

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)

Questions for Federal Election 2008

Immigrant Settlement and Integration

Investment in the Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA), and additional national investment in immigrant settlement have served to support better settlement and integration outcomes for immigrants arriving in Ontario. While COIA was signed in November 2005, it is only now that immigrants are starting to realize its benefits. It is helping to improve access to language training, assist immigrants with immediate and long-term settlement challenges, and address systemic barriers to settlement faced by women, youth and seniors.

Will you commit to an annual investment of at least \$320 million, the amount allocated to the last year of the five year Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA), and sustain at least the current level of national investment in immigrant settlement?

The Green Party of Canada is committed to ensuring a smooth transition into Canadian society for immigrants. We would allocate greater funding for training in official languages and assistance in long-term settlement challenges that they face.

Labour Market Integration

National investment in Labour Market Agreements (LMA) with the provinces have served to improve access to skills training opportunities and labour market integration for those who do not qualify for Employment Insurance (EI). The LMA between the governments of Canada and Ontario is worth approximately \$1.2 billion over six years. It specifically targets groups under-represented among those eligible for EI, including immigrants. These investments have the potential to support economic integration for immigrants, but only if they are sustained and if the funds are allocated to meet these needs of under-represented groups.

Will you commit to sustaining the \$1.2 billion over six years investment in the Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement, and ensure that those funds are actually allocated to improving the employment situation of immigrants and other under-represented groups?

The Green Party is dedicated to improving the employment situation of immigration and under-represented groups through many comprehensive measures. We must not let these groups continue to fall behind the rest of Canadian society. We call upon the Prime Minister to demonstrate his support for Canadian workers by signing the Worker's Bill of Rights that has already been endorsed by all other party leaders. Labour rights are human rights

Immigration

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) became law on 28 June 2002. Since that time, two different governments have failed to implement the Refugee Appeals Division contained in the legislation, despite making a promise that they would do so. The lack of appeal puts Canada at risk of violating the rights of asylum seekers by sending them back to face persecution after an incorrect decision.

Canada is increasingly relying on temporary migrant labour to fill labour market needs. Research by the Alberta Federation of Labour has shown that this has created a vulnerable pool of disposable workers, subject to exploitation by employers. The number of temporary work permits approved by the Canadian government has increased dramatically over the last five years. The new Canadian Experience Class allows only some, but not all temporary foreign workers to apply for permanent resident status.

At the same time the backlog in family sponsorship applications has not been reduced. Applicants from countries in the global south are over-represented among those who face the longest wait times.

These and other systemic barriers in Canada's immigration legislation, policies and practices have contributed to creating a growing population with less than full resident status. These immigrants are often full participants in our economy and are part of our communities. Because of their precarious status, they have few rights and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

What will you do to ensure immediate implementation of the Refugee Appeal Division, as required by the IRPA?

We have not developed a specific position on this issue at present but it must be said that we must do all in our power to ensure that we do not allow people seeking refuge from an oppressive, war-torn society to be turned away.

What will you do to ensure that all temporary foreign workers in Canada have the immediate opportunity to be eligible for permanent residence status?

These temporary foreign workers ought to be treated with the same rights and respect that most workers across the country receive. These people come to our country in the hope of a better quality of life and must not be taken advantage of. We support changes to the Employment Standards law to provide equal protection to contract and temporary workers.

What will you do to reduce the backlog and delays in processing family sponsorship applications?

The criteria for granting landed immigrant status to refugees and other immigrants seem at times arbitrary and the process is frustrating and stressful for many. The backlog of

files is too long. Over cautious security officials have in some cases put the civil liberties of new Canadians at risk. Recent reforms to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act have fostered a culture of fear and discrimination. Our immigration policies must be revamped to ensure we stay true to our identity as a just, fair and open country, and to be prepared for new challenges that are predicted to arise with increased numbers of environmental refugees seeking a safe new home in an increasingly perilous world.

What will you do to improve the situation of people without status in Canada?

We would establish a program to deal with the estimated 200,000 people living in Canada without official status that leads to full landed immigrant status for those who have become contributing members of Canadian society.

Racialization of Poverty

Recent research and Census data show that immigrants tend to be underemployed, earn less than their Canadian-born counterparts and experience high levels of contingent employment. Immigrants and refugees from racialized communities experience higher levels of poverty than their Canadian-born counterparts. Research also shows that members of racialized communities, including those born in Canada are over-represented among Canada's poor.

How will your party address the problem of the increasing racialization of poverty and high levels of poverty among immigrants, particularly those from racialized communities?

The Green Party believes in pay equity, the equal treatment of organized and non-organized workers and in workers' rights to fair wages, healthy and safe working conditions and working hours compatible with a good quality of life. Our reputation for welcoming immigrants must be backed up by strong measures to ensure a smooth transition to a new life in Canada.

We would re-establish a federal minimum wage of \$10 an hour under the Canada Labour Code. Support changes to the Employment Standards law to provide equal protection to contract and temporary workers. Strengthen non-union workers' rights and protections to close the widening gap between union and non-union workplaces.

We would press professional societies to remove unnecessary barriers in recognizing the professional credentials of immigrants. This would include working with the CMA (Canadian Medical Association) to immediately establish qualification standards and on-the-job mentorship programs to fast-track certification of foreign trained health care professionals.

We would also ensure that such professionals being considered for immigration will have the licensing requirements for their profession clearly explained before entry. Landed immigrants with professional qualifications will be supported and given the opportunity to obtain Canadian licenses consistent with public safety.

We must work to ensure a balance in Canada by working with municipalities and provinces to improve the integration of new Canadians into the fabric of our country. We would also support multicultural communities by assisting cultural organizations to obtain charitable status.

Human Rights

The Anti-Terrorism Act passed in December 2001 has been identified by many groups as having a negative impact on Canadian society. In particular, these groups are concerned that the Act has resulted in increased racial profiling of Muslims and Arabs, more stringent immigration laws, and has had a serious impact on privacy and individual rights and freedoms. Canada's security-certificate proceedings have been used to arbitrarily detain and deny a fair hearing to individuals subject to this measure, primarily those who are Muslim and Arab.

In 2006, the Government of Canada severely reduced investment in Status of Women Canada, including closing down several offices across the country. While this raises serious questions about Canada's commitment to supporting the full participation and equality of women in Canadian society, the greatest impact has been felt by equity-seeking groups including women from racialized communities and women with disabilities.

The Court Challenges Program (CCP) established in 1994 supported equity-seeking groups to exercise rights guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The program was cancelled in 2006. The CCP has been frequently cited by the Canadian Government as a demonstration of meeting its commitment under the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). A court challenges program was created in June 2008 as the result of a negotiated settlement with minority official-language communities. The new program focuses on linguistic rights. Other groups named in the Charter have no recourse in their efforts to access and enforce their rights.

Early this year, Canada withdrew from supporting and participating in the 2009 Durban Review Conference, including denying support to non-governmental groups to participate. The Conference is organized by the UN Human Rights Council, and is a follow-up to the World Conference Against Racism held in 2001 in Durban, South Africa. This action calls into serious question Canada's commitment to anti-racism and in meeting its obligations under CERD and other international human rights conventions.

What will you do to demonstrate a renewed commitment to human rights and anti-racism?

We believe that a responsible government cannot sacrifice human rights in the name of security or we will actually be opening the door for greater injustice and insecurity. In this regard, we would amend the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Public Safety Act to require that formal charges are brought against all those detained after a reasonable length of time. It is also necessary to ensure that individuals held under security certificates are given access to legal assistance and the right to trial within a reasonable period of time. In addition, this detention under security certificates must be subject to prompt and fair review by an independent and impartial court.

Furthermore, the Green Party of Canada will vigorously defend every hard-won victory for women's rights in Canada and to advance forward towards full equality. Women's equality is fundamental to a just society. We will reestablish funding for Status of Women Canada and for a Women's Program that funds not-for-profit women's groups that advocate women's rights.

What will you do to ensure that Canada, and civil society representatives such as non-governmental organizations are able to participate effectively at the Durban Review Conference 2009?

We believe that the role of the Durban Review Conference is an important one, despite recent controversy. Canada must work to strengthen the commitment of the world community to anti-racism efforts, not avoid the issue altogether through a boycott. A Green Government would ensure the effective participation of Canada and its civil society representatives in order to meaningfully participate in the critical work of combating racism. It is most unfortunate that the Harper Government has chosen to undermine these efforts.