

A Note from the Editor

SHARRY J. AIKEN

In a recent news release on Canada's overall immigration intake for 2010, the government asserted that the country had "maintained its humanitarian tradition" by welcoming 4,833 privately sponsored refugees to Canada, 63 percent more than in 2005.¹

Viewed positively, this statistic might be a signal of a strong commitment to refugees and a progressive refugee policy.

However, the real news behind the latest numbers of privately sponsored refugees admitted to Canada is the fact that the refugee program has shrunk over the past decade—both in terms of raw numbers as well as percentage distribution.² Canada may be a leading country of refugee resettlement, accepting one out of every ten refugees resettled globally—but the fact remains that the number of refugees being admitted to Canada in any given year (less than 25,000 in 2010)—are an increasingly smaller fraction of the overall immigration program and a tiny share—less than one percent—of the world's forcibly displaced. To put these numbers in perspective it helps to recall that there are at least 43 million people displaced worldwide (unofficial estimates are higher), including over 15 million refugees—more than half of whom have been warehoused in camps for five years or more in the global south.³ Asylum claims in Canada—in concert with other industrialized countries are much lower than a decade ago. Indeed, according to a recent study by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of asylum applications in Canada fell 30 percent in 2010, part of an overall decline in asylum claims in Western countries.⁴ High Commissioner António Guterres has suggested that "[w]e need to study the root causes to see if the decline is because of fewer push factors in areas of origin, or tighter migration control in countries of asylum."⁵ In the face of recent emergencies in Libya and the Côte d'Ivoire, longstanding conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia as well as ongoing abuses in Sri Lanka and China—just to cite a few examples⁶—there should be little doubt that heightened regulation of migration and border control are significant factors in the shifting dynamics of



asylum worldwide. The mass arrests of Sri Lankan Tamils in Bangkok last fall, many of whom were registered with the UNHCR, were a direct result of Canada's new anti-human smuggling program in Southeast Asia and a clear manifestation of refugee interdiction.⁷

Exacerbated by 9/11 and a moral panic about "dangerous" foreigners, countries of the global north are increasingly

embroiled in a complex matrix of competition and cooperation. On the one hand states are competing with each other to recruit the most highly skilled, "adaptable" newcomers through a highly regulated process of immigrant selection—while on the other, a coordinated transnational strategy of surveillance, interdiction and deportation has served to selectively contain or immobilize "high risk" foreigners in the global south. This strategy has serious human rights implications for refugees—but it also raises critical questions of social justice in a world increasingly stratified into the "mobility rich" and "mobility poor".⁸

In the ten years since I assumed the post of editor-in-chief, *Refuge* has chronicled these disturbing developments. As explored in numerous special issues of this journal, the conditions facing refugees—the vast majority of whom are "mobility poor"—are deteriorating. For refugees in detention, encamped for years in exile or scarcely surviving in urban centres throughout the developing world, as well as the seemingly intractable problems facing Palestinian refugees and stateless persons—the past decade has been witness to many setbacks. At the same time *Refuge* has consistently engaged with solutions—highlighting international efforts to combat xeno-racism, the emerging role of global movements for refugee and migrant rights, the positive features of refugee diasporas with multiple homes and parallel civil societies as well as the persistent salience of sanctuary practices to resist deportation. I am particularly proud of the current issue, "No Borders as Practical Politics", both for the depth and range of its scholarship—but also for the fundamental challenge the guest editors and authors pose for refugee studies as an academic discipline.

On this note, I am delighted to announce that York University professor Michael Barutciski has taken up the post of editor-in-chief of *Refuge*, beginning with volume 27. The journal could not be in more capable hands. Leaving the editorial post is bittersweet—while I will not miss the relentless deadlines, I certainly will miss the incredible satisfaction of seeing each issue germinate from a bare concept to an exciting collection of thematically related articles. Looking back, *Refuge* has accomplished a great deal over the past decade. It has matured from a government funded periodical to a full fledged, peer reviewed journal which has benefited enormously from ongoing support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. It has its own web site with a complete archive of past issues dating back to the very first issue in 1981. It has forged a relationship with the new Canadian Association for Refugee and Forced Migration Studies but its readers are in every corner of the globe.

Before signing off, I would like to express my immense gratitude to all the people who have supported my work with *Refuge* over the years—from hard working student interns to dedicated staff, guest editors and Editorial Advisory Board members. Former managing editors Lene Madsen and Martin Jones, current senior editorial assistant Negin Dahya and Centre for Refugee Studies coordinator Michelle Millard deserve special mention for their exceptional contributions. Finally I would like to thank you—the authors, referees and readers without whom *Refuge* would not be possible. Adieu.

NOTES

1. Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Canada welcomes highest number of legal immigrants in 50 years while taking action to maintain the integrity of Canada’s immigration system”, News Release, 13 February 2011.
2. For both recent and historical statistics in relation to Canada’s immigration program, see Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Preliminary tables—permanent and temporary residents, 2010” and “Facts and Figures 2009: Immigration Overview - Permanent and temporary residents”: <<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/menu-fact.asp>>.
3. UNHCR, “Number of forcibly displaced rises to 43.3 million last year, the highest level since mid-1990s”, News Stories, 15 June 2010 <<http://www.unhcr.org/4c176c969.html>>.
4. UNHCR, “Asylum Seeker numbers nearly halved in last decade, says UNHCR”, News Stories, 28 March 2011 <<http://www.unhcr.org/4d8cc18a530.html>>.
5. *Ibid.*
6. These selected examples are drawn from recent reports by the International Crisis Group <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/>> and Amnesty International <<http://www.amnesty.org/>>.
7. See Stewart Bell, “On the smugglers trail: The unlucky ones”, *National Post*, 29 March 2011.
8. Dean Wilson and Leanne Weber, “Surveillance, Risk and Preemption on the Australian Border”, *Surveillance and Society* 5, no. 2 (2008): 121-141 at p. 125.

Sharry Aiken was Editor-in-Chief of Refuge from 2000 to 2010. She is an associate professor and associate dean in the Faculty of Law at Queen’s University.