

CUC RESOLUTION ON BILL C-31
PROTECTING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION SYSTEM ACT
An Act to Amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

Background

Canadians are rightly proud of our country's record of welcoming refugees. Since the end of World War II, these have included Hungarians in 1956, Czechoslovakians in 1968, Vietnamese 'boat people' in the seventies, and refugees from many other parts of the world in subsequent decades. Many of our congregations have sponsored refugee claimants who have made Canada their home and enriched our society through their contributions. Some members of our congregations, or their parents before them, came to Canada as refugees themselves.

Some of our congregations have also opened their doors to provide sanctuary as a measure of last resort. Church sanctuary in Canada exists in part to compensate for the lack of an effective appeal system in our current refugee determination system. Now with the new fast-tracking measures included in the 'Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act' (Bill C-31), there is far greater potential for error as well as politicization of the refugee determination process.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration will have unilateral power to designate certain countries as 'safe' (Designated Countries of Origin). The long-honoured principle that every refugee's case must be considered individually is compromised because all people from a so-called 'safe' country are lumped together. In particular, targeted groups within certain countries, such as GLBT persons and the much maligned Roma, the largest cultural minority in Europe, will be most affected by the new 'Designated Country' list.

The Minister of Public Safety will also have the power to designate any group of refugee claimants as 'irregular arrivals' and these persons will be automatically detained, including children and youth 16 years of age and older. This is in direct contravention of the Canadian Charter and International Law.

The above designated refugee claimants are also barred from the Refugee Appeal process. As well, all other refugee claimants will have only 15 working days to complete the appeal applications. Access to legal counsel and qualified interpreters will be seriously compromised. The short time frames specified in Bill C-31 are simply inadequate, especially for survivors of torture and rape, suffering from post-traumatic stress.

Cuts to the Interim Federal Health Provisions (IFHP) for refugee claimants, both preventative (such as pre/post natal care) and primary health care, came into effect on June 30th, 2012. This punitive and ultimately costly healthcare policy not only jeopardizes innocent lives but also threatens the public safety of all Canadians.

We therefore propose the following CUC Resolution:

Whereas, we, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person and justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.

And whereas, the living tradition which we share draws from the words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love,

And whereas, a number of Unitarian congregations have sponsored refugees and offered sanctuary to refugees in recent years,

And whereas the Resolution on Sanctuary was adopted and the Guidelines for Sanctuary approved by the CUC Board in May 2005,

And whereas, Canada is signatory to international legal commitments such as the 1951 'Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 'Convention against Torture' and the 'Convention on the Rights of the Child',

And whereas, the 'Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms' applies to everyone in Canada, regardless of whether they are Canadian citizens,

And whereas, Bill C-31 places in jeopardy refugees who have legitimate claims to protection,

Resolution

Therefore, be it resolved that

- 1. The Canadian Unitarian Council recommends to the Government of Canada the repeal of Bill C-31, the 'Protecting Canada's Immigration Act', and its replacement with legislation more in keeping with this country's tradition of justice and equality before the law.**

For more information go to www.ccrweb.ca, www.doctorsforrefugeecare.ca, www.sanctuarycanada.ca

Action Plan next page

ACTION PLAN

PROPOSED ACTION	DETAILS	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	SUGGESTED COMPLETION DATE
For the Criminal Justice Monitoring Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare a letter to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice for the signatures of the Canadian Unitarian Voice to make our recommendations • Prepare a press release to communicate our stand to major media, news-papers, CBC Radio and TV • Follow the refugee issues and the consequences of this bill and report further actions to the CUC as required • Network and develop an active relationship with allied organizations such as the Canadian Council for Refugees, Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care and Sanctuary Canada 	<p>Margaret Rao</p> <p>Margaret Rao and Frances Deverell</p> <p>All members of the monitoring group</p> <p>Chosen members of the monitoring group</p>	<p>June 15th, 2013</p> <p>June 15th, 2013</p> <p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p>
For CUC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the communications to the government, the media, to Canadian Congregations, and to our allies such as the Canadian Council for Refugees. • Support and develop an active networking relationship with the Canadian Council for Refugees, Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care and Sanctuary Canada 	<p>The Canadian Voice with the support of CUC staff.</p> <p>April Hope, Vyda Ng</p>	<p>June 30th, 2013</p> <p>On-going</p>
For Member Congregations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take action by writing letters to your MP, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and the Minister of Public Safety • Make appointments to phone or visit your MP on this issue • Hold services or events to inform your congregation or the public 	<p>Individual members Ministers</p> <p>Worship services & Social Action or Refugee committees</p>	<p>Fall 2013</p> <p>2013-14</p>

This resolution was developed by Margaret Rao of the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto with the assistance of Reverend Frances Deverell, and was accepted to be proposed by the Criminal Justice Monitoring Group because of the criminalization and unconstitutional detention of designated refugees.