

International participation included fifteen international agencies, representatives from eight governments and three academic institutions. Refugees from more than twelve countries attended.

The brief of the Refugee Studies Programme is essentially academic, its priority is to encourage rigorous, independent, multi-disciplinary research into refugee situations. However, as the details of those who attended the recent Symposium attest, the Programme cannot be said to be isolated from events nor unconstructively academising issues. Such a comprehensive representation and interest suggests that the Programme's aim to ensure that its research is policy oriented and relevant to the needs of refugees and practitioners is being realised. The other obvious element which was well illustrated at the recent Symposium was that such innovation is long overdue and much welcomed.

A model for the 1989 Symposium was the workshop which was held in the Sudan in July 1987, organised by Dr Ahmed Karadawi on behalf of the RSP. The workshop was chaired by a senior Sudanese diplomat and brought together representatives of the Sudanese government, the police, the military, Sudanese non-governmental organisations, the media and representatives of refugee organisations. Such a meeting represented a novel and innovative initiative with the objective of developing a permanent forum for dialogue between refugees and Sudanese institutions, concerning certain immediate and long-term problems faced by refugees.

In January, the Symposium held in Oxford sought to examine the nature of the contemporary crisis with a view to improving current policy and practice. In comparing the existing provision of services to refugees in both Canada and the UK it was hoped that inadequacies could be identified and current services evaluated. Set in the context of the world refugee crisis, the hardening of public attitudes towards asylum-seekers and the tendency towards more restrictionist policies from governments indicate that the problems of access and the effects of detention and deterrence on successful resettlement urgently need to be reconsidered. At the Symposium Mr Zia Rizvi of the Independent Commission on Humanitarian Issues suggested that the degree to which the West chose to insulate itself from the refugee crisis was an indictment on its moral well-being. He feared the drawing in of a self-interested, protectionist approach to strangers in the West in general and in Europe in particular.

The Symposium looked at the laws and regulations in operation in the two countries and the politics of reception or deterrence. The context and processes of resettlement were compared in detail when the Symposium divided into eleven workshops to look at specific issues of resettlement including education and language, health care, housing, employment and social services. The comparison of these issues served to emphasise one of the fundamental differences underlying the responses of the two societies. In Britain, there are

few official programmes set up to create an institutionalised base to make best use of the fund of human resource which refugees represent. Many of the refugees who spoke at the Symposium had professional qualifications and potential but resettlement had entailed an inability to utilise such skills. Refugees who manage to overcome the myriad difficulties of gaining entry are identified as competing against others who are equally in need of scarce resources and are therefore seen as a drain on public funds.

Historically Canada has an advantage over Britain, it is a society built on and maintained by immigration and has thus sought to develop a multicultural identity. Because it has already established the means of easing the entry of immigrants, the adaptation of the refugee to Canadian society is often more easily facilitated. The refugee is viewed as another kind of immigrant, adding to the diversity of a heterogeneous nation; while this can help to nurture a positive attitude, the identification of the asylum seeker with the immigrant emphasises the skills and experiences needed in Canada rather than the need to offer asylum.

The Symposium was presented as an opportunity for essential learning for all concerned with refugees and other minorities but it was not just an opportunity to learn from up-to-date research about facts, figures, data and statistics. One of the most important things learned, and which was stressed by Dr Barbara Harrell-Bond, Director of RSP, was the need for consultation and collaboration in order that all might work towards a common strategy of action, heighten awareness of the problems and contribute to their resolution. A participant at the Symposium wrote; 'I gained a great deal from the conference; both in new insights, and in new contacts with other people working with refugees. I think it's valuable for all of us...to get away, to think, listen, and share knowledge. I am grateful for having had that opportunity. I think the interaction of practitioners and academics, too, is a useful and all-too-rare event.'

The initiative RSP has shown in gathering together interested parties to forge a common aim, is an example of what is required with regard to responses to the refugee crisis. Professor Michael Lanphier, Research Counsel for the centre for Refugee Studies at York University suggested that if Britain wanted to remain true to its liberal traditions and Canada to its multicultural principles, then both countries would have to move from a national to an international perspective and from an individualistic stance to one of collaboration.

Collaboration between the Refugee Studies Programme, Oxford University and the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, Canada, continues. A publication comprising papers presented at the Symposium will be produced in the near future. For details of this, or more general information, the Refugee Studies Programme is based at Queen Elizabeth House, 21 St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LA.