

- (d) we have led the way with gender-based persecution criteria, hailed by the UNHCR, and only a few other countries have followed us; an example is that spousal abuse can be accepted by the IRB as amounting to persecution, although only where the state (such as certain Muslim ones) does not protect a wife, as in Bangladesh, Iran, or Gulf countries, or where it is unable to cope, as in some Caribbean countries. (Some 600 out of 1100 claims have been accepted on this basis);
- (e) all information furnished must be unclassified, and anyway there is often disinformation from governments to Canadian diplomats about how well they treat their citizens;
- (f) new IRB members, conscious of the "moral burden" they bear, tend to say "yes" during their first year, after which they become more familiar with the situation, but the average turnover is only 2½ years;
- (g) panels take independent decisions on individual cases, but efforts are made to reduce divergencies, whereby, for instance, certain similar cases are accepted 25% in Montreal and 2% in Vancouver;
- (h) members are now recommended by a more independent and impartial process. (After the 1993 election 50% were replaced by the new Minister all at once, largely from among declared refugee advocates.)

Most of these (and others not recorded here in defence of IRB practices) are sound points, but one wonders about the IRB chair's statement that "Canadians have developed the best refugee determination process in the world; ours is a process that mirrors the finest qualities of the Canadian character". Certainly it is the most generous and (some might say) the most naïve. Many well-known examples are cited of fraudulent or exaggerated claims pressed successfully by skilled immigration lawyers, systematic attempts to delay decisions so that potentially unsuccessful claimants can continue to avail themselves of Canadian social and medical facilities, ill-considered decisions by inexperienced members, and controversial decisions, such as those concerning Russians claiming persecution in Israel, and recently, a case concerning a minor calling into question British and US standards.

There are two adverse results of this situation:

Much the most important is the danger that the public, seeing so many obviously fraudulent or unreasonable claims being accepted for so long, may mistakenly turn against the whole idea of refugees and indeed of immigrants in general. Support for immigration in many sectors of public opinion is already fragile.

The second result is that we lose a degree of international respect for our policies as a whole. UNHCR officials have privately criticised our acceptance rate as too high, just as they have criticised Finland's (at 0.2%) as too low, no doubt because both, in their view, bring the Convention refugee system into disrepute. Other countries, mostly European, criticise our gender guidelines as too broad, as mentioned earlier, and also note that the lure of our high acceptance rate attracts potential claimants to potential jumpoff points in Europe such as Frankfurt, where we try to block them through airline access control measures. There is indeed some hypocrisy,