

Bill C-11: The "Balanced Refugee Reform Bill"

Bill C-11, introduced in March, 2010 by Citizenship and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney, is a Bill designed to "speed up" the process of refugee determination in Canada. This Bill will influence how and to whom Canada will grant refugee protection. Not every change to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act proposed in this Bill is inherently bad, however, there are a number of significant concerns and areas with a lack of accountability and protective measures. This Bill, along with the condescending language of "bogus" and "abuser" levelled at refugee claimants has the potential of undermining Canada's reputation as a humanitarian and human rights respecting nation.

Resources

- A synopsis of Bill C-11 and the concerns of organizations serving refugees across Canada - [Proposed Refugee Reform Undermines Fairness to Refugees](#).
- Join the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) Facebook page for ongoing updates - [Canadian Council for Refugees on Facebook](#).
- [Bill C-11](#)
- MCRS Press Release (can be found below)

You can be an advocate!

You can play a powerful role in advocating for refugee claimants. When you lend your voice to the call for fair legislation and fair appeals, you help men, women and their families find a safe home.

You can advocate for change by joining us for events and our Community Action Group, as well as by writing letters to your Member of Parliament. Below is a list of current needs and campaigns we are currently active in supporting along with letter templates you can use to write your own letter.

Voice your concern regarding Bill C-11

Bill C-11 proposes to change the Refugee determination system in Canada. While the changes may sound good initially, there are actually several pieces of the legislation that will fail to protect refugee claimants. We ask you to please contact your Member of Parliament and advocate that the bill be sent to a Parliamentary Committee for a full review before it passes Second Reading. You can use the letter template provided by the Amnesty International website, to draft a letter, or create your own. You can find your local MP by typing in your postal code at the Government of Canada web site. MCRS also has postcards to send to your MPs available at the office.

MCRS Press Release

April 05, 2010

“Proposed Changes to Refugee System Further Endanger At-Risk Claimants”

On March 30th the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Jason Kenney, introduced a bill to change Canada’s Refugee System. These changes will supposedly fix a broken refugee system which allows many migrants to stay in the country under false refugee claims as well as creating a backlog of cases still waiting to be decided. It would be better, however, to correct the system that we have now than to implement a new and costly system that will close the doors to people fleeing persecution.

We at the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support are very concerned that if the bill to implement these changes is passed, there will be severe negative consequence to refugee claimants. The introducing of a two-tier determination system based on countries of origin—where refugee claims would not be decided on a case-by-case basis and by the individual merits of each case, but would be decided based on nationality—is a mistake.

MCRS is concerned that claimants particularly hurt by this will be women making gender-based claims, and persons claiming on the basis of sexual orientation or sexual identity. In many countries that otherwise seem fairly peaceful and “safe”, there can be serious problems of persecution on these grounds. Yet, these claimants will not be able to appeal a negative decision as would claimants from “unsafe” countries.

One of the proposed changes will be to have hearings within two months of making a claim. While many refugees will welcome an early hearing, for some it will represent a serious disadvantage—notably refugees who have experienced serious trauma such as torture, refugees who cannot have the relevant documentation sent to Canada quickly enough, and refugees who need to build trust in order to be able to testify freely (such as women and persons claiming on the basis of sexual orientation who have experienced sexual assault).

It is also a mistake to turn first-instance decision making over to civil servants, because they lack the necessary independence and judicial experience. Systems using civil servants in other countries have proved unsuccessful, with a large number of cases overturned on appeal.

While we at MCRS understand the Minister’s concern about limiting any abuse to Canada’s refugee system, we do not agree that refugees only come from certain “unsafe” countries. It is unfair to deem refugee claimants false or “bogus” because they didn’t have the ability to apply overseas because of dangerous or life-threatening situations. We call on the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to stop using damaging terms when referring to human beings in need of protection, our friends: refugee claimants, most of whom legitimately require protection. It is our duty under the Convention of Human Rights to protect people who seek refuge.

Refugees are among the most vulnerable people in society and are easy targets for attack, as non-citizens in a foreign country. Disparaging labels, especially coming from government officials, profoundly damage public perception of refugees, and non-citizens in general.

Please contact MCRS at 519-571-1912, refugee@mcrs.ca for more information and suggestions for positive action.