of examining individual claims for protection on their own merits, we began to hear broad generalizations about asylum seekers coming from, or travelling through, certain countries.

The Canadian government estimates that there are currently about 15,000 rejected refugee claimants in Canada ready for removal—and another 38,000 who have gone ‘underground’—a situation that, as mainstream media portrayed it, reflects an inefficiency of the system in removing asylum seekers whose claims were rejected. Jason Kenney, the Minister of Immigration and Citizenship, went on record saying that “the current system is broken,”

and in March of 2010, he announced a major overhaul of the refugee system through Bill C-11.

Bill C-11: Refugee Reform

The stated goal of Bill C-11 was to accelerate the delay-plagued refugee determination process. A strong subtext was promoting speedy removal of asylum seekers whose claims were rejected. And indeed, the dramatic changes envisioned in the Act raised alarm among immigration professionals, refugee rights organizations and academics in the lead up to its passage, as did the secrecy surrounding the changes. “The cloak and dagger routine which has surrounded this draft legislation is unprecedented for immigration reform in this country over the past quarter century,” wrote Catherine Dauvergne, the Canada Research Chair in Migration Law at the University of British Columbia, in an opinion piece in the Refugee Forum.

Faced with a dramatic erosion in the rights of asylum seekers, the Canadian Council for Refugees and other refugee advocacy groups swung into action. The resulting national advocacy effort to ensure their concerns were heard resulted in a greatly improved version of C-11 being passed in June.

What was wrong with C-11?

Here’s just one example: proposed timelines for how soon claimants should be interviewed by a public servant following their initial referral were too short. Law professor and former IRB Chair Peter Showler claimed the original 8-day timeline would “effectively deny legal counsel to claimants and lead to either hasty and poor decisions or to an excessive number of wasteful and time-consuming adjournments.” As a result of the campaign by refugee advocates, the timeline was extended to 15 days in the legislation that finally passed. Nevertheless, vulnerable applicants may still be at risk. As interviews won’t be postponed to ensure claimants have legal representation or have prepared a solid application. Find out more about the complex bill and remaining concerns at http://ccrweb.ca/files/c11_summary.pdf

Designated countries of origin

One of the most significant wins for advocates was overturning a highly controversial clause of Bill C-11 related to designated countries of origin.

“This is one of the most controversial provisions in the bill,” Showler said of the idea, borrowed from the United Kingdom, Australia and the U.S., that the government draw up a list of countries that are determined to be safe and exclude claimants from those countries from the new appeal process—an alternative to imposing visas on certain countries that produce high numbers of failed refugee claimants, such as the Czech Republic and Mexico. “The idea of ‘white-listing’ some countries as safe for all undercuts the spirit of international human rights protection,” argues Dauvergne.

“The introduction of safe country of origin means the minister has the power to create two classes of refugees: those who have the right to appeal and those who do not have that right,” argued NDP immigration critic Olivia Chow in a statement to parliament.

Opposition resistance to the “safe country” provision resulted in significant amendments to the bill, ensuring that all refugee claimants would have access to the appeal. Under the final version of the legislation, the “safe” list can only be used to expedite claims. To date, no countries have been designated. Indeed, most of the changes coming from C-11 will not be implemented until 2011 or even 2012, but changes affecting humanitarian and compassionate applications already apply. Many concerns—and many uncertainties—remain as the legislation begins to roll out.

Bill C-49: Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada’s Immigration System Act

The grandly titled Bill C-49 represents yet another challenge for refugee advocates.

Here’s the background. In August 2010, a ship carrying 492 asylum-seeking Tamils docked on Vancouver Island. The government reacted by tabling the anti-smuggling bill C-49. The controversial legislation criminalizes trafficking in persons, benefiting economically from trafficking and withholding or destroying of identity, immigration, or travel documents to facilitate trafficking

in persons. However, refugee advocates argue that the proposed legislation, which has yet to become law, would punish asylum seekers, not smugglers.

“I believe that C-49 has the potential to not only significantly erode human rights and refugee protection in Canada, but also Canada’s ability to play a leadership role in responding to protracted refugee situations abroad,” wrote James Milner, a Professor of Political Science at Carleton University, in a letter to the government, while immigration lawyer Raoul Boulakia points to the unconstitutional provision for lengthy detention without review as one troubling aspect of the Bill. Another problem relates to the government’s efforts to de-legitimize refugee claimants as “queue jumpers”, without acknowledging that the right to seek asylum supersedes normal immigration procedures. As of December 1st, all three opposition parties had spoken out publicly against C-49, and the Canadian Council for Refugees is urging members of the public to contact their MPs to ask that they vote against the bill.

“The bill is unconstitutional, it violates international refugee law and it is, frankly, mean-spirited.”

Sean Rehaag, professor at York University’s Osgoode Hall Law School, has his say on Bill C-49.



Stephen Kaduuli is a Ugandan with degrees in Social Work and Social Administration from Makerere University and a Masters in Demography from the Australian National University and certificates in Forced Migration issues from the universities of Oxford and York. Formerly a university teaching assistant, civil servant and civil society project coordinator, he is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the Center for Refugee Studies, York University. You can see some of Stephen’s published and online publications at: <http://ssrn.com/author=808607>

From demos to NGOs, it's getting harder to speak out



© Luis Horacio Najera

Freedom of expression: a Canadian value worth holding on to.

Thirty-one year old David Vasey, an environmental activist, wasn't really doing anything when he was arrested this summer during the G20 meeting and demonstrations. "I was arrested two times in two days; the first one was when I just walked to the security fence and a police officer asks me for my identification," he says. Vasey was among the 1,105 people arrested in Toronto by police during the largest mass arrests in Canadian history.

"Based on the Movement Defence Committee's publication, "Know your rights", I thought that I didn't have to provide police with any identification, so I refused and I was arrested under failure to provide identification, and spent six hours in a detention centre," Vasey recalls.

The overwhelming police reaction on the G20 weekend has become symbolic of the way dissent on political grounds is increasingly less tolerated by the government in Canada, according to Nathalie Des Rosiers, General Counsel of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and Executive Director of the Canadian Civil Liberties Education Trust. In fact, Des Rosiers explains, freedom of expression is becoming an increasingly hot topic in Canada, with cases of the undermining of freedom of expression accumulating in recent years.

For Vasey, things worsened the night after his first detention.

"I was with over a thousand people held in the detention centre, and the police was extremely abusive during that time, threatening and withholding your ability to go to the washroom, and things like that", the activist recalls. In the end, all charges against Vasey were quietly dropped—in fact, less than 300 of the thousand-plus arrestees were ever charged.

Des Rosiers attributes the erosion of civil rights to two main factors.

"One is the increasing role that security and police experts are playing in designing systems without any regard for the impact on freedom of expression; they say there is a risk to our security, and therefore all measures that minimize this risk are appropriate," she explains.

The second element, Des Rosiers says, is a general lack of respect, among both government and the police, for the expression of dissent. Indeed, both may seek to raise their popularity by cracking down strongly on 'activists'. This is a very dangerous threat to freedom of expression as our government can trample on civil liberties without suffering politically for its actions.

Freedom of expression is not a concern that gets much press within Canada. Most available reports dealing with the issue focus on specific aspects like journalist access to public information or court publication bans. Still, reports such as the 2009 Free Expression Review from Canadian Journalists for Free Expression support the assertions of activists like Vasey, non-governmental organizations like Des Rosiers', and members of the press themselves that the universal right to freedom of expression has been eroded in Canada.

Another case in point is that of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, a non-partisan, Canadian church-based organization. The respected international development and social justice organization was suddenly denied federal funding last year after 37 consecutive years of regular, substantial government support. After initially approving a routine project proposal for KAIROS to undertake projects with local NGOs in nine countries, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) reversed its decision and rejected the \$7.1 million proposal.

A year later, KAIROS is still struggling with the government's mystifying decision.

"While there is a great deal of speculation, the only official reason referenced by Minister Oda was a change in CIDA priorities. The government announced new priorities—children and youth, food security and economic growth—after our 2009-2013 application was already being processed by CIDA. We have since reapplied to CIDA under these new priorities and are awaiting word on the results of our application", explains Jennifer Henry, Manager of Dignity and Rights at KAIROS. She notes that other organizations with a similarly strong focus on advocacy, such as the Canadian Arab Federation and the women's development agency, Match International Centre, have also had funding cut.

"There is a sense in the NGO community that our defunding was related to our advocacy on issues. This has created a fear. We may never know who has not spoken up on important issues because of that fear", Henry says.

She points out that her organization's role is the same under any government: to support the public witness of the member churches working together for ecological justice and human rights.

"Sometimes that causes us to support government policies and sometimes to critique them, proposing instead creative alternatives, but in this particular context, it seems important to work together, as NGOs, so that Canadians might understand and defend the role of a strong civil society in any healthy democracy", Henry says.

According to Henry and others, freedom of expression in Canada must be an ongoing theme of public discussion, and not just a temporary debate around a single event like the heavy policing of the G8/G20 summit. Canada's future depends on healthy democratic debate of issues that affect us all. We need everyone's voice.

CANADIAN
CIVIL LIBERTIES
ASSOCIATION



ASSOCIATION
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LIBERTES CIVILES

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) is looking at issues of discrimination based on citizenship and immigration status. The CCLA's discussion paper "Who Belongs? Rights, Benefits, Obligations and Immigration Status" explores some of these issues and raises questions for further thought and discussion.

Read the discussion paper and tell the CCLA what YOU think about the most pressing issues facing immigrants in Canada. Download the paper here: <http://ccla.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/WhoBelongsdiscussionpaper.pdf> and email the CCLA at: discrimination@ccla.org to have your voice heard!



Luis Horacio Nájera is a Mexican journalist and photographer with 20 years of experience writing about US-Mexico border issues and freedom of expression. He fled to Canada in 2008 with his wife and 3 children, and now lives in Vancouver, where last June they were granted refugee status. Now, Luis is trying to re-establish his career in Canada.

PHOTO ESSAY: PILGRIMAGE TO FREEDOM

Did you know that much of the fresh produce grown in Ontario is actually the work of migrant labourers from East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean? Although migrant workers harvest fields across the province, their contributions - and their struggles – often go unseen. That wasn't possible last Thanksgiving weekend, when farm workers from around the globe joined together with Justicia for Migrant Workers on a 10-hour pilgrimage to draw attention to their often exploitative working conditions. Bound to a single employer by the terms of their work permit, migrant farm workers are vulnerable to rights violations. Taking a public stand for their rights, workers and their supporters marched 50 km from Leamington to Windsor. Photographer Gerardo Correa was there and captured images of this historic pilgrimage to freedom.



To learn more about Migrant Workers Rights, contact [Justicia for Migrant Workers](#)



Gerardo Correa



Gerardo Correa



Gerardo Correa

PREVIOUS PAGE

TOP: Farm workers start their pilgrimage early in the morning at Leamington, Canada's greenhouse capital.

MIDDLE: Farm workers and supporters raise their call for rights and permanent status outside MP Jeff Watson's office.

BOTTOM: A worker talks with a neighbour about the pilgrimage, raising local awareness of the contributions and struggles of migrant workers.

THIS PAGE

TOP: Workers pause for rest, lunch and massage in Essex, midway through the pilgrimage.

LEFT: The pilgrimage arrives in the city of Essex. The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program began in 1966 by bringing Jamaican workers to harvest crops in Essex County.

RIGHT: Workers end their pilgrimage at the Tower of Freedom in Windsor, symbolically uniting their march for rights and freedom with the courageous journeys of agricultural workers past who travelled the underground railroad to escape from slavery.

PROFILE: EQUITY IN THE JOB SEARCH

Foreign-trained professionals face systemic barriers



© Gerardo Correa

A job seeker looks for answers at the National Job Fair and Training Expo, held at Metro Toronto Convention Centre.

“When I applied for immigration, I easily passed the point system and my experience was recognized. But now my work experience is worth nothing. I feel like I’m being fooled around with by the Canadian government.” An Iranian engineer shared this story with us—though he wouldn’t disclose his name. Still, he shares his experience with many other foreign-trained professionals in Canada. True, Canada has had outstanding success at bringing in people with high educational attainment and strong professional background. However, are these talented newcomers receiving enough support to find employment commensurate with their skills and experience? Let’s look at the statistics.

In 2006, 52% of recent immigrants with a university degree worked in a job requiring only high school education—almost double the proportion among their Canadian-born counterparts. In 2009, the unemployment

rate of recent immigrants who have university degrees was 13.9%—4.1 times the Canadian-born rate. Earnings also differ substantially. The most recent Census found that whereas Canadian-born workers in the Toronto census area with a university degree earned an average of \$57,695 in 2005, immigrants with the same qualifications earned just \$37,647, on average. That’s a gap of \$20,050, and it rises to a difference of \$31,394 between immigrants arriving between 2000 and 2004 and their Canadian-born counterparts.

Why do skilled immigrants often fail to get jobs in their profession? Jojo Geronimo, Executive Director of the Labour Education Centre, points to lack of recognition of foreign credentials and employer expectations for Canadian experience as the two biggest barriers faced by internationally trained professionals.

He explains that the accreditation process, especially for regulated professions, is challenging and may take newcomers anywhere from a few months to several years to complete. For certain professions, newcomers must start from scratch to get re-certified. Long delays result in wasted human resources, and the de-skilling of internationally trained professionals who give up on the process, turning to low wage jobs to make ends meet. Geronimo suggests that professional accreditation should be processed in the country of origin, prior to immigration, or else far more efficiently here in Canada.

But even after foreign-trained professionals have their education and experience recognized, they still face that other huge challenge, lack of Canadian experience and connections. Enter the Career Bridge program.

A unique paid internship program that provides foreign-trained professionals with meaningful Canadian work experience, Career Bridge began in 2003, and has since helped over 1500 participants launch their Canadian careers. Because of the large supply of immigrant job seekers, the qualification process for this program is very competitive and there is far more demand than available spaces.

“Career Bridge is a great internship program. But to get in this program, you really need good luck,” says Bhavna Trivedi, a York Region employment specialist. “It would be great to see more programs like this funded by the government.” She suggests that job placement is a key tool to help newcomers gain Canadian experience. And the placement has to be at least three months for newcomers to demonstrate their qualifications to employers and build up their connections in the work place.

Janice Rudkowski, Director of Marketing & Communications at the Career Edge Organization, which runs the government-supported Career Bridge program, says that because it is well known in the community, many newcomers approach her organization even before they arrive in Canada.

Rudkowski suggests the government should more vigorously promote her program to employers as a cost-effective and flexible staffing solution, as it not only contributes to higher employment rates for newcomers to

According to the Conference Board of Canada, if all immigrants’ foreign experiences and credential were recognized, between \$3.4 and \$5.0 billion would be added to the Canadian economy every year.

Canada but also helps employers to tap into pre-screened international talent. Besides providing 300-400 Career Bridge internships every year, Career Edge Organization actively seeks out new potential host employers to create further internship opportunities.

Employment equity, which would ensure that equally qualified people from visible minorities get a chance at scarce employment opportunities, is yet another, powerful way to promote integration of skilled immigrant professionals in the labour force and to dismantle the systemic barriers they face. Career Bridge and other internship programs play an important complementary role. Both are urgently needed—after all, by 2011, immigrants will account for 100% of net labour force growth in Canada. They deserve full and meaningful employment, and we desperately need their experience and skills. We can’t afford to get this wrong.



Sunny Wang is originally from China and came to Canada as an international student in 2004. She has a Master’s degree in Political Science with her main interest lying in policy development. She had worked for an ethnic media in Toronto for two years, reporting on financial scams and frauds

related to newcomer consumers. She’s currently working on a community based planning project in the immigrant settlement field. As a resident, she’s actively involved in the York Region Equity Council, advocating for immigrants’ equity issues.

Women in the struggle for women's rights



© Gerardo Correa
June 2010: Toronto women take a stand for reproductive justice in the People's Summit Rally.

A few days ago, as I sat in the waiting room at my daughter's pediatric clinic, I overheard two women talking. One said: "I have a child with special needs; she was attending a daycare in an institution that helps woman like me but, because of the financial cuts, it had to reduce the number of attendants. I had to leave my job as a laboratory technician six months ago in order to take care of my child and now my husband and I do not know how we are going to survive. I have applied for child care subsidy, but the waiting list is one year at least".

The other woman replied, "Many people think that this is our destiny, but I think women deserve something more. 'Women' means home, but 'women' means struggle as well. So, only women can stop this social inequality."

The conversation—which I've reproduced exactly as I heard it—reflects the battle that women have to fight every day. Even in Canada, a relatively rich country, budget cuts and policy changes have recently had profound effects on women's lives.

Today, economic crisis in Canada means increased inequity for women, with cuts to women's organizations and a shortage of childcare emerging as part of the response to recession. The widening gap between men and women can be seen in unfair wages or unemployment, or in the life stories of specific women.

Erosion in the status of women

In their March 2009 Equality and Human Rights E-Bulletin, the National Union of General and Public

Employees affirms that "from eliminating funding to women's organizations that research or advocate for equality and the elimination of the Court Challenges Program, the government has consistently moved away from women obtaining equality in this country".

The authors add that "the need for universal early childhood education and daycare programs and the need to amend the Employment Insurance eligibility requirements have been ignored."

In fact, the Report of the 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the United Nations' most recent report on equality in Canada, says there has been "systematic erosion" in the status of Canadian women since 2004.

The UN notes in this report that women have lost ground because of the elimination of funding for advocacy groups, and they also cite the effects of scrapping the national child-care program.

The government has cut federal funding to more than a dozen women's groups that promote human rights and equality rights. In the House of Commons, MPs have gone on record saying that groups were "inefficient" and "the government is just making sure taxpayers get their money's worth". Among the victims of funding cuts are aboriginal women's organizations such as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. According to missingjustice.ca, the result will be that "134 community projects across Canada will no longer provide cultural healing services to Indigenous people". The defunded projects include investigation of the disappearance or murder of several hundred aboriginal women in Canada over the past thirty years.

Gender Gap

The gap between men and women in employment equity is also on the rise.

According to a recent report of the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, "Canada was in 14th place [of 114] in 2006 and now has dropped to 25th in the latest survey."

In a Status of Women in Canada study presented in January to the Canadian Labour Congress, researchers found that “only 32% of unemployed women qualified for regular EI benefits in recent years compared to 40% of men who were unemployed. Only about one-third of the total dollar amount of regular EI benefits is paid to women, even though women now participate in the paid workforce at almost the same rate as men.”

During a recent Concordia University conference called Equity Matters, York University professor Pat Armstrong argued that despite some gains, employment equity remains elusive.

“The evidence about [unequal pay for equal work] has been there for a long time and it’s being used for women to improve the pay,” Armstrong says. “But evidence alone doesn’t do the trick. It’s a necessary but not sufficient factor in making change”.

A range of strategies are needed to close the gender gap, argues Armstrong. As women tend to be concentrated in poorly paid sectors, minimum wage legislation, based on ensuring workers can meet basic needs, tends to improve their wages.

“For this reason minimum wage legislation remains critical to women’s paid work today. This strategy for minimum wages demonstrated women’s concentrations in particular sectors could be readdressed at least to some extent by ensuring the lowest paid will be not totally impoverished,” Armstrong says.

Temporary workers struggle for equity and rights

An overlooked area where equity is a concern is in temporary agricultural work. Many women who come to Canada to work as seasonal farmer workers—3% of the total temporary foreign worker population—struggle for equity with also dealing with the same critical labour rights issues as their male counterparts.

“The jobs and the income earned are highly valued by the women because it is often the only income for the family,” explains Kerry Preibisch, a professor of sociology and anthropology at the University of Guelph. “This income provides the women with a measure of economic independence that is seldom found in their home

According to the York University-based Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative, “Female immigrants with at least one university degree have the poorest labour market outcomes. They have lower annual earnings and higher unemployment rates than equally well-educated Canadian-born women, immigrant men and Canadian-born men.” (TIEDI, March 2010)

countries. In order to keep their jobs, women are more likely to comply with the demands and restrictions of their employers because they have more at stake”.

“They come to work in isolated places, therefore they are vulnerable to sexual harassment,” adds Evelyn Encalada, a labour rights researcher and founding member of Justicia for Migrant Workers. “If they get pregnant they can be deported because they are fired immediately. Sometimes, if they get sick they prefer to hide their disease and avoid attention. They could lose their jobs if the boss knows they are sick”.

The situation for women in Canada, whatever their background, can look discouraging right now. However, just as one woman said at the beginning of this article—women are also the ones who can challenge inequity. In fact, every expert mentioned in this article is a woman engaged with women’s rights—a small sample of the struggle of which women are capable.



Natalia Durango Vásquez is a Colombian journalist based in Toronto. Over the past ten years, Natalia has covered political transitions in Latin America, including the evolution of the Chavez government, the new Bolivian politics, the political transformation of Central America

and the Colombian conflict. She has also worked on-site covering conflict in the Middle East and the war in Lebanon. As well as working as a journalist and broadcaster, she has worked as an associate professor at universities in Colombia.

A documentary that tells the story of newcomer advocacy for social change, fair employment and inclusive civic participation.



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EDUCATION AND ACTION RESOURCES

Support newcomer advocacy
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New Voices:

New Voices is a bi-annual magazine featuring articles written by internationally trained journalists and immigrant writers.

Our contributors explore the political and social realities that affect the lives of immigrants and refugees, expose injustices and propose solutions. Our Winter 2010 edition addresses the timely theme of "Equity: Are we losing ground?" and features a guest editorial from OCASI Executive Director Debbie Douglas.

If you are looking for strong writing and critical analysis of current issues facing immigrant and refugee communities, *New Voices* is for you!

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Raising our Voice:

This half hour documentary tells the story of newcomer advocacy work for fair employment and inclusive civic participation, reaching out to community partners and political allies through a Community Forum. Members of the Newcomer Advocacy Committee talk about their experience of finding strength and hope in collective reflection and action on four advocacy priorities: employment equity, paid internships, community organizing, and municipal voting rights for permanent residents.

If you want to raise awareness, explore new strategies for community engagement, or join with immigrants and refugees in the work of social change, order a copy of *Raising our Voice*!

Video: \$10

Community Toolkit

Looking for new ideas for community engagement? LINC/ESL resources rooted in the lived experience of immigrants and refugees? Order our Community Toolkit and join with immigrants and refugees in reflection and action on issues of fair employment and inclusive civic participation.

This resource toolkit includes:

50 copies of *New Voices*
(25 Winter 2010
and 25 Summer 2011 editions) +
2 *Raising our Voice* video

\$75

Leadership Toolkit

Want to spice up your board meetings? Inspire and engage your management team? Connect the leadership of your organization with the voices and concerns of immigrants and refugees? Invest in our Leadership Toolkit!

This resource toolkit includes:

24 copies of *New Voices*
(12 Winter 2010 and
12 Summer 2011 editions) +

1 *Raising our Voice* video

\$50

To place an order or organize a free video screening and dialogue with newcomer activists, please contact us: (416) 699 4527 Ext 229

asalazar@mnlct.org

In this edition of *New Voices*, internationally trained writers examine the current state of equity in Canada, inviting discussion between equity seeking groups and elected decision makers. Equity is a collective responsibility. It demands all our voices.