



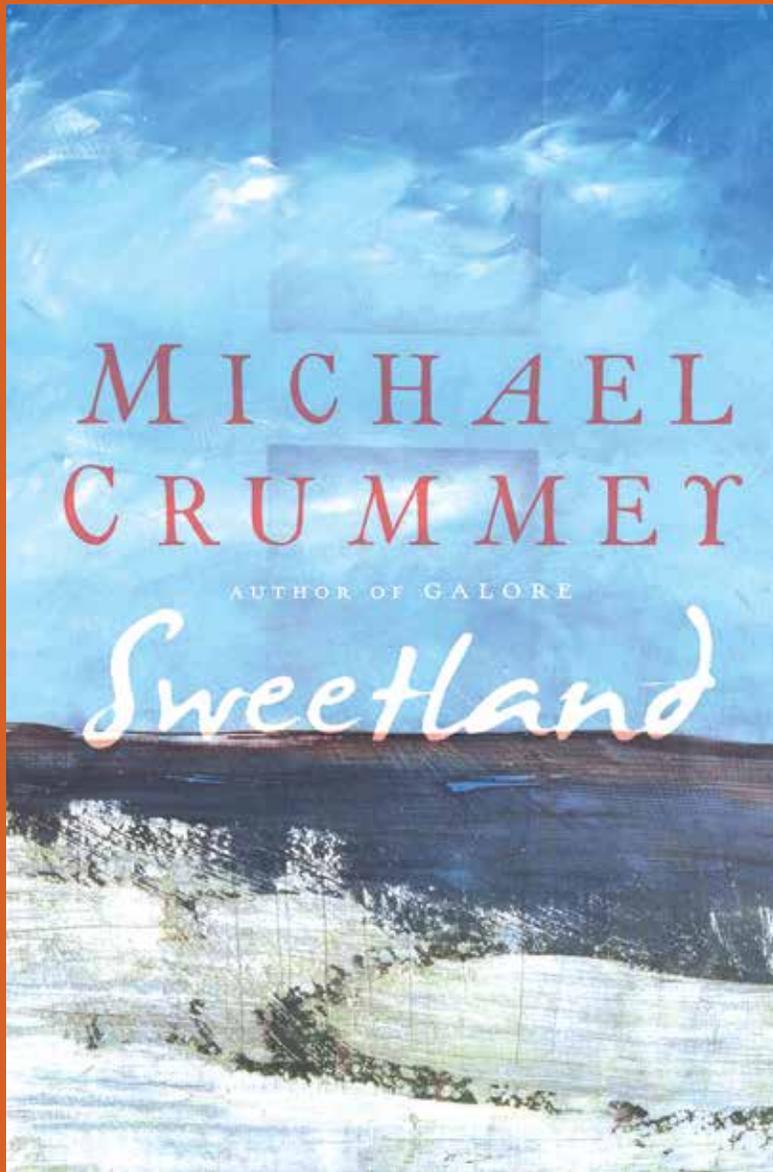
AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 
BOOK CLUB

**APRIL 2015
DISCUSSION
GUIDE**

Sweetland

By Michael Crummey

As selected by
guest reader
Steven Galloway





Home sweet home

Does any word in the English language carry as much weight as the word ‘home’? Perhaps love and a few others. But ‘home’ roots us throughout our lives – where we come from, who we are, what kind of home we make for ourselves, physically and emotionally.

Michael Crummey explores all these aspects of home in his latest novel, *Sweetland*. For twelve generations, when the fish were plentiful and when they all-but disappeared, the inhabitants of a remote island in Newfoundland have lived and died together. Now, they face resettlement, thanks to a generous government compensation package. But there’s a catch – everyone must go and Moses Sweetland refuses to leave.

Around the world, there are millions and millions of displaced people – some who are forced off their lands by governments eager to develop natural resources where they live, and others fleeing violence and conflict. This discussion guide includes more information about forced migration and Amnesty International’s work on their behalf.

Amnesty has done a great deal of work on forced evictions and the protection of refugees on which we could have created an action this month. However, we have a very urgent case in Saudi Arabia right now, that of blogger Raif Badawi. He has been sentenced to 10 years in jail and 1,000 lashes. We decided the Book Club action this month should focus on this critical case. Please take action on page 12.

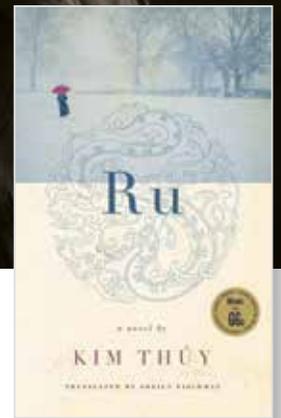
Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. If you have any questions, suggestions or comments, we’d love to hear from you. Just send us an email at bookclub@amnesty.ca.

—The Book Club Team



Ru wins Canada Reads!

Ru, the Amnesty International Book Club selection for October 2014, written by Kim Thúy, was the winner of the CBC Canada Reads program, announced in March. Congratulations Kim and thanks to Claire Cameron for selecting it for our Book Club! You can download the Discussion Guide for *Ru* at www.amnestybookclub.ca



About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than three 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 off line 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.

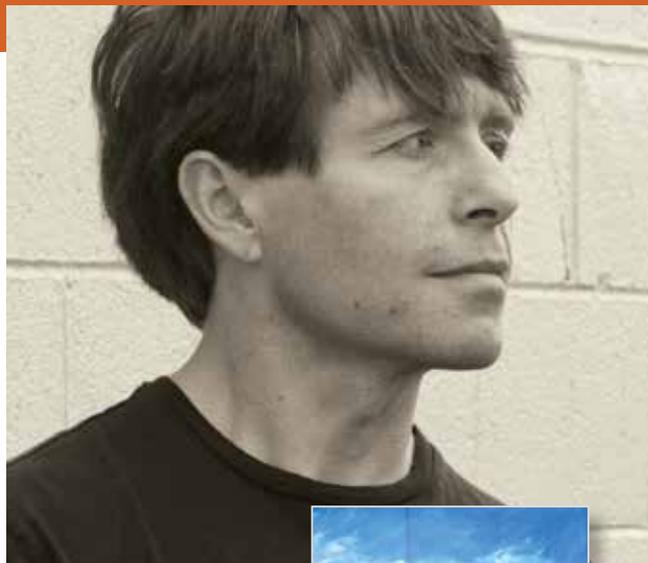
For more information about Amnesty International visit www.amnesty.ca or write to us at: **Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.**

APRIL 2015 BOOK: *Sweetland*

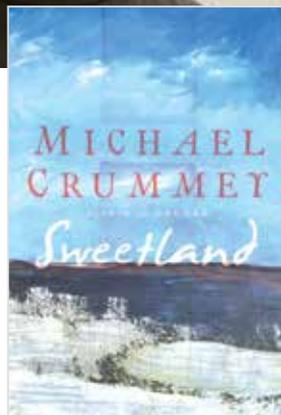
AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



BOOK CLUB
SELECTION



About this month's author **Michael Crummey**



Michael Crummey was born in Buchans, a mining town in the interior of Newfoundland, and returned to live in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2001. His first writing success was in poetry, winning the first Bronwen Wallace Memorial Award for unpublished poets in 1994. He is the author of three books of poetry. In 1998, he published his first collection of short stories, *Flesh and Blood* and was nominated for the Journey Prize. His first novel, *River Thieves*, was a Canadian bestseller and was nominated for the Giller Prize, the Commonwealth Writer's Prize and the Books in Canada first novel award. His second novel, *The Wreckage*, was long-listed for the 2007 IMPAC Award and his third novel, *Galore*, was shortlisted for the 2011 IMPAC Award. *Sweetland* was a finalist for the 2014 Governor General's Award for Fiction.

Michael Crummey on *Sweetland*

Resettlement is not a new idea to Newfoundland

Sixty years ago, it was a ham-fisted social engineering project instituted by the Smallwood government to help drag the province into the twentieth century. New to confederation and Canada's cradle-to-grave social programs, Premier Smallwood faced the near-impossible task of delivering modern conveniences such as roads and electricity, as well as health and education services, to 1,200 communities scattered along 29,000 kms of coastline. Reaching the province's smallest and most isolated outports was so impractical that households were paid to move to a more central community. Between 1954 and 1974, 50,000 people from 500 outports were relocated.

Technically a "voluntary" program, resettlement was, and remains, mired in controversy. Some communities on the government's list fought the policy and managed to stay put. Even in the hundreds of outports that accepted the package, there was rarely universal assent. Neighbours and relatives were pitted against one another. Coercion and intimidation, subtle or otherwise, poisoned friendships and families. Many people moved under duress and lived the rest of their days in a kind of internal exile. It's a touchy subject, still.

And now, after an extended period of dormancy, resettlement is making a comeback, fuelled by chronic unemployment in the fishery and a rapidly aging demographic. Much of rural Newfoundland is falling deeper into a crisis that began with the cod moratorium in 1992. A "temporary measure" when it was imposed, the moratorium is now into its twenty-second year. Great Harbour Deep on the Northern Peninsula took a government package to relocate a decade ago. The

residents of Grand Bruit on the south coast abandoned their homes in 2010.

But the modern version of the policy is different in this respect: the government is happy to facilitate the process, but only when a community makes the request. Cutting power generation, regular ferry runs and other essential services to an isolated outpost is a long-term economic win for the budget. But the government isn't about to "force" relocation on anyone. Instead, they're sweetening the pot. The provincial budget of March 2013 nearly tripled the cash incentive per household from \$100,000 to \$270,000. The requirement that a decision to resettle be unanimous was also changed to a more workable 90 per cent.

Little Bay Islands, an island outpost on the northeast coast, was for many years a centre of the local cod fishery. The merchant's fishing rooms included three acres of fish flakes where the salted cod was dried. Rail tracks ran the length of the flakes, to help lay out the fish in the morning and collect it again before sunset. Trading vessels from Europe and the Mediterranean sailed into Little Bay Islands in the fall to buy salt cod.

That incarnation of Little Bay Islands – vibrant, self-sufficient, oddly cosmopolitan – ceased to exist some time ago. Most of the younger residents have left to find work elsewhere. Islanders have to take a three to four hour round trip by ferry to buy groceries or see a doctor. Many of the houses in the community sit empty, abandoned or owned by seasonal residents from the Canadian mainland or the United States. A referendum on "resettlement" was held last winter and 55 of the 69 residents who voted were in favour of leaving Little Bay Islands for good.

It's a sad fact of life that the death of these communities won't alter much in the world. In almost every way we quantify such things, their absence will make no difference. But the loss we're facing is real, if subtler and harder to measure.

Most of what we are as Newfoundlanders, our peculiar mettle, the tics and idiosyncrasies of manner and speech unique to ourselves, we owe to outposts like Francois and Little Bay Islands. For two hundred years they have shaped and defined us. It may be true that we won't be poorer without them. But we will be, intangibly and inevitably, something less.

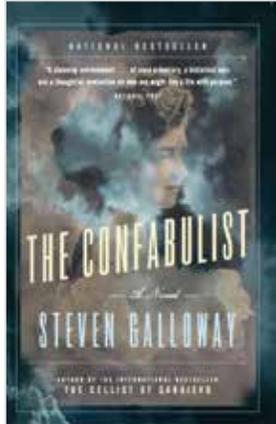
A Newfoundland outpost



Glenn Rogers / Shutterstock

About guest reader **Steven Galloway**

Steven Galloway is the author of four novels, most recently *The Confabulist*, which was nominated for the Rogers' Writers' Trust Award for Fiction. His novel *The Cellist of Sarajevo* was an international bestseller, called "The work of an expert" by *The Guardian* newspaper in Britain. He has won the Borders Original Voice Award, the OLA Evergreen Award, and the George Ryga Award for Social Awareness in Literature. He has been nominated for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, the Scotiabank Giller Prize, the Richard & Judy Book of the Year Award, the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize, the Canadian Booksellers Association Fiction Award, and the Amazon.ca/Books in Canada First Novel Award. His work has been published in over thirty countries and optioned for film. He is the Chair of the UBC Creative Writing Program and lives in New Westminster, BC.



Steven Galloway on *Sweetland*

I've known for some time, along with most other Canadian writers, that Michael Crummey is one of our finest storytellers. I loved his previous novel Galore and consider it a Canadian classic, easily one of the best books of the last decade. I also greatly admire his previous novels River Thieves and The Wreckage.

I approached reading his newest novel, Sweetland, with some excitement. I knew I would be reading a good book, but I was absolutely blown away.

Sweetland is the story of a Newfoundland outport whose residents have been offered a resettlement package; if they agree to leave the town, they will each be paid a substantial sum of money to relocate. The hitch is that they've all got to go.

Moses Sweetland is reluctant. He is concerned about his nephew and he doesn't know what he will do with himself outside of the place where he has made his life.

This is a book full of real-world-magic, of hard choices, and of perilous landscapes. It shows a life that few of us know exists but which is happening in our country every day. For each of us, the idea of what is home and how we are defined by this idea is an ever present question, one many of us do not even realize is being asked. Nothing stays the same and some things never change.

I hope you all find Sweetland as challenging, rewarding and breathtaking as I did. I'm pretty sure you will.

—**Steven Galloway**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions from Steven Galloway

1. What do you think happened on the ladder?
2. Would you have left Harbour Deep?
3. Do you think Moses Sweetland died at any point? If so, when?
4. Moses isn't always a friendly or nice man, but he is good in his core. What do you think about this type of man, and how do they exist in today's world?
5. If you had to fake your own death, how would you do it?

Further discussion questions

1. As well as a fiction writer, Michael Crummey is also a poet. Identify some of the poetic elements found in *Sweetland*.
2. This novel is split into two sections. Which do you think is the most successful and why?
3. Michael Crummey has said that this novel is about mortality. In what ways do you agree or disagree with him?
4. The novel is filled with quirky characters. What role does the isolation of the island play in forming those characters?

Dominicans of Haitian descent demonstrating for their rights: to urge the Dominican government to quickly find a solution to restore their right to Dominican nationality. A recent constitutional judgement retroactively and arbitrarily deprived them of their Dominican nationality, making them stateless.



Amnesty International

BACKGROUND

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Forced migration

Forced migration refers to anyone who migrates to escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood.

Causes of forced migration

- **Conflict-induced migration** occurs when people are forced to flee their homes as a result of armed conflict such as civil war, generalized violence or persecution on the grounds of nationality, race, religion, political opinion or social group.
- **Development-induced migration** is when people are compelled to move as a result of policies and projects initiated to advance 'development' efforts. Examples of this include:
 - large-scale infrastructure projects such as dams, roads, ports, airports
 - urban clearance initiatives

- mining and deforestation
- the introduction of conservation parks/reserves and biosphere projects.
- **Disaster-induced migration** happens when people are displaced as a result of:
 - natural disasters (floods, volcanoes, landslides, earthquakes)
 - environmental change (deforestation, desertification, land degradation, global warming)
 - human-made disasters (industrial accidents, radioactivity).
- **Poverty-induced migration** is when people are compelled to move for economic survival. Such a move may be a matter of life and death. Migrants may move within their own country or region; from rural to urban areas; or cross borders in search of economic survival.

Forced migration terms

- A **migrant** moves around within their own country, or from one country to another, usually to find work, although there may be other reasons, such as to join family. Some move voluntarily, while others are forced to leave because of economic hardship or other problems. People can migrate 'regularly', with legal permission to work and live in a country, or 'irregularly', without permission from the country they wish to live and work in.
- A **refugee** is a person who has fled their own country because they have suffered human rights abuses or because of who they are or what they believe in. Their own government cannot or will not protect them, so they are forced to seek international protection.



Amnesty International Nepal, along with CLASS Nepal and Union Network International Nepal, demonstrate, calling to ensure protection of rights of Nepali migrant workers.

BACKGROUND

In the afternoon of August 11, 1986, Gus Dalton, skipper of the *Atlantic Reaper*, was working the rough seas off the southeastern coast of Newfoundland, fishing for cod, hake and haddock when members of his crew saw two lifeboats in St. Mary's Bay. He thought they were fishing vessels, but then saw the passengers waving a flag, and went to investigate. He found 152 men, women and children crowded into two lifeboats. The rescued people told him they were from Sri Lanka and they wanted to go to Canada.

The opening scenes in *Sweetland* are based on these

real life events of 1986. They set the stage for a story about the trauma of displacement.

Sweetland is a story which captures the hopes and fears of people who are prepared to take tremendous risks to find a new life. It plays with the grey lines which surround the "voluntary" nature of the decisions of those who are forced to relocate. It explores the multitude of reasons why people make the decision to move, the consequences of such decisions, and the pain involved in the uprooting of a community of people who have lived and died together for generations.

The Nogales Mexico fence between USA and Mexico. The wall art depicts the migrants' flight to the USA.



On the move

Throughout history, migration has been a fact of life. The reasons people migrate are varied and often complex. Some people move to new countries to improve their economic situation or to pursue their education. Others leave to escape human rights abuses, such as torture, persecution, armed conflict, extreme poverty and even death.

Sweetland introduces the reader to migrants who live at both ends of this continuum – the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who risk their lives to flee armed conflict and the residents of a small outport community in Newfoundland who are forced to move in order to survive economically. Neither group moves voluntarily and their respective journeys are full of danger, fear and even hostility.

Many migrants face daily racism, xenophobia and discrimination. *Sweetland* paints the best possible picture of the Newfoundlanders' reception and hospitality towards the Sri Lankan arrivals. They are

welcomed into homes in the community and cared for, seemingly without prejudice.

The reception portrayed in the book is similar to the real life response of Gus Dalton and Canadian authorities in the summer of 1986. At that time the migrants were housed in dormitories at Memorial University, given a one-year permit to remain in Canada and allowed to work. All of them were eventually allowed to remain permanently in Canada. The Tamils' landing however, set off a nationwide debate about how Canada treats refugees, which continues to this day.

A double standard

The 1986 events stand in dramatic contrast to the experience of the 492 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who arrived off the coast of British Columbia on the MV Sun Sea in August 2010. The Tamil passengers on that ship were immediately detained and described by government authorities as “terrorists” and/or human smugglers and traffickers. Nearly half of the Canadians polled in 2010 believed the Tamils should be deported

Refugees and migrants, rescued in the central Mediterranean by the Italian Navy vessel *Sfinge*, prepare to disembark in the port of Augusta, Sicily, August 6, 2014.



Amnesty International

even if their refugee claims were found to be legitimate and there was no evidence that they had links to a “terrorist” organization.

While the book doesn’t tell us very much about the reasons for the Tamils’ flight to Canada, it does deal with what forced migration means to the central character, Moses Sweetland. Moses Sweetland is rooted to his land and tries to resist all the pressures which are forcing him to migrate. The story of the closure of his community in Newfoundland is similar in so many ways to the stories of people who every day around the world make the most difficult decision of their lives – to leave their homes in search of a better life.

Moses already knows what it means to be alienated as a result of his previous migration experience. The story recalls his move from Newfoundland to Ontario in order to earn money to buy an engagement ring. Here he and other migrants “.... found work building split level bungalows among crews of Italians and Hungarians and Caribbeans.... They drank at the Cribou Club, a new bar catering to the expats who’d left Newfoundland to work in Ontario’s packing plants and factories, in the auto sector, on road gangs. Economic refugees mourning the anachronistic little world they’d abandoned, the squat saltboxes that housed three generations A weakness for superstition and singing and tribal politics. An antediluvian vocabulary spoken in accents so inbred and misshapen they felt like foreigners everywhere else in the city.... Talking all the time about when they might be able to jack up and move home..” p 191-192

Like migrants the world over, Moses found work that involved gruelling hours, poor pay and dangerous conditions. Like them, he paid a heavy price for working in these conditions. Strange as it may seem, Moses was one of the lucky ones.

A harsh reality

Millions of migrants around the world work in conditions which amount to forced labour or in some cases slavery-like conditions. Governments treat them like criminals and corporations care more about profits than workers’ rights. Undocumented migrants are particularly at risk of exploitation and human rights abuse. Those who live outside their countries, without wealth or status, are the world’s most vulnerable people, often condemned to desperate lives in the shadows.

Amnesty International’s role

Amnesty International has recent reports of abuse of migrant workers in Qatar. In preparation for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, foreign workers now make up 95 per cent of Qatar’s workforce. Many work in conditions which amount to forced labour. Amnesty International witnessed workers facing serious food shortages and living in appalling conditions, without electricity, clean drinking water or proper sanitation. For many of those who spoke to Amnesty International, the nightmare does not end even when they go home because, after months or years working in the world’s richest country, they return unpaid and in debt.

Other people are forced from their homes or land against their will without any legal protections or safe guards. Our September 2014 Book Club Discussion Guide dealt with how the residents of the community of Badia East in Lagos, Nigeria were violated when their homes were bulldozed overnight as the government prepared to undertake an urban renewal project.

More recently, Amnesty International released a report about forced evictions in Myanmar (Burma) where mining companies with ties to China and Canada are responsible for forcing people off their land in order to make way for mining operations. The mining projects have serious environmental impacts, posing a threat to local people’s health and access to safe drinking water. But the governments of China, Canada and Myanmar have failed to carry out proper investigations or hold the companies to account.

And there are the millions of refugees worldwide, like the Sri Lankan Tamils who arrived in Newfoundland in 1986. Amnesty International has reported on the people of Syria, Sudan, Eritrea, Colombia, and countless other countries who continue to take to boats, trains, planes or simply their feet in a desperate search for safety and protection. Like the characters in *Sweetland* they are “set adrift without warning or explanation, with nothing to say if they would ever be found. Or if anyone was even looking for them. Orphaned on an ocean that seems endless.” p 120

A SPECIAL APPEAL

Raif Badawi must also feel that he is orphaned on an ocean that seems endless

Raif Badawi is a blogger and activist in Saudi Arabia who was sentenced to 10 years in jail and 1,000 lashes, administered at a rate of 50 per week, after starting a website for social and political debate. He received the first 50 lashes in a public flogging on January 9, 2015 in front of the al-Jafali mosque in Jeddah.

He has not been flogged since that date and no reasons have been given as to why not. However, it is clear that Raif Badawi remains at risk of further flogging as long as the sentence stands.

Mass protests have been organized by activists around the world, including at many Saudi Arabian embassies, condemning the flogging of Raif Badawi and calling for his release. There have also been official appeals by a number of governments. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called the flogging *“at the very least, a form of cruel and inhuman punishment... prohibited under international human rights law, in particular the Convention against Torture, which Saudi Arabia has ratified”*.

Raif Badawi has close ties to Canada. His wife and children live in Quebec and are waiting for the day their husband and father will join them.

Protest to condemn the flogging of Raif Badawi and call for his release.



TAKE ACTION

Everyone has the right to peacefully express their beliefs and opinions. No one should be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment for any reason. Amnesty International believes Raif Badawi is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.



Using your own words, please call on the Saudi government to:

- release Raif Badawi immediately and without any conditions on his freedom
- drop all charges against Raif Badawi
- ensure that Raif Badawi is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, including his sentence of flogging, until he is free.

Send your message to:

His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Naif bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud
Ministry of the Interior
P.O. Box 2933, Airport Road
Riyadh 11134, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Salutation: *Your Royal Highness*

Postage: \$2.50

Please send copies to:

His Excellency Naif Bandir A. Alsudairy
Ambassador for Saudi Arabia
201 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 1K6

Salutation: *Your Excellency*

Online action: <http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/individuals-at-risk/raif-badawi>

Other resources

For more information about Amnesty International's work on migrants, forced evictions and refugees see:

People on the Move: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/people-on-the-move/>

Amnesty International, *Open for business? Corporate crime and abuses at Myanmar copper mine*, 10 February 2015, available at:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA16/003/2015>

Qatar: *'Treat us like we are human': Migrant workers in Qatar*, November 2014, MDE 22/011/2013

References

<http://www.nytimes.com/1986/08/12/world/152-after-5-days-in-lifeboats-are-rescued-near-newfoundland.html>

<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/society/immigration/immigration-general/sri-lankan-migrants-rescued-off-newfoundland.html>

Key Facts

—From “People on the Move” at www.amnesty.ca

230M

More than 230 million people live outside the country where they were born – that's about three per cent of the world's global population.

14.2M

There were an estimated 14.2 million refugees in the world at the end of 2013.

10M

10 million people across the world are “stateless” – no country recognizes them as nationals.

33.3M

Around 33.3 million people have been forced to leave their homes, but stay within their own country (known as internally displaced people).

COMING UP MAY 2015

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
BOOK CLUB
SELECTION

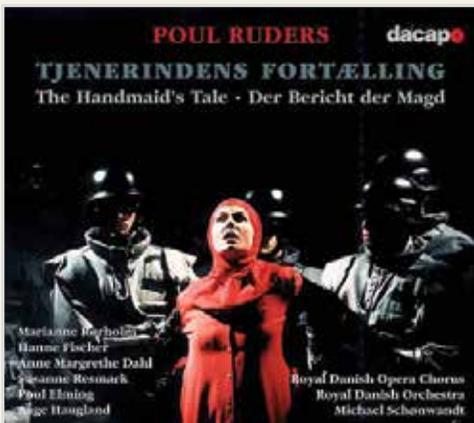
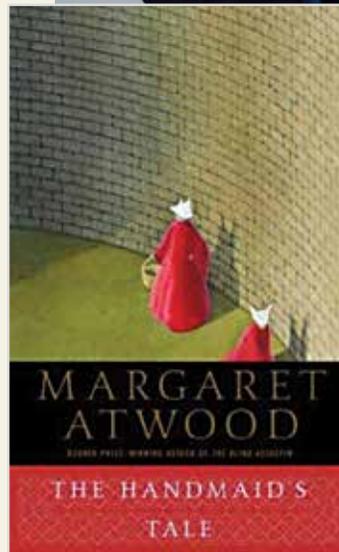
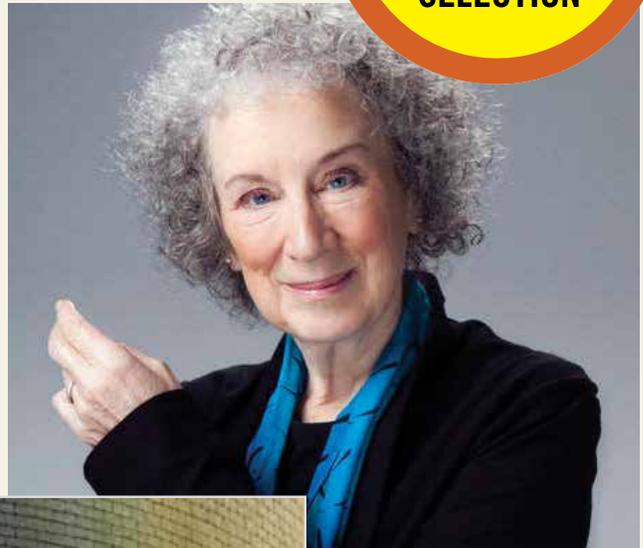
The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

Recommended by guest reader
Gail Bowen

The Handmaid's Tale (1985) is a work of speculative fiction by Canadian author Margaret Atwood. Set in the near future, in a totalitarian Christian theocracy which has overthrown the United States government, *The Handmaid's Tale* explores themes of women in subjugation and the various means by which they attempt to free themselves. *The Handmaid's Tale* won the 1985 Governor General's Award and the first Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1987. It was also nominated for the 1986 Nebula Award, the 1986 Booker Prize, and the 1987 Prometheus Award. It has been adapted for the cinema, radio, opera, and stage.

The discussion guide will be sent out in early May.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at bookclub@amnesty.ca.



Find us on Goodreads: To join the conversation and register your views, go to www.goodreads.com.