

Immigration and Bill C-31

Mr. Mendel Green, noting Canada's less-than-perfect record of accepting refugees and immigrants and the complexity of the system, was otherwise very optimistic about the positive and valuable effect immigration has had on Canadian society. He felt immigrants are generally more resourceful than other Canadians, with lower rates of both unemployment and welfare dependency. He believes that Canada's main strength is its immigrants and that Canada should emphasize the positive aspects of immigration, including both multiculturalism and tolerance.

In particular Mr. Green was positive about the modern views of refugee protection and decision-making being proposed in Bill C-31. For example, while reaffirming that family reunification is the foundation of Canadian immigration policy, Bill C-31 introduces a new definition of 'family' to include common law and same-sex spouses. Similarly, to address the problem of professionals being selected but then being left without room in their area of the market, Bill C-31 is introducing a more innovative and creative approach by emphasizing flexible skills and experience in a trade. A further positive element of Bill C-31 is greater safeguards such as more stringent and comprehensive medical examinations, and stricter screening for criminals.

The Canadian Reception of Refugees

Introducing a fascinating discussion, Maître Bertrand summarized the Canadian view of refugees. First, he noted that Canadians acknowledge that problems exist around the world and that there are many people in need of protection and compassion. We also recognize that we share the planet and must face the consequences of others' problems. Second, Canadians realize that there are lots of people abroad that could apply and qualify as a refugee in Canada. Canada does not have a quota or maximum and with open exchange of information (i.e. the internet), the world is realizing the ease of coming to Canada. Third, Canadians are afraid of the cost and numbers of accepting many refugees, but still want to help. Finally, Canadians also know that there is corruption and crime out there. They are afraid of queue jumpers and economic migrants - abusers of the system.

Maître Bertrand offered a number of solutions to address the frustration felt by the Canadian population. The foremost solution is to test the credibility of the claimants and to keep one step ahead of the incoming system-abusers. For example, the port of entry interview could be used more effectively and consistently. With careful translation of the claimant's story, with the possibility of calling overseas to corroborate the story, and with the verification of documents overseas, a claimant's credibility can be tested.

Refugees, Restitution and International Law

Focusing on the Middle East, Mr. Michael Lynk discussed the right in international law to restitution or compensation for refugees. Summarizing the situation in the Middle East and the fate of the Palestinians, he noted that there are still wide gaps between the parties as to the 'final status' of the refugees and their property. The repatriation, resettlement and compensation of refugees require answers as to many questions: who and how many qualify for such remedies? Who would pay? How much is to be paid? By what process should this be done?