

“Love The Sojourner: An Exploration of the World Refugee Situation and How the EFC Might Respond”

Written by William Janzen (1998) for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, this excellent paper gives an overview of the refugee situations in the world and then suggests appropriate responses.

It is “an attempt to identify the issues and trends in the world refugee situation” that “includes background material, a survey of “refugee producing situations” and a section on causes and various responses. The objective is to help the EFC to consider whether there are actions it ought to undertake.”

The paper has its limitation because it was written in 1998 and events since then that have affected refugees are missing. However, despite its limitations, the paper is a good source of information about Canada's history of migration, the evolution of Canadian immigration law and the conditions in the world that create refugees. In addition, it thoughtfully makes recommendations for Christian action.

Summary

The paper opens with a biblical call to care for refugees, then gives surveys of migration in Canadian history and international refugee institutions.

In 1945, the United Nation's High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was formed.

In 1951, the Geneva Convention for Refugees was formulated and signed by European countries and in 1967 extended to other countries. Its definition of and protocol for refugees have been central to refugee work ever since.

History of Canadian Immigration Law

In 1967, the Canadian government changed its immigration law replacing its old selection system based on nationality with a point system based on education, language, Canada's need for the immigrant's job skill, and the likelihood that the immigrant would adjust well to Canadian society. In the same year, they established the Immigration Appeal Board (IAB) with the authority to overturn deportation orders for humanitarian and compassionate reasons.

In 1969, Canada signed the Geneva Convention, setting up the Refugee Status Advisory Committee (RSAC) in 1973 to review applications from refugee claimants and adding the Convention definition of a refugee to the IAB Act.

In 1976, Canada passed the Immigration Act without changing procedures for receiving refugees because it did not expect many. However, late in the 1970s refugees began to arrive—sixty thousand sponsored refugees from Vietnam and refugee claimants from Central America and elsewhere fleeing civil war.

From 1980—1986 the number of refugee claimants jumped from a few dozen a year to 18,000 a year. The RSAC—IAB structure could not handle the influx and the government began looking for alternative systems.

In 1985, following a Supreme Court ruling that refugee claimants had the right to an oral hearing, Canada temporarily relaxed its criteria for accepting refugees in order to process 23,000 backlogged cases.

In 1987, the government replaced RSAC and IAB with the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) to oversee oral hearings. However, cases continued to mount and by 1992 there was a 100,000 backlog.

Critics charged that people used the refugee claimant system as a back door to regular immigration. Consequently, in 1997, a government study called for a new agency to handle claimants and overseas selection of refugees.

The paper ends leaving the reader anticipating the opening of a new agency to replace the IRB. However, at the time of this summary (June 2010) the IRB is still the governing agency although the government is in the process of revamping its immigration law and changes are inevitable if the bill passes.

Survey of Refugee Producing Countries

The paper surveys refugee-producing countries and analyzes the causes in the different regions.

Africa

- Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Mozambique, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi produced refugees
- Since 1998—add Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe to the list of refugee-producing countries

Latin America and the Caribbean

- Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Haiti produced refugees
- Since 1998, add Mexico to the list of refugee-producing countries

Middle East

- Palestinian and Kurdish people needed protection
- Since 1998, add Iran and Iraq to the list of refugee-producing countries

Asia

- Afghanistan, Burma (Myanmar), Tajikistan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos produced refugees
- Since 1998, add North Korea to the list of refugee-producing countries

Europe

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the breakup of the USSR, many people from Warsaw Pact countries moved west. In addition, during ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia, many people fled for their lives. Over twenty thousand came to Canada as Convention refugees.

Causes, Trends and Responses

The paper makes observations and suggests causes, responses, and approaches.

Observations

- Refugees are not the only migrants—there are migrant workers, undocumented migrants and illegal migrants
- Africa hosts more than twice as many refugees as Europe, North America and Oceania combined.
- Iran and Pakistan hosted the most refugees.
- The Gaza Strip, West Bank, Jordan, Guinea and Lebanon had the largest ratio of refugees to host population.
- The West admitted refugees from communist countries but closed the door to others to expose the oppressive nature of communism but once the Iron Curtain fell, it set up barriers to people fleeing eastern Europe

Causes

- War—ninety percent of victims are civilians; soldiers look like civilians; weapons are readily available; and most wars are fought between competing tribes within countries indicating the instability of countries
- Economics—for example, Rwanda's food production dropped by thirty percent; coffee fell to half its original value on the world market; their foreign debt quadrupled; the World Bank devalued their currency by eighty percent and Rwanda had the highest population density in Africa
- The World Bank and International Monetary Fund—made decisions that affected the ability of countries to industrialize, use their resources domestically, and provide social assistance to their own people.
- Environmental factors—deforestation; soil erosion and degradation; and water logging and salinization indirectly cause refugee-producing situations. Conversely, refugees create ecological problems—Mozambique refugees in Malawi gathered firewood to survive thus depleting the forest.

Diminished Responses

- Refugees do not get the protection they need while living in another country
- Refugees are not allowed into other countries and if they get in, they are deported back to life-threatening situations.
- The above trends create more internally displaced people than refugees
- The “safe third country” policy affects the welfare of refugees

Different Approaches

- **Ask the government to bring more refugees to Canada**
- Campaign for the rights of refugees and internally displaced people and pressure governments to respect those rights
- Address causes such as poverty, debt, economy, jobs, and agricultural productivity; teach conflict resolution; stop the arms trade; and offer incentives to promote democracy, human rights and aid projects.
- Humanitarian intervention

Possible EFC Responses

The paper looks at what church groups are doing and then suggests some actions for consideration.

Denominations and Organizations Working with Refugees

- Christian Reformed Church (CRC)
- Salvation Army
- World Vision Canada (WVC)
- Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)
- Canadian Baptist
- World Relief Canada (WRC)
- Anglican Church
- United Church
- Lutheran Church
- Presbyterian Church
- Roman Catholic Church
- Inter-Church Committee for Refugees (ICCR)

Actions to Consider

- Repatriate refugees when it is safe to return them to their homeland
 - Integrate refugees into the neighbouring countries to which they have fled
 - Resettle refugees in a safe country such as the USA, Canada and Australia
 - Solve for the root causes of refugee-producing situations
- Support relief workers and organizations already doing the above, host a consultation of interested parties, educate the public on refugee issues, and heed the biblical call to social action.

To view the full document link to www.evangelicalfellowship.ca. Click on "Social Issues" then "Refugees" then "Resources" to link to the above article.