

Ensuring a Fair and Efficient Refugee System

On June 28, 2012, Bill C-31, the Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act, became law in an attempt to ameliorate a record backlog of unprocessed refugee claims and particularly high processing costs for refugee applicants from the EU. These deficiencies left refugee claimants in limbo, unable to restart their lives and fully enter Canadian society.

The changes instituted by C-31 attracted a great deal of attention within the Jewish community. Since the 1970s, Canada has provided a welcoming home for thousands of Jewish immigrants, who have become an integral part of the fabric of Canadian life. However, our community remembers with sorrow the prejudicial immigration policy in place through the 1930s and 40s that prevented refugees fleeing the Holocaust from finding safety on Canadian shores. This immigrant experience compels the Jewish community to take a keen interest in ensuring Canada's refugee system remains fair, just and effective.

In CIJA's assessment, the changes offered by C-31 represented significant improvements in protecting the safety and security of Canadians, deterring

human smuggling and dispensing with unsubstantiated refugee claims quickly and fairly. On balance, C-31 reformed Canada's refugee system to better respond effectively and compassionately to those in need and to identify and remove those who try to abuse the system's generosity.

Jewish Canadians remain vigilantly mindful of the need to help desperate refugees find safety on our shores.

However, CIJA recommended three nuanced but significant improvements:

First, clear provisions are required for how a designated country of origin (DCO) is removed from the DCO list if and when the situation in that country merits reconsideration.

Second, DCO refugee applicants should have access to the same health coverage as non-DCO claimants.

Third, care should be taken to avoid separating families that are part of an irregular arrival. Furthermore, once irregular arrival claimants' identities and status are confirmed and their refugee sta-

tus has been approved, they should be treated as all other approved claimants and not be subject to a five-year waiting period before sponsoring family members to join them.

KEY POINTS

- The Jewish immigrant experience compels the Jewish community to take a keen interest in ensuring Canada's refugee system remains fair, just and effective.
- Jewish Canadians remain vigilantly mindful of the need to help desperate refugees find safety on our shores.
- Clear provisions are required for how a designated country of origin (DCO) is removed from the list of safe countries if and when the situation in that country merits reconsideration.