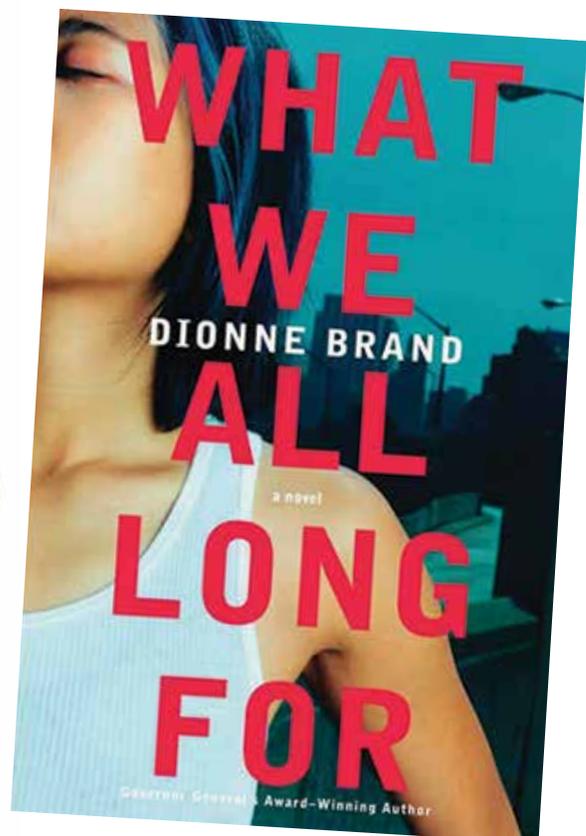
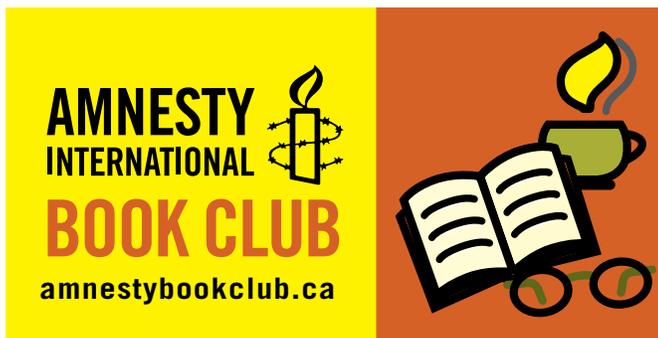


**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL** 
BOOK CLUB

**MAY 2014
BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE**



**Guest reader Mark Kingwell's choice:
What We All Long For by Dionne Brand**



Welcome Book Club members!

Thank you for joining the Amnesty International Book Club and helping us create this unique way to involve Canadians in raising awareness about human rights issues.

This month's book *What We All Long For* by Dionne Brand was selected by guest reader Mark Kingwell, and contains many themes which relate to Amnesty's human rights work. It also allows us to talk about our Project Urban Canvas, which you can read more about on page 4, including a special poem written by Poet Laureate Dionne Brand for the project.

The focus of our discussion guide and action this month is refugees. While our action in April was on the siege of Yarmouk, and the desperate situation many Syrian civilians are facing there, this month's action focuses on refugees from Syria and encourages our own government to do more to help them, especially in assisting more to come to Canada. We hope you will take the action by writing a letter yourself or going to the on-line action on the book club website at www.amnestybookclub.ca.

If you're already in a book club, please consider using one of our recommended books with your club, and having your members take the action.

If you know of a bookstore or library branch in your area which might be interested in joining the Amnesty International Book Club, please forward the contact information (store/library, person, telephone number, email) to us at bookclub@amnesty.ca

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club! If you have any questions or comments, please contact us at bookclub@amnesty.ca or by calling toll-free at 1-800-266-3789. We'd love to hear from you.

The Book Club Team

About this month's guest reader, Mark Kingwell

Mark Kingwell is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto and a contributing editor of *Harper's Magazine* in New York. He is the author or co-author of seventeen books of political, cultural and aesthetic theory, including the bestsellers *Better Living* (1998), *The World We Want* (2000), *Concrete Reveries* (2008), and *Glenn Gould* (2009). Kingwell has lectured extensively in Canada, the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and Australia on philosophical subjects and had held visiting posts at Cambridge University, the University of California at Berkeley, and at the City University of New York. He is the recipient of the Spitz Prize in political theory, National Magazine Awards for both essays and columns, the Outstanding Teaching Award and President's Teaching Award at the University of Toronto, and in 2000 was awarded an honorary DFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design. His most recent book is a collection of political essays, *Unruly Voices* (2012).

About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 3 million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person's voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and offline campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit www.amnesty.ca or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Avenue East, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 1H9.



Mark Kingwell on *What We All Long For*

*“Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For* offers a perfect snapshot of Toronto, and Canada, at a crucial moment in our nation’s history, when the demographics of the country have decisively left Anglo-Celtic and French dominance behind. The intertwined young people of the novel’s main narrative, with their mixed racial and sexual identities, face basic human challenges of life, love and work against a background of immigrant family expectation and changing social mores. This is multicultural Canada presented in a way that is no slogan or cheap ethnic-variety carnival. Tuyen, Jackie, Oku, and Carla resonate with real desire: like all of us, they are trying to make their way, but they must invent what that means in a manner that perhaps no Canadian generation before them has had to do. Brand captures with absolute fidelity the mixture of fear and courage, of joy and cynicism, in the everyday language of the twenty-first century Canadian city. This is a funny, insightful and finally moving story of our newest friends and neighbours.” —Mark Kingwell*

Author **Dionne Brand**

Dionne Brand moved to Canada from Trinidad when she was 17 to attend the University of Toronto, where she earned a degree in Philosophy and English, a Masters in the Philosophy of Education and pursued PhD studies in Women’s History but left the program for creative writing.

Dionne Brand first came to prominence as a poet. Her books of poetry include *No Language Is Neutral*, and *Land to Light On*, winner of the Governor General’s Award and the Trillium Award and *thirsty*, finalist for the Griffin Prize and winner of the Pat Lowther Award for poetry. Brand is also the author of the acclaimed novels *In Another Place, Not Here*, and *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Her works of non-fiction include *Bread Out of Stone* and *A Map to the Door of No Return*.

In addition to her literary accomplishments, Brand is Professor of English in the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph.

Suggested discussion questions for *What We All Long For*

Questions from guest reader Mark Kingwell

1. How does the experience of Brand’s characters compare with your own at a similar age? Were the challenges different? The rewards and expectations? Do you identify with them?
2. The novel is considered a tale of the ‘immigrant experience’ but because the main characters are second-generation Canadians, it has a different tone than many immigrant novels. Do you agree? If so, how is this feeling of difference achieved?
3. The novel is often labeled a story of ‘identity’. What does this notion mean to you? What are the political stakes in questions of identity?
4. It is a critical cliché to say that a city figures as a character in a novel or film, but in this case the claim seems justified: Toronto is an ever-present feature of this book. Does the Toronto depicted here resonate with your own experience of the city? How do you feel about Toronto as presented in the novel?
5. The ending of Brand’s novel, where the subplot of the missing child is turned to a somewhat unexpected climax, is controversial. Some readers love it, others find it contrived. What was your view of how the novel resolved its narrative?
6. Finally, while it is not an explicit theme of the book, the issue of human rights abuse lingers in the background of *What We All Long For*. How important is that for relating to the story as a reader whose experience may be quite different from that of the characters?

Questions from Random House

1. What do each of the main characters – Tuyen, Carla, Jackie, Oku and Quy – long for? Do their longings overlap in any respect? Do they evolve over the course of the novel?
2. If Tuyen approached you in the street and asked, “What do you long for?,” how would you answer? Can you narrow your longings down to just one for her lubai?
3. Carla observes that the immigrants she sees passing in the streets are “trying to step across the borders of who they were. But they were not merely trying. They were, in fact, borderless.” Are the identities of the second-generation characters borderless as well?
4. The novel explores the tensions between immigrants and their second-generation progeny. In what way are these tensions typical of any child-parent relationship? In what ways are they complicated by the immigrant experience?
5. Tuyen, Jackie, Oku and Carla are essentially unilingual. And yet Tuyen acted as a translator for her parents throughout childhood. Jackie is fluent in “valley girl, baller, hip-hopper, Brit mod ...” Discuss the role that language plays in terms of how the four friends navigate the city.
6. In the first chapter, Brand writes: “Anonymity is the big lie of a city. You aren’t anonymous at all. You’re common, really, common like so many pebbles, so many specks of dirt, so many atoms of materiality.” How does the novel address our commonality as opposed to our anonymity?
7. “What floats in the air on a subway train like this is chance. People stand or sit with the thin magnetic film of their life wrapped around them. They think they’re safe, but they know they’re not. Any minute you can crash into someone else’s life, and if you’re lucky, it’s good, it’s like walking on light.” The novel examines a range of different people living in the city, some of whom meet and connect, some of whom pass one another by. What role does chance play in the story?
8. In what ways is the novel built around the notion of absence – whether of people, objects, hopes, dreams?

Article 13 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.



Poet Laureate Dionne Brand reading her poem *Article 13* at the dedication of the mural for Project Urban Canvas, on October 19, 2010. In the background, David Miller, then Mayor of Toronto.

Dionne Brand, City of Toronto’s Poet Laureate, and the Amnesty International Urban Canvas project

Dionne Brand wrote the poem on page 5, *Article 13*, as part of Amnesty International’s Project Urban Canvas. *Article 13* is painted on a mural in an art alley in Etobicoke (with partnership of Arts Etobicoke).

Project Urban Canvas is a partnership between Amnesty International and community arts groups in the Toronto region to create murals depicting all 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Started in 2008 as a way to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the UDHR, 16 murals have been painted by artists and community groups throughout the area. Please see the link under More About This Issue on page 12 of this guide.

Article 13

The passenger pigeons once traveled here,
here once they furrowed the sky,
raked wide the full moon's face,
to drink the lakes' inclined and pristine surfaces,
who crossed the languorous cold river first
and saw the ceiling of birds,
then wandered the mouth of this intimate lake,
skanadario, who needed maps and homing devices,
compasses, the featherless arms,
who came here driven on the muscular spasms
of guesses, and hard bargains and wars and lack,
this river, Tanaovate, at the east, has washed
its large share of loneliness and industry
it has collected time and more, much more

than its salt and black and rainbow creeks,
fugitive, its tributaries of migrants
inalienable nomads, global citizens
unfettered limbs, we are heartsick for the true world,
compelled to place we search for place,
there in the growths of black wild alders,
how many sojourns, the gathered feet, the flight of horses,
the vein of railway, the stray of airplanes,
we brace our transience on the hurtling planet,
this 13th note, its opening sound, articulates,
unbinds our migratory bones, reascent
here our common ownership of the earth

—Dionne Brand



The thousand square foot mural of *Article 13*, which includes Dionne Brand's poem. The mural, a project of Urban Canvas and Arts Etobicoke, is located in an alley at 4893A Dundas Street West in Etobicoke, Ontario.

“But in all this they were ordinary people living an ordinary life who were suddenly caught, the way war catches anyone, without bearings; the way war dismantles all sensibility except fear.”

—*What We All Long For*, page 180

People fleeing violence face many barriers in their search for safety. Crossing an international border is one of the most insurmountable barriers. A person can only be considered a refugee after they have left their home country and crossed a border into another country.

Refugees are often forced to resort to extreme and risky measures to cross borders, including taking to boats. The world responded with incredible compassion and support to the Indochinese exodus in the late 1970's. Today, in the midst of the tragedy and violence of warfare in countries such as Syria and the Central Africa Republic we see a very different response. Have we lost our willingness to respond with compassion and provide support for refugees today?

In April, 1975, as the Saigon regime in South Vietnam came to an end, it was estimated that more than a million people left Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam – the three countries that constituted the former Indochina. Half of these refugees were Vietnamese, and of these, half again were classified as “boat people.”

The exodus of refugees by sea began as only a trickle. But by 1977, there was a steady stream of 21,000 refugees leaving each year. And by 1978 it was a flood of more than 100,000, rising to 160,000 in 1979.

The term “boat people” became popular mid-way through 1979. Media coverage was non-stop, powered by vivid descriptions and dramatic film clips of rickety boats and thousands of people floundering in the South China Sea. The reports exposed the hopelessness of the situation – large numbers of people with no place to go, people who had already suffered oppression and now the trials of life and death at sea. Comparisons were made between their situation and that of the victims of the Holocaust. These reports shocked the world and set off pleas for help from potential resettlement countries such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and France.

“On the fourth day of that ugly sea we were boarded by Thai pirates. Six of them. They had three guns and many knives. They were disgusting men. They separated the men from the women, and a few of them raped the women while the others searched the rest of us.”

—Quy, in *What We All Long For*, page 14



Photography / Shutterstock

Passing ships in the region often picked up struggling refugees who were in trouble at sea. They unloaded their human cargo at the nearby ports of Singapore and Hong Kong to a welcome that was often cold. Singapore, Taiwan and Japan would not allow these refugees to land unless they secured guarantees that western countries would eventually offer permanent resettlement. Malaysia declared that Vietnamese landing on its beaches would be shot to assure the country wouldn't be swamped with unwanted refugees. The results were devastating. Many humanitarian crews, unable to unload the refugees, refused to pick them out of the sea. Boat people starved and drowned in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

“When you look at photographs of people at Pulau Bidong you see a blankness. Or perhaps our faces are, like they say in places, unreadable. I know how you come by such a face. I was paralysed when we unfolded what was left of ourselves onto the shore of Bidong. I felt like you do with sunstroke. I felt dried out, though, of course, a child doesn't have these words...”

—Quy, in *What We All Long For*, page 14

Public sympathy for the boat people grew. The international community was moved to respond.

Canada responded generously, true to its reputation for accepting and providing a “haven for the homeless.” Since the end of WWII, Canada has accepted some 400,000 refugees for resettlement. The Indochinese refugee movement that started in 1975, and culminated with the boat people's exodus of 1979, was one of the largest. Their acceptance by the federal government was regarded as courageous since it was made against considerable resistance both internationally and domestically.

The Canadian refugee resettlement program was unique because it encouraged not only the participation of government, but also of private citizens. Any church, group (of five or more adult Canadian citizens or permanent residents) or corporation could become sponsors of refugees. This had an important impact on the resettlement of the boat people and on the numbers allowed into the country. Private sponsorship of the refugees cut down on the perceived government costs.

For 1979, the Canadian government allowed a quota of 4,000 refugees to be resettled by the private sponsorship program; over and above the government's quota of 8,000 Indochinese refugees for that year. The response from the private sector was a great success. Thousands of individual Canadians provided financial and material support, while others opened up their homes.

The government was urged to increase the quota and began an innovative resettlement measure, promising to take an additional 21,000 Vietnamese refugees if the same numbers could be matched by private sponsorship – one refugee for every refugee sponsored privately. By 1980 Canada had surpassed its 50,000 quota for Vietnamese refugees. With the change of government that same year, an additional 10,000 refugees were added. By December 1980, a total of 60,000 Indochinese refugees had arrived in Canada.

In total, from 1975 to 1995 Canada welcomed approximately 137,000 Indochinese refugees.¹

The Indochinese arriving in Canada prior to 1986 came under acutely traumatic circumstances. They had suffered through poverty, violence, the death of friends and family, and often the total destruction of their traditional way of life. Their escape involved tremendous personal risk as they survived near drowning, pirate attacks and starvation. Often they arrived in interim refugee camps only to stare out onto an uncertain future waiting for permanent resettlement. Once in Canada they were immersed in a foreign western society that was industrialized, urbanized and highly individualistic in its way of life. They faced extreme psychological, social, cultural, political and economic challenges, usually with little preparation.

Learning a new language and reconstituting a sense of family were crucial factors in how effectively the Vietnamese adapted to their new home. The Canadian sponsorship programs were invaluable in helping the Vietnamese find balance.

Many of the ethnic Vietnamese refugees were fluent in English or French. Most were well educated and skilled in various trades.

In 1986, Canadians received the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award in recognition of outstanding service to refugees. It is the only time in the award's history that all the citizens of a country have received the award.

¹ <http://indochinese.apps01.yorku.ca/icrm-blog/>

The international response to the South Asian boat people was outstanding. Today however, the response to asylum seekers who turn to boats to seek safety is not as welcoming. The primal fear of the stranger, or the “other” seems to climb to new heights when they arrive by sea.

Europe

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that close to 45,000 boat migrants, including thousands of children without parents, made dangerous crossings of the Mediterranean to land in Italy and Malta in 2013.² Most were fleeing war torn countries such as Syria, Eritrea and Somalia.

In recent years, European countries have stepped up border control measures in an attempt to prevent migrants and asylum-seekers from reaching Europe. Some of these measures have resulted in, or contributed to, serious human rights violations.

Some European countries have introduced criminal penalties for irregular migrants who seek to enter or remain in their country. Asylum seekers are frequently referred to as queue jumpers or potential ‘terrorists’ rather than people in need of protection.

Migrants’ boats heading to Europe often get into danger at sea. At least 1,500 people are known to have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean in 2011. Some of these deaths could have been prevented. Desperate men, women and children have been left at sea for days while countries argue about where they should be taken.



In some cases, people died on these boats while distress calls went unanswered.

Many of those who do manage to enter Europe end up being detained for long periods of time. Countries use detention in order to discourage the arrival of asylum seekers, despite the lack of evidence that detention deters people from migrating or seeking asylum.

² www.dw.de/iom-releases-mediterranean-boat-migrant-count/a-17392900

Right: A fact sheet from Amnesty International Australia attempts to dispel myths about refugees seeking asylum there.

Fact 3 explains it is not illegal to seek asylum in Australia even if arriving by boat.

Australia

The Australian government has adopted punitive and inhumane methods in order to deter people from coming by boat. Beginning in 2001 the government opened camps for boat people in Nauru and on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea and later Christmas Island, near Indonesia. The asylum seekers are detained in camps under harsh conditions.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has stated that the conditions on Manus Island amounted to “cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment” and were below international standards. This “Pacific Solution” is designed to prevent people smugglers sending illegal boats to Australia and allows the Australian government to process refugees outside the country. Most of the 47,000 boat people of the past five years have been found to be “genuine refugees”. Over the last five years over 1,100 people have died at sea as a result of this offshore processing policy.

In January 2014 it was reported that the Australian Navy intercepted and turned five boats of asylum seekers around mid-ocean, towing two of them back to Indonesia. There are further reports that detainees in the island camps have resorted to hunger strikes, attempted suicide and self-harm, including refugees sewing their lips together, as a form of protest to the harsh conditions.

In spite of this research, polls have shown that 60 percent of Australians want the government to “increase the severity” of its treatment of asylum seekers as a means to combat the dangerous people smuggling business.

REFUGEE FACTS

FACT 1

An **ASYLUM SEEKER** is someone seeking protection whose claim for refugee status has not yet been assessed.



Asylum seekers arrive in Australia by boat or plane and ask for protection. The government then processes their claims and if they are found to be refugees they are granted a visa.

FACT 2

A **REFUGEE** is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war or violence.



Over 90 per cent of asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat are assessed to be refugees fleeing persecution.

FACT 3

It is **NOT ILLEGAL** to seek asylum in Australia, even if arriving by boat.



The right to seek asylum is recognised under Australian (1958 Migration Act) and international law.

FACT 4

There is **NO QUEUE**.



For people who need protection, seeking asylum in another country is their only choice. Resettlement through the UN ('the queue') is only available for a very small group. In 2012, there were 15.4 million refugees worldwide and 88,600 of those were resettled; only 0.6%.

FACT 5

Asylum seekers arriving by boat make up **LESS THAN 8%** of Australia's annual immigration.



Every year, the number of asylum seekers who arrive by boat is tiny compared to our overall migration.

FACT 6

In Australia there are **1.3 REFUGEES** for every **1,000 PEOPLE**.



Over the years, Australia has helped to protect thousands of refugees from all over the world. However, this group of people still make up a very small portion of the Australian population.

FACT 7

ASYLUM SEEKERS 2012
(UNHCR Global trends 2012)

			
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Australia receives a very **SMALL** number of asylum seekers by international standards.

FACT 8

An asylum seeker in the community	\$505.40	Aged pensioner	\$808.40
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Asylum seekers on Bridging Visas in the community get Centrelink equivalent to 89% of the unemployment benefit, which covers their rent, bills, food, transport and all other costs.



GET THE FACTS AT AMNESTY.ORG.AU/REFUGEES

The number of people arriving by boat in Australia is small. In 2010-11, Australia received 11,491 asylum applications. Less than half of these (5,175) were from asylum seekers who arrived by boat.

Working to defend the rights of refugees and asylum seekers is a key focus for Amnesty International's Australian section. A link to their work is in the More About This Issue section on page 12 of this guide.

Canada

The Canadian response to boat arrivals has been largely hostile over the years.

In 1914 Canadian officials turned away the Komagata Maru; a ship from India whose passengers were mostly Sikh (and British subjects). Upon its return to India, some of the passengers were killed in a shootout with British police who were suspicious of their politics. Others were jailed for refusing to return to the Punjab.

In 1939, Canada refused admission to more than 900 Jews fleeing Nazi persecution aboard the St. Louis. The ship returned to Europe and most of its passengers died in concentration camps.

Following the arrival of Sri Lankan refugees on the MV Sun Sea and Ocean Lady in 2010, the Canadian government passed new laws aimed at discouraging “illegal migrants” from entering Canada by sea. People who arrive on boats or cross borders into Canada ‘irregularly’ with the aid of a smuggler can be designated as “irregular arrivals.” Those designated are immediately detained and will only be provided with a review of the reasons for their detention after one week, and then again after six months. “Irregular arrivals” must launch a refugee claim while they are detained. If a person is successful and found to be a Convention Refugee their difficulties are not over. That person is barred from making an application to become a permanent resident in Canada for five years, leaving them in a state of legal limbo. Only after five years can they begin the application process which will allow them to be reunited with their immediate family members who have been left behind.

The new law has been described as vicious and anti-humanitarian. Amnesty International believes that it violates Canada’s obligations under the Refugee Convention and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Transit site of Bekonanga along the Chad/Central African Republic border, where some people had been staying in the open for two months.



The refugee crisis today: Syria and the Central African Republic (CAR)

Refugees continue to face insurmountable barriers today.

There are currently 2.2 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey. Despite repeated appeals from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (the UNHCR), assistance and attention to the plight of Syrian refugees has been lacklustre, at best.

The Canadian government has committed to resettling 200 “extremely vulnerable” refugees, as identified by the UNHCR, and has provided opportunities for private groups to sponsor an additional 1100 people. Last summer, Canada committed to taking in 1,300 Syrians by the end of 2014. So far, though, Immigration Minister Chris Alexander estimated no more than 10 have arrived in Canada from refugee camps in the Middle East.

Another conflict which does not often make the headlines is taking place in the Central African Republic (CAR).

In late October 2013, Amnesty International raised alarm bells about an impending human rights crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The country began spiraling out of control months earlier when a coalition of armed groups known as Seleka launched an offensive against former President Francois Bozizé in December 2012, and seized power in March 2013. Seleka forces attacked, tortured and executed

civilians, indiscriminately shelled communities, and forcefully recruited thousands of child soldiers.

The violence has now displaced upwards of 625,000 within the country, and led to over 300,000 seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

You can take action on both these urgent situations at www.amnesty.ca. You can also write the Canadian government to urge them to take more vulnerable Syrian refugees.

TAKE ACTION FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES

Canada: respond to the Syrian refugee crisis

Over 2 million refugees have fled Syria, and over 4 million Syrians are internally displaced within the country. This is the gravest humanitarian emergency the world has faced in years. Canada has already committed vital humanitarian aid to the region and must be prepared to continue to provide generous and ongoing humanitarian support.

Refugees who have fled to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq face enormous hardship and difficulties; particularly the vulnerable and those who have been injured and traumatized by violence and human right violations. The impact on communities, infrastructure and budgets in these neighbouring countries has been overwhelming. They cannot shoulder this burden alone. Canada must also provide solutions to some of the displaced, especially those with connections to Canada and the most vulnerable.

Take action

Please send a letter, fax or email to Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Chris Alexander. Urge him to:

- Significantly increase the number of government sponsored refugees from Syria, giving priority to the most vulnerable.
- Immediately provide additional resources to Canadian visa offices in the region so that all immigration applications can be processed in as timely a manner as possible.
- Respond affirmatively to Syrians who meet all the conditions of a temporary visa such as students and/or parents or grandparents on super-visas.
- Expedite family linked sponsorship applications, and consider an expanded definition of family. At a minimum immediately rescind the proposed changes to the definition of a dependent child from 18 years to 21 years.
- Suspend the return of all Syrians to Syria and neighbouring countries until human rights situation has sufficiently improved to permit safe, dignified and sustainable return.

Write, fax or email:

Honourable Chris Alexander
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Email: Chris.Alexander@parl.gc.ca

Fax: 613-996-1289

- Salutation: Dear Minister Alexander
- Note: Within Canada no postage is required on letters to the House of Commons

Background information

The United Nations launched an unprecedented \$3 billion humanitarian appeal for Syria which, in September 2013, was underfunded by over 50%. As of 6 September 2013, Canada's overall contribution of humanitarian assistance since the beginning of 2013 is reported to be \$203 million.

In June 2013 the UNHCR announced it was seeking 10,000 places for humanitarian admission and 2,000 places for resettlement of Syrians in acute need. Figures released in September 2013 indicate that the UNHCR only received 7150 offers of resettlement; 5,000 came from Germany. The first group of 107 Syrians arrived in Germany in September, and the remainder are expected to arrive before the end of the year.

In July 2013 Canada announced it would resettle 1300 Syrians refugees – 200 through government sponsorship and 1100 through private arrangements. Only 200 of these refugees are expected to arrive within the next year. The remaining 1,100 applicants will be forced into the backlogged private sponsorship system, in which the average wait time for the region is three to four years.

Sponsorships under the Private Sponsorship of Refugee Program should be in addition to government sponsorship, and not the primary vehicle for refugee resettlement in Canada. Canada must commit to significantly higher levels of government sponsored resettlement of Syrian refugees.

The Syrian Canadian Council has expressed concerns

regarding limited immigration programs and refusal rates for Syrian Canadians who are trying to bring family members to Canada. Temporary visas have been rejected due to the concern that the applicant may not go home when the visa expires. A super-visa is valid for up to 10 years and allows a parent or grandparent to remain in Canada for up to 24 months at a time. The Syrian Canadian Council has called on the government to implement special measures for Syrians, as it has done in the past in response to the Rwandan genocide and the Haitian earthquake.

In May 2013 the government announced proposed changes to the immigration regulations. The proposal would change the definition of a dependent child from 21 years to 18 years. If this proposal is accepted children over 18 years will no longer be considered part of a family for immigration purposes. It is also proposed that the rules for sponsoring parents and grandparents will change. The sponsorship period will increase from 10 years to 20 years and sponsors will need to have a higher income over a longer period before they can sponsor.

The UNHCR has recommended that the return of all Syrians to Syria and neighbouring countries be suspended until the country's security and human rights situation has sufficiently improved to permit safe, dignified and sustainable return. While Canada has deferred removals to Syria, it permits a number of exceptions related to criminal and other inadmissibility. Canada should make it clear that, in line with the international law principle of non-refoulement, no Syrians will be forcibly returned from Canada to Syria at this time, in any manner whatsoever.

Canada has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in response to the Syrian refugee crisis at the October meetings of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR, where all states have the opportunity to develop a generous, well-coordinated and effective global response.

MORE ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Amnesty International

Europe: S.O.S. Europe: Human rights and migration control, 13 June 2012, www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR01/013/2012/en

When You Don't Exist: www.whenyoudontexist.eu/

Amnesty International Australia: Refugee Rights. www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/

Global Mail Australia: *At Work Inside Our Detention Centres: A Guard's Story*. serco-story.theglobalmail.org/

Amnesty International Canada: Unbalanced Reforms: Recommendations for Bill C-31 www.amnesty.ca/get-involved/lead-in-your-community/unbalanced-reforms-recommendations-for-bill-c-31

Project Urban Canvas: www.aito.ca/urbancanvas/project.html

Other

CBC, Fifth Estate, *The Voyage of the Black Dragon*, January 2014. www.cbc.ca/fifth/episodes/2013-2014/the-voyage-of-the-black-dragon

A film was made about the St. Louis in 1976: *Voyage of the Damned*.

Award-winning Canadian director and screenwriter Deepa Mehta is making a film about the Komagata Maru.

York University, Indochinese Refugee Movement <http://indochinese.apps01.yorku.ca/icrm-blog/>

White Pine Pictures: *A Scattering of Seeds, Brothers From Vietnam*, www.whitepinepictures.com/seeds/ii/16/sidebar.html

Coming up June 2014! *Fugitive Pieces* by Anne Michaels Recommended by guest reader Jane Urquhart

As a young boy during the Second World War, Jakob Beer is rescued from the mud in Poland by an unlikely saviour, the scientist Athos Roussos, and he is taken to Greece, then, at war's end, to Canada. It is here that his loss gradually surfaces, as does the haunting question of his sister's fate.

