



Citizenship and
Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION CANADA (CIC)

**REPORT ON CROSS-CANADA CONSULTATIONS
IN RESPONSE TO THE TSUNAMI
OF DECEMBER 26, 2004**

Canada 

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Executive Summary

The recent tsunami that affected countries in South and Southeast Asia and Africa on December 26, 2004 was one of the largest natural disasters in modern history. Over 160,000 people lost their lives and many more are missing, injured or displaced.

This report summarizes consultations former Citizenship and Immigration Minister Judy Sgro and her officials held with community groups across Canada regarding measures that CIC should implement to help victims of the tsunami, and those Canadians who are either from, or who have close family members in, the affected regions.

Many of those who participated in the consultations said that Canadian aid must be directed primarily at the victims, and not at governments in the affected areas. Some suggested that accountability mechanisms be built into Canadian aid.

Human rights were raised repeatedly. Some said the relief effort provided Canada with an opportunity to send a message that it is not acceptable for countries to persecute their residents, and that disaster relief should be contingent on improvements in human rights.

The need for a long-term plan for disasters that require massive humanitarian relief was raised frequently. The plan should include: prior identification of staff with the required expertise and language skills; a plan to engage Canadians as volunteers; input from relief agencies; and a coordinated federal response.

One of the strongest themes was the need to help the many children who were affected. Many interveners said that Canada should explore various options to facilitate the entry into Canada of the many children left orphaned by the tsunami. Another identified priority was to rebuild the education infrastructure.

While there was general satisfaction with Canada's response, there were concerns that some areas within the affected regions had been excluded. Specifically, some communities said efforts appear to be focused on Southeast Asia, and that the African side of the story has been ignored.

Many interveners expressed support for *opening the doors* to anyone affected and wanting to come to Canada, rather than simply accelerating applications.

The widespread loss of identity and travel documents was raised frequently. Many people suggested that the use of affidavits and testimonials be allowed to establish the identities of tsunami victims.

Some interveners were concerned that moving applications up the immigration queue would delay applications already in the system. The need for new funding

in order to respond effectively was raised frequently. Stakeholders are concerned that if CIC simply addresses the issue through reallocations, there will be negative impacts on already high inventories and long wait times.

Several proposals were made to facilitate immigration to Canada by immigrants who may have suffered significant financial setbacks because of the tsunami. Many interveners said that expanding the definitions of the Family Class under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* would assist tsunami victims who want to come to Canada.

Interveners noted the tsunami's impact on students from affected areas who are currently in Canada. They cited the interruption of financial support from home and the stress and mental anguish experienced by students as prime concerns.

It was suggested that, while they rebuild, people from affected areas with family in Canada, be issued temporary residency permits for short-term stays. This measure could be tailored to assist unskilled workers.

A recurring theme in discussions on integration and settlement services was the need for additional counseling and mental health support to help families in Canada from the affected areas to deal with the effects of the tsunami. Many people stressed the need for additional funds and resources for language training and other settlement services to help cope with a large influx of immigrants from areas affected by the tsunami.

The need for Canada to establish a strong presence on the ground in stricken areas was articulated by a number of stakeholders as essential in ensuring that Canadian aid and other measures to assist victims is targeted and effective. Several provinces said they were pleased to work with the Federal Government on humanitarian relief for tsunami victims, and appreciated the efforts being made to consult them and other stakeholders.

Many people cited the need for improved communications by the Government. The greatest need is for clear, plain language information that is provided in easily accessible formats.

MPs and their staff noted that immigration inquiries are becoming more and more time-consuming; in some cases making up 75 to 90% of their constituency workload. They attributed this increase to a reduction in resources and services by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The need for additional resources and the ability of CIC to increase its case-handling capacity were the two most pressing issues identified by MPs.

Many specific measures that address the suggestions made at the consultations have been put in place by CIC to respond to the disaster. CIC will continue to

work with stakeholders to reunify families as quickly as possible, while ensuring that families receive the support and counseling that they need and deserve.

Introduction

The tsunami in the Indian Ocean that hit the coastlines of several countries in South and Southeast Asia and Africa on December 26, 2004 was one of the largest natural disasters in modern history. Over 160,000 people lost their lives and many more are missing, injured or displaced. Tens of thousands have lost their livelihood. The hardest hit areas were the Indian Ocean coastline areas of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand. Several other countries as far away as Africa were also affected.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has been designated by the Prime Minister as one of the key partners in Canada's humanitarian effort to aid those affected by the tsunami. On January 2, 2005, Prime Minister Paul Martin asked Judy Sgro, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to conduct consultations with community groups across Canada to hear their suggestions on the immigration measures that CIC should implement to address the needs of affected Canadians and other persons in Canada who are either from, or who have close family members in, the affected regions.

The Honourable Judy Sgro, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and Regional Directors General consulted with members of ethnocultural communities, consular officials, national and ethnic media, provincial officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), service provider organizations (SPOs), educational institutions, foreign student organizations, and Members of Parliament (MPs) and their assistants across Canada. Meetings were held in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax, Fredericton, Charlottetown, and St. John's. Details of the meetings can be found in Appendix A. A complete list of participants appears in Appendix B.

Stakeholders were pleased that the Government of Canada was seeking their input, and feedback during the consultations was generally positive. Communities were very pleased with the overall effort made by the Minister and Citizenship and Immigration Canada and grateful for the response of all Canadians. While they recognized the important role of immigration in responding to the disaster, it was made very clear that efforts should be directed first and foremost to reconstruction and aid in the affected areas.

This report includes an overview of the many suggestions received through the outreach effort and a summary of immigration measures and initiatives put in place to respond to the disaster. This report also outlines some of the policy options under consideration.

Summary of Suggestions

The following is a summary of suggestions that were received during the consultations across Canada. For ease of reference, they have been grouped by subject area.

The final section refers to questions and suggestions raised by MPs and their constituency assistants.

Foreign Aid, Donations and Canada's Role

i) Aid must be properly directed

Many of the individuals and organizations that participated in the consultations strongly stated that Canadian aid must be directed primarily at the victims of the tsunami, and not at the Governments of the affected countries. Some suggested that accountability mechanisms should be built into Canadian aid, and that the Canadian Government should request reports on how the relief funds were distributed.

Some organizations wanted the funds that they raised distributed to specific areas. Concerns were expressed regarding whether aid would reach these areas, including the Aceh area of Indonesia. There were questions about the Canadian Government's role or influence in ensuring that aid reached its intended destinations.

These concerns were sparked by reports in the media and from relatives abroad that aid to the people of Aceh was being stalled by Jakarta, and that the Indonesian Army was controlling the distribution of food and water.

Participants in the consultations spoke of the need for the Canadian Government to discourage the Governments of India and Sri Lanka from using their armed forces in affected areas, and in areas of previous unrest, since they may intimidate residents.

Concerns were also expressed that some of the funds that were donated for disaster relief might be used by larger organizations such as the Red Cross for administrative costs.

Although there is widespread support for Canadian efforts to assist tsunami victims, there were also a number of people who articulated the need for balance in Canadian disaster relief efforts, so that people in need in other parts of the world are not ignored. The need for humanitarian assistance in the Congo, Darfur, Haiti and in other developing nations was raised.

ii) Human Rights

The issue of human rights was raised by many of those who shared their views at the consultations. Some said the tsunami relief effort provided Canada with an opportunity to send a message to countries with long-term political unrest and military activities such as Indonesia and Sri Lanka that it is not acceptable to persecute their residents, and that disaster relief should be contingent on improvements in human rights.

Representatives of the Aceh community said that in light of the ongoing strife in their province, they hoped that Canadian representatives would remain in the area until work had begun on rebuilding a better society.

iii) Need for a long-term plan

The need for a long-term plan to deal with disasters that require massive humanitarian relief was articulated by many of those who participated in the consultations. Stakeholders suggested that an effective disaster relief plan should include the following elements:

- Prior identification of a pool of federal civil servants with the required expertise to provide assistance. The required security clearances would be obtained ahead of time, and designated staff would be given time off, with salary, to assume their disaster relief duties.
- A plan to engage other Canadians as volunteers.
- Input from agencies such as the Red Cross, the DND Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) and other relief agencies to help coordinate and implement an emergency plan in accordance with anticipated priorities.
- Designation of specific short- and long-term solutions for various scenarios.
- Close coordination with other federal departments.

Stakeholders suggested conducting an evaluation of tsunami relief efforts and an assessment of all subsequent disaster response efforts and their long-term impacts so that Canada can learn from each disaster/crisis.

iv) Tax and debt relief

There were suggestions that the cut-off date for donations that could be claimed in the 2004 tax year be extended beyond January 11, 2005.

Several organizations expressed disappointment at not being selected as one of the organizations for whom the Government would match tsunami relief contributions. They would like to be included.

Many interveners felt that Canada's debt moratorium was encouraging. Some felt that Canada should consider extending the initiative to debt cancellation, which would show Canada's goodwill and encourage other nations to follow suit.

However, one participant suggested that the moratorium on foreign debt repayments was not a good idea because some governments would use the funds to continue to persecute their own people.

Voices:

“If we are considering expanding our humanitarian efforts, then we need to apply it more broadly, not only to those affected by the tsunami. It’s a good thing if perhaps this disaster prompts the Government and/or CIC to rethink its approach to humanitarian issues more globally.”

“Any country could be hit by this type of devastation and the international community should be attempting to build infrastructures in the developing world to ensure that all countries are able to effectively cope with this type of tragedy.”

“Remember people don’t generally want to leave home—the emphasis must be on rebuilding.”

Helping Children

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the consultations was the need to help the many children who were victims of the tsunami, particularly those who were orphaned. A secondary theme was the need to rebuild schools so that the education of children in affected areas is not disrupted further.

i) Adoptions and orphans

Many of those who were consulted noted that the tsunami had produced large numbers of orphaned children, and that Canada should explore various options to facilitate their entry into Canada. Several individuals and organizations said that current procedures around foreign adoptions must be rethought because they are slow and cumbersome and do not serve the best interests of children.

Two options, raised several times, were modifying existing foster parent programs or introducing a temporary sponsorship program that would allow children to come to Canada on a non-permanent basis. Other suggestions included:

- Streamlining the adoption process for tsunami and non-tsunami cases; and
- Opening up the adoption process to Canadian families by providing assistance to Canadians who want to adopt orphans from affected areas.

It was noted that the provinces and territories must be consulted before any changes to adoption procedures are considered.

One participant argued that the question of adoption is a sensitive one in many cultural communities, and that Canada must be mindful of religious and cultural

laws. For example, it was stated that Islamic law does not allow adoption of children in the full legal way, and that other options should be explored.

Several individuals/organizations suggested that Canada should assist in the rebuilding of orphanages.

ii) Education

There was a general consensus that one of the most significant priorities in restoration work should be rebuilding the education infrastructure as education will not only provide surviving youth with the structure and support to deal with the effects of the disaster but it will also provide much needed hope for the future.

There were many suggestions on how aid could be directed towards assisting with the reconstruction of schools and other infrastructures for children. Among the suggestions:

- Twin schools and villages in the affected areas with schools and cities in Canada. This would be beneficial for both communities.
- Recruit Canadian teachers who are willing to travel to South Asia to assist. Emphasis should be placed on teachers who have the experience and knowledge of the environment as well the language skills to help in affected areas.
- Pair Canadian NGOs with NGOs in affected areas so, together, they can provide more effective assistance.

Representatives from the YMCA noted they are receiving daily updates from YMCAs in affected areas—who report that they are working very hard with youth groups in these areas to develop their leadership capacity because so many elders were lost. It is important to consider responses that allow the young leaders of tomorrow to remain in their countries.

Immigration Policy

i) Relief efforts must be more inclusive

While there was general satisfaction with many of the measures that Canada has put in place, there were concerns that some areas within the affected regions had been excluded. Specifically, some communities feel that efforts appear to be focused on Southeast Asia and that the African side of the story has been ignored.

Community representatives argued that the following areas should be included in priority processing:

- Somalia (Puntland and the cities of Hafun and Foar); and
- Burma (Arakan State, Irrawaddy and Taninsarry Divisions).

Efforts should also be directed at Kenya, and resources should be added to Nairobi to deal with Somali needs.

There was a desire among interveners to ensure that individual regions or countries not be forced to compete against each other for assistance nor benefit at the expense of another.

ii) Admission criteria

Many interveners expressed support for *opening the doors* to anyone affected by the tsunami and wanting to come to Canada. Several submissions proposed measures to increase the number of admissions to Canada from affected areas, rather than accelerating the processing of applications.

One of the most frequently suggested changes was to modify the criteria for admission in the Family Class to allow for sponsorship of more distant relatives. Specific suggestions included:

- Raising the age limits for the sponsorship of orphaned nieces and nephews;
- Making children orphaned by the disaster who have family members in Canada eligible for admission under the Family Class without requiring lengthy and costly international adoption procedures;
- Making women widowed by the disaster and their children eligible for sponsorship by relatives, eligible groups or individuals;
- Widening the criteria to include sponsorship of any deserving case, even if there is no direct family relationship to an eligible individual or group in Canada willing to sponsor them;
- Waiving the low-income cut off for those sponsoring individuals from affected areas; and
- Allowing parents and grandparents (or older children and siblings) to come to Canada for a short period (one or two years) and providing them with support such as medical coverage.

While some argued for a much less restrictive admission policy that would include allocations for low-skilled immigrants from affected areas, others said the criteria for resettlement or sponsorship should be defined by regulation and not left to the discretion of visa officers, except in cases defined as deserving or compassionate.

The notion of a one-time lottery for individuals who are not eligible for sponsorship was proposed. The lottery, which could be similar to the US Green Card lottery, would select 1,000 - 5,000 immigrants from affected areas.

Another suggestion was for the Minister to place a higher priority on applicants who would be willing to settle in smaller Canadian communities rather than the

larger centers, such as Vancouver and Toronto, which already receive many immigrants.

iii) Identity and travel documents

One of the most frequently raised issues during the consultations was the widespread loss of identity and travel documents that occurred as a result of the tsunami. Many of those who spoke on this issue noted that it is often difficult under normal circumstances to obtain birth certificates, passports, or other documents in some of the affected countries, particularly in areas with ongoing conflicts.

The need for visa officers and other Canadian officials involved in the immigration process to be sensitive to this problem was raised repeatedly. There were concerns that the lack of documentation would slow down immigration applications.

The most frequent suggestion on how to deal with missing documents was to allow the use of affidavits and testimonials to establish the identities of people from affected areas. Many community organizations and NGOs indicated that they were willing to assist in this process. Some suggested that there would be a role for MPs to help in this area as well.

Some of those who appeared at the consultations would like the Canadian Government to increase its vigilance on the use of fraudulent documents, and requested that CIC reaffirm the severe consequences of falsifying documents and providing false statements.

DNA testing was suggested as a method to be used to confirm identities and relationships; however, the high cost was identified as a significant barrier for many applicants. The possibility of waiving fees for DNA testing was raised.

There was a request that the Canadian Government issue travel documents to enable relatives in Canada to return to their homeland to deal with their loss, as occurred during the Kosovo experience.

iv) Medical

Medical issues were frequently mentioned at the consultation sessions, and many participants proposed improvements to make it easier for tsunami victims to meet the medical requirements for admission to Canada.

Several interveners suggested that designated doctors go to applicants and not vice-versa. One public health representative suggested that a team of physicians travel to the affected areas to complete the necessary medical screening and

ensure that applicants are disease free so that applications could be processed more quickly.

Another alternative that was proposed was to have the medical and security screening of applicants done once they arrive in Canada rather than abroad.

It was also suggested that the Government work with the provinces to help immigrants from assisted areas pay for medical insurance. Alternatives that were proposed included expanding eligibility for the Interim Federal Health Program, or eliminating the program altogether and giving immigrants from affected areas immediate access to provincial health care programs.

v) Queue jumping

Some interveners were concerned about the impact that moving applications up the immigration queue would have on applications already in the system (from both within and outside the affected areas). It was noted that the special treatment that refugees from Kosovo received caused some resentment from those who had already been going through the process. The Government should look at ways of not making this a two-tier process.

vi) Immigration levels

One province expressed an urgency to know if there would be an increase in the level of government-sponsored refugees.

Other interveners inquired if the Minister would consider increasing immigration levels as part of the tsunami response, or whether there would be a cap on the numbers of applications from affected areas that would be processed at the provincial or national levels.

vii) More staff, resources needed

Many of those who were consulted said that CIC offices in Canada and abroad need new funding to effectively respond to the tsunami disaster and to deal with its longer-term impacts on immigration issues.

Many interveners are worried that if new funding is not devoted to assisting tsunami victims, internal reallocations will have a negative impact on already high inventories and long wait times.

viii) Immigrants in financial difficulty

Several proposals were made to facilitate immigration to Canada by immigrants who may have suffered significant financial setbacks because of the tsunami. They include:

- The creation of a loan fund to assist persons coming from affected areas;
- Relaxing the settlement funds criteria for immigrants whose financial resources have been wiped out by the tsunami;
- Reimbursing fees for applications that have already been submitted;
- Ensuring that financial considerations do not invalidate applications for sponsorship by parents and grandparents that would otherwise be approved; and
- Ensuring that the loss of livelihood or reduction in net worth as a result of the tsunami does not prevent an otherwise qualified applicant from coming to Canada or benefiting from expedited processing.

ix) Expedited processing

Many of those who were consulted questioned how long the expedited processing of immigration applications from affected areas would continue.

x) Removals

It was recommended that any person in Canada who is the subject of a removal order to a country in an area affected by the tsunami be provided with a deferral or a permit to stay in Canada.

Voices:

“It’s presumptuous of us to assume that victims want to re-settle here.”

“Relatives of the Aceh group in Canada are presently in Malaysia waiting to be processed. They have no means of support and would like assistance for their family members from UNHCR and/or the Canadian Government. They are concerned about the Malaysian Government deporting or *pushing out* their family members before they are processed to come to Canada.”

Family Reunification

Many of those who were consulted believed that expanding the definitions of the Family Class under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* would assist tsunami victims who want to come to Canada. Allowing financially capable relatives to sponsor extended family members, or individuals and groups to sponsor unrelated victims who present compassionate arguments would be one method of assisting.

Suggestions for expanding the Family Class included:

- Including brothers and sisters, nephews, nieces, cousins, orphaned children and others who are not currently eligible;
- Giving parents and siblings the same priority as spouses and children;
- Including unrelated persons in some circumstances; and

- Making the changes permanent.

To speed up processing, family members could be brought to Canada and processed here, as was done with refugees from Kosovo.

Several suggestions were made on measures that would help Canadians, and permanent and temporary residents in Canada to locate family members in affected areas. They include designating a central government contact point for assistance, involving local Canadian NGO's/grassroots organizations working in affected areas, and providing access to the Internet or other communication methods.

Private or Group Sponsorship

Many of those who brought suggestions to the Government on private or group sponsorships highlighted the need for change and flexibility in the program. Many felt that the established private sponsorship model is a good starting point, but that further changes, such as allowing individual families to sponsor individual families, could be made.

It was recommended that a case registry be established to gain a better understanding of the potential sponsorship numbers. Once the scope is known, a detailed plan of action could be developed for private sponsorships, joint sponsorships and possibly relaxed selection criteria for relatives of sponsors.

Agencies such as the Red Cross should be involved, and international approaches should be considered as well. The NGO community has volunteered to assist in brainstorming on how a register might work and suggested there may be precedents in previous humanitarian movements.

There is strong community interest and support for CIC to consider sponsorship for affected persons who may or may not have family in Canada.

There was a discussion on the need to sensitize the public, NGOs, and churches about private sponsorships. Additional work must also be done with the provinces because across the country there appears to be an uneven capacity, awareness, and interest in the Sponsorship Program.

Students

Many of those who appeared at the consultations discussed the impact of the tsunami on students from affected areas who are currently studying in Canada. Some of the concerns that were raised included the interruption of financial support from families in affected areas, and the mental anguish and stress caused by the disaster that could disrupt studies. Several measures to assist students were proposed. They include:

- Establishing a national policy that would allow students to work off-campus;
- Extending work permits for affected students beyond their current term;
- Providing financial assistance for full-time students directly affected who have no time to work; and
- Extending the period of post-education employment beyond the one year currently allowed.

A number of suggestions to speed up the processing of student permits were also given. They included allowing students to submit their applications to CIC offices in their home countries, allowing applications from within Canada, and establishing special procedures to process urgent requests for work permits from students who are destitute as a result of the tsunami.

Under another proposal, students would be allowed to sponsor family members to come to Canada as temporary residents during their period of study.

Temporary Residents

Some interveners suggested that temporary residency permits be issued to people from affected areas with family in Canada even if they do not plan to reside here permanently but would like to stay for a short time while they rebuild.

Another suggestion was to create a temporary workers program for unskilled workers to help them through this difficult time—e.g. planting trees, etc.

Temporary resident visas could also be issued to people who want to come to Canada temporarily until the situation improves in their home country.

Refugees and Refugee Claimants

Several suggestions for changes to the way that Canada manages its programs for refugees were made during the consultations. For example, one intervener proposed that the *Safe Third Country Agreement* should be reviewed so that it does not impact negatively on people from affected communities.

The issue of Convention Refugees (CRs) who have not yet been landed was also addressed. This is an issue of particular interest to the Sri Lankan and Somali communities in Canada as both communities have many members who are Convention Refugees with CR status but who have not become permanent residents even though they have been in Canada for several years. Community members believe that the same consideration should be given to this group as being given to permanent residents and Canadian citizens.

Some participants in the consultations suggested that refugee claimants from affected areas be given consideration as many of them also have family that has been lost or affected.

There was a request that the processing of CRs and refugee claimants in Canada be expedited so that family members abroad can come more quickly.

Integration and Settlement Services

i) Additional counseling needed

A recurring theme in discussions on integration and settlement services was the need for additional counseling and mental health support for families in Canada to help them deal with the tsunami disaster. Specifically, funding for an outreach counselor for four to six months is required for the Acehnese because this group is under extreme stress.

Additional funding will be required to deal with the mental trauma of new arrivals as well as immigrants who have already come to Canada. This new money should be provided to existing settlement agencies. It is felt that women and children may be particularly vulnerable.

Participants at the consultations in Atlantic Canada expressed an interest in sending a team of counselors to Banda Aceh to see if they could alleviate the inevitable mental health situations (post-traumatic stress syndrome).

ii) More resources needed

Many stakeholders stressed the need for additional funds and resources for language training, counseling and other settlement services to cope with a large influx of immigrants from areas affected by the tsunami.

It was suggested that one way of dealing with the increased workload, and to provide extra help with any tsunami initiatives, would be to return, for a six-month period, employees who were recently transferred from CIC to the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA).

Stakeholders felt that an assessment should be undertaken to determine the immediate settlement and integration needs and to plan for the longer term. Stakeholders are ready to step forward and participate.

Rather than creating new mechanisms to deal with the tsunami disaster, stakeholders felt that it made more sense to use mechanisms that are already in place and support existing processes by involving existing settlement agencies, unlike the process that was used to deal with refugees from Kosovo.

iii) Consult with provinces on capacity

It was noted that provincial governments and settlement agencies must be consulted on their capacity to assist with increased numbers and additional factors, such as the physical and mental conditions of arrivals from affected areas.

Overstressing the settlement delivery agencies was identified as a concern, particularly in British Columbia. Consultations would have to be held to ensure there would be services available to immigrants from affected areas.

Voices:

“Be careful not to do what we did with Somali teens, who had integration problems.”

“When new arrivals from the affected areas arrive in Canada they should not be required to attend 80% of language training classes due to their mental stress.”

Service Delivery and Immigration Processing in Canada and Abroad

The need for the Government of Canada to establish a strong presence on the ground in stricken areas was articulated by a number of stakeholders as essential in ensuring that Canadian aid and other measures to assist victims are targeted and effective.

Stakeholders made several recommendations:

- Increase the number of visa officers in the disaster areas, and open visa offices in areas that are remote and affected;
- Send more Canadian government officials to see the most affected areas firsthand;
- Ensure senior Ministers and MPs visit the North of Sri Lanka;
- Establish a consular presence in Indonesia; and
- Ensure that CIC staff travel to affected areas and work with local organizations.

Several people mentioned CIC should improve its services in affected areas, particularly at the New Delhi High Commission, where there have sometimes been more than 500 people in line in extreme heat with little shade, and no stools or drinking water. This is particularly difficult for elderly applicants.

Concerns were also expressed about the ability of CIC officials to differentiate between cases of genuine need and those who are taking advantage of the current crisis.

Voices:

“We need to help persons to re-establish in their own country and provide the necessities of life there.”

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Several provinces indicated that they were pleased to work with the Federal Government on humanitarian relief for tsunami victims, and appreciated the efforts that the Government was making to consult with them and other stakeholders.

Several provinces also indicated a willingness to deal with humanitarian issues, including funding for relief efforts.

Some interveners suggested initiating discussions with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to develop a plan for water, wells, and shelter, and a *village for village* twinning scheme.

Communication

Many people cited the need for improved communications by the Government. The greatest need is for clear, plain language information that is provided in easily accessible formats.

Communications that target affected communities were identified as a priority. Stakeholders requested precise information on the measures taken by CIC. A lack of clarity on what was meant by *expedited process* was identified as a specific example where the Government could communicate more effectively.

Communities requested clear information on the criteria that were used to designate specific areas or groups for fast tracking, and how these criteria compared with those used in previous disasters or crises.

Concerns were also expressed that public opinion is generally uninformed and that many Canadian residents base their (negative) conclusions on historical stereotypes. Public opinion research data was cited that revealed two-thirds of Canadians oppose fast tracking immigration applications. Questions were asked about the measures that CIC uses to educate the public.

Some stakeholders said they felt that CIC was relying too heavily on its Web site to disseminate information. They were critical of this strategy because they feel information on the site is often out-of-date and many immigrants and Canadians do not access it.

The need for CIC to increase its communications budget to enable the department to reach communities that have been affected by the tsunami disaster was noted. Stakeholders also called on the Government to publish more information, such as the *Welcome to Canada* booklet, in third languages for new arrivals from the stricken areas. Ethnic third-language media should be provided with information in their languages.

Stakeholders said that it is often difficult to reach the CIC Call Centre to get information and order application kits. It was suggested that a special tsunami hotline be established.

Task Forces or Forum on Immigration

The consultations were received very positively. Many communities indicated a willingness to continue working with the Government on follow-up measures to provide updates and to consider further measures that the Government might implement.

A number of participants suggested forming a cross-cultural committee to address issues raised by the tsunami.

Several provinces indicated their desire to establish immigration councils or fora to discuss immigration matters on an ongoing basis, and not just during crisis times. The proposals were well-received by all participants.

Members of Parliament and Constituency Assistants

Several MPs and their constituency staff attended the consultations, while others communicated their views directly to Citizenship and Immigration Canada. In general, the views of MPs mirrored those of the communities that were affected by the tsunami.

MPs and their staff noted that immigration inquiries are becoming more and more time consuming for them, in some cases making up 75 to 90% of their constituency workload. They attributed this increase to a reduction in resources and services by CIC. The need for additional resources to fix a system that is *broken* was cited by one MP. The need for additional resources and the ability of CIC to increase its case-handling capacity were the two most pressing issues identified by MPs.

i) Additional resources required

MPs and their staff noted a clear need for additional funding for counseling, financial support, and to cope with a five-month backlog at CIC Case Processing Centres (CPC). Many noted that accepting additional immigrants would place a

further strain on health and social services resources that are already stretched to the limit.

MPs and their staff urged the Minister of Immigration to advise the Prime Minister that more resources are needed, and that simply reallocating current resources is not an effective solution to a growing problem. The need for additional staff at CIC was highlighted, as staff are overworked. Some MPs stated that the Global Case Management System (GCMS) has increased delays and created additional problems.

ii) Capacity

Increasing the demands on the immigration system was identified as a major problem area when the system is already overburdened.

In light of current backlogs, MPs questioned the wisdom of accepting applications for parents and grandparents. Backlogs and delays in processing these applications have caused many problems, including numerous inquiries from children in Canada. CIC should look at alternatives or a policy shift towards raising priority and decreasing backlogs. There is the potential of a backlash if you expedite the cases of tsunami victims: “You need a disaster to get your parents and grandparents here.”

Some MPs feel that CIC needs to be more up front with applicants about the processing times for their applications. The case processing times listed on the CIC Web site are deceiving.

iii) Other issues

The following immigration questions directly related to the tsunami were identified by MPs as priority areas that must be resolved:

Financial issues for immigrants

- Will families already struggling in Canada be required to meet the financial commitment before bringing family here or will support in Canada be provided for a period of time?
- Who is exempt from fees and would this apply to any application or just for applications for permanent residency through Family Class? (Some MPs felt fees should be deferred, not waived.)

Eligibility criteria

- Will there be a special program for people who do not have any family members in Canada such as the one for refugees from Kosovo?
- Will there be special consideration for siblings or other family members who are not eligible under Family Class Sponsorship?

Medical/security/identity documents

- Will medicals or security checks be waived?
- What if a person does not have identity or travel documents?

Immigration levels

- Will the targets for the number of permanent resident visas be increased for 2005?

Communications

- How is the message getting out to people that Canada may be able to help?

Tsunami versus war and other disasters

- Concern of precedence to waive fees for this group when there are many others from war-torn areas—consider temporarily waiving or postponing fees for those affected and collecting them at a later date.

Temporary and Permanent Residents

- CIC must clearly define its plans for Permanent and Temporary Resident applicants from the affected areas.

CIC's Response

Canada is already doing much more than most countries on immigration issues by responding to the concerns of citizens and permanent residents who have close family members in the affected regions. With the exception of Australia, which announced similar measures, no other country is taking this approach.

The current immigration framework allows Canada to respond quickly and compassionately on immigration issues in crises like this. The Minister has the authority to waive many requirements where humanitarian considerations are compelling.

Security and health concerns are being respected. Security risks associated with movements from this part of the world and the public health concerns regarding communicable diseases like tuberculosis are being taken seriously.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) and the Canadian Border Security Agency (CBSA) are working closely together. All three departments appreciate that this terrible event may have had an impact on the cases of persons being reviewed who, or whose family members, come from the most affected areas.

CIC initiated the following outreach efforts to ensure that the public could readily access information related to Canada's immigration response to the disaster.

1. (a) On December 30, 2004, a letter was sent to all Senators and MPs providing them with information on access to a dedicated response centre, along with an e-mail address and a fax line through which they could direct inquiries on behalf of their constituents.
(b) December 30, 2004, Senators and MPs were invited to meet with the Minister or departmental staff to obtain information and offer suggestions on how the department could aid victims and their families.
(c) On January 13, 2005, a letter was sent to Senators and MPs advising them of the immigration measures that have been put in place to aid persons in Canada and their families abroad affected by the disaster.
2. Updated information on the CIC Web site, including phone and fax numbers for visa offices handling applications for those affected by the disaster, as well as a dedicated e-mail address (tsunami@cic.gc.ca) to obtain information on the special immigration measures. A separate email address for members of the public (suggestions.tsunami@cic.gc.ca) was also established to solicit suggestions on how CIC could help affected persons.
3. A 1 800 hotline (1 800 457-5035) for information on the special immigration measures was launched.

4. Information about Canadian initiatives to assist tsunami victims and members of their families was released to the media and posted on the CIC Web site.

Documents available include:

- (a) News Release (January 3, 2005)
- (b) Frequently Asked Questions (January 5, 2005)
- (c) Notice (updated January 6, 2005)
- (d) Fact Sheet (updated January 6, 2005)

CIC has also implemented the following immigration measures to respond to the disaster:

- CIC has waived application fees for all persons who are seriously and personally affected and immediately put priority processing in place for them.
- First priority is given to processing family member applications for those spouses, common-law and conjugal partners, dependent children, and orphaned siblings, nieces or nephews regardless of when their applications were received. CIC has committed to processing most of these files within three months.
- The second priority is parents and grandparents. The objective is to issue visas in six months or less.
- Applications of other personally and seriously affected family members with ties to Canada are being considered on a priority basis under humanitarian and compassionate grounds. Overage siblings, aunts and uncles, and nieces and nephews will be considered. Visa officers have the authority to respond to these cases and will determine individual circumstances and family ties to Canada.
- CIC has currently identified, in Canada and abroad, 1,000 cases of applications involving persons affected by the disaster. Officials are working around the clock to identify every single affected applicant with close family ties to Canada.
- As long as there are no security risks for staff, area trips are planned to meet with those who cannot make it to the visa office in Sri Lanka.
- Visa officers have been redirected from other missions to affected areas and are using extensive overtime to handle the extra workload. However, CIC is very conscious that redirecting resources for exceptional processing, which is very labour intensive, will inevitably have an adverse effect on the regular processing stream.

- The effect that increased processing will have on our Designated Medical Practitioners abroad who provide medical screening for immigration applicants is being monitored. CIC will partner with other organizations, such as the International Office on Migration (IOM) to provide backup.
- Foreign students who are seriously and personally affected by the disaster (for example, loss of financial support from their families in affected areas) are able to fax their applications for work permits to the CPC in Vegreville for priority processing. Students have been asked to phone the 1 800 (1 800 457-5035) Call Centre for the tsunami for guidance on the requirements.
- Requests for extensions of status from persons who may be visitors or temporary workers in Canada and who originate from areas affected by the disaster will be given sympathetic consideration. New applications from these areas will be handled on a priority basis.

In addition, various policy options are being considered:

- *Ensure appropriate integration services*—There will be a need to provide additional counseling and mental health support for those families accepted into Canada who have been affected by the disaster.
- *Facilitate the processing of applications by family members who may be medically inadmissible*—While ensuring that the public health of Canadians is protected, officials could approach the provinces to request sympathetic assessment of Family Class cases that have been and continue to be seriously affected by the disaster. Provincial concurrence could be sought on admitting them to Canada regardless of their potential demand on health care services.
- *Increase resources at visa offices and in Canada for immigration processing to cope with existing backlogs as well as those affected by the disaster*—Unfortunately, CIC does not have experienced visa officers standing by to deploy on short notice in these crises. By necessity, CIC must redeploy resources from other business lines and other missions to provide priority processing. Additional resources will be requested to redeploy staff, deal with overtime in Canada and abroad, and to provide additional integration services and security checks, immediately and into the next fiscal year.
- *Deal with the IRB stream expeditiously*—The Immigration and Refugee Board is reviewing its caseloads and any measures undertaken will be in full compliance with the law and Canada's international obligations and humanitarian traditions. If persons from affected areas fail their refugee claim, CIC could examine their cases under humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

- *Speed up processing of protected person applications for permanent residence in Canada who have dependents in the affected areas*—Regulations already exist that enable CIC to process dependent family members concurrently with persons who have been found to be refugees in Canada.
- *Support refugee protection*—CIC will continue to be responsive to the UNHCR on specific refugee situations, such as that experienced by the Aceh community. No special measures are needed at this time.

The following policy options were considered, but rejected:

- *Facilitate adoptions of orphaned children*—The countries concerned have made it very clear to Canada that these children represent their future, and will not agree to, or facilitate international adoptions. CIC will respect the wishes of the concerned countries, and will continue to process adoptions of children made available for international adoptions in the normal manner—that is, to facilitate approved adoptions in consultation with provincial authorities.
- *Create a new sponsorship program for displaced persons*—In response to the comments that CIC has received through the consultations and outreach efforts, it is believed that the people in affected areas will be best served through reconstruction, fostering those in need, adopting communities and helping those affected persons in their own countries.

Conclusion

In summary, it is believed that the measures which have been put in place are responsive to the needs of persons affected by this disaster. CIC will continue to work in partnership with stakeholders across Canada to reunify families as quickly as possible, while ensuring that families receive the support and counseling they need and deserve.

Appendix A: Cross-Canada Consultations

1. B.C. Region – Vancouver (January 4-5, 2005) (Minister Sgro)

Dialogue with consular representatives from Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Indonesia and Italy

Meeting with Achenese Community

Round table with immigrant serving organizations

Meeting with education representatives from UBC

Round table with MPs and constituency assistants

Media interviews with CBC National, CBC Newsworld, Radio India, Indo-Canadian Times, Vancouver Immigrant Magazine, Vancouver Sun

Ethnic media round table

2. Prairies and Northern Territories Region

(a) Calgary – January 6, 2005 (Minister Sgro)

Round table with NGOs, SPOs, ethnocultural community groups, and foreign student organizations, provincial officials

Round table with MPs and constituency assistants

(b) Edmonton – January 8, 2005 (RDG Rob Vineberg)

Round table with NGOs, SPOs, ethnocultural community groups, and foreign student organizations, provincial officials

Round table with MPs and constituency assistants

(c) Winnipeg – January 10, 2005 (RDG Rob Vineberg)

Round table with NGOs, SPOs, ethnocultural community groups, and foreign student organizations, provincial officials

Round table with MPs and constituency assistants

3. Ontario Region

- (a) Ottawa – January 8, 2005 (RDG Bader and MP Marlene Catterall representing Minister Sgro)

Round table with NGOs, SPOs, ethnocultural community groups, MPs

- (b) Toronto – January 9, 2005 (RDG Bader and MP Susan Kadis representing Minister Sgro)

Round table with NGOs, SPOs, ethnocultural community groups, medical and educational institutions

4. Quebec Region – Montreal – January 7, 2005 (Minister Sgro)

Round table with NGOs and ethnocultural associations

Meeting with the media

5. Atlantic Region – January 6 -10, 2005 (RDG Tony Marshall)

- (a) Charlottetown, PEI – January 6, 2005

Round table with representatives from Federal Council, provincial departments, academia, SPOs/NGOs

- (b) Fredericton, NB – January 7, 2005

Round table with representatives from the province, MPs, Mayor of Fredericton, and community groups

- (c) Halifax, NS – January 9, 2005

Round table with representatives from the province, educational institutions, community groups, NGOs and SPOs

- (d) St. John's, Nfld. – January 10, 2005

Round table with representatives from the province, educational institutions, community groups, NGOs and SPOs

Appendix B : Participants

Round Table Consultations – VANCOUVER - January 4-5, 2005 **Community Participation**

Meeting with Consular Representatives

Consulate General of India
Consulate General of Italy
Consulate General of Thailand
Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia
Consulate of Sri Lanka

Meeting with Representatives of Immigrant Serving Agencies

Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies in BC (AMSSA)

Bridge Clinic, Physician Leader
Immigrant Services Society
MOSAIC, Executive Director
Provincial Minister of State for Immigration
Provincial Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services
Provincial Multicultural Committee
SUCCESS, Executive Director
Vancouver Coastal Authority, Medical Health Officer

University of British Columbia

UBC President
UBC Vice President, Students

Round Table Consultations – CALGARY- January 6, 2005
Community Participation

ORGANIZATION NAME

Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth
Calgary Catholic Immigrant Society
Calgary Immigrant Aid Society
Calgary Immigrant Educational Society
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
Calgary Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
Calgary Multicultural Centre, Executive Director
Canada Indonesia Social Club, Calgary
India - Canada Association, Past President
India - Canada Association, President
Province of Alberta, Alberta Government Human Resources and Employment
San Center
Southern Alberta Institute of Technology
Sri Lanka Canada Association

Round Table Consultations – WINNIPEG - January 10, 2005
Community Participation

ORGANIZATION NAME

Francophone Settlement and Integration Services for Newcomers Bilingual Service
Centre
Manitoba Immigration Council
Province of Manitoba
Province of Manitoba, Immigration & Labour, ADM
Red River College, Dean of Student Services
Red River College, Diversity and Immigration Support
Red River College, Language Training Centre
The International Centre
The International Centre, Settlement Services
University of Manitoba, Coordinator for Students
University of Manitoba, Director, Immigration Services
University of Manitoba, Executive Assistant to VP (Academics)

Round Table Consultations – EDMONTON - January 7, 2005
Community Participants

ORGANIZATION NAME

ASSIST Community Services Centre
Catholic Social Services
Catholic Social Services (Malaysia Community)
ECALA
Edmonton Catholic Schools
Edmonton Immigrant Services Assoc.
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
Immigrant Settlement Services
Indo-Canadian Women's Association
Metro Continuing Ed, EPSB
Millwoods Welcome Centre
NorQuest College
PALS/ASSIST
Province of Alberta, Advanced Education
Province of Alberta, Human Resources and Employment
Sri Lanka Canadian Friendship Association
Sri Lankan Tamil
Sri Lanka Tamil Canada
University of Alberta
University of Alberta, International Centre

Round Table Consultations - OTTAWA –January 8, 2005
Community Participation

ORGANIZATION NAME

Buddhist Congress of Canada
Burmese Community - Catholic Immigration Centre
Canadian Friends of Somalia
Catholic Immigration Centre
City of Ottawa Board on Equity, Chair
Indonesian Community
Indonesian Embassy
LASI World Skills, Executive Director
Lower Town Community Resource Centre
Ottawa Community Immigrant Service Organization
Pak-Chou Tam
Shek-ho-Ching
Somali Centre for Family Services
SOMCAN Board of Directors
South Asian Partnership of Canada, Executive Director
South East Health and Community Centre
Sri Lankan Association of Ottawa

Members of Parliament and constituency assistants

Mauril Belanger
Ed Broadbent and Liane Holte
Mr. Casult
Indima Karunaratne
David McGuinty

Round Table Consultations – TORONTO - January 9, 2005
Community Participation

ORGANIZATION NAME

African Canadian Social Development Council
Board India Rainbow Community Services of Peel
Brampton Neighbourhood Resource Centre
CAMH / Family Services Association University of Toronto
Canadian Tamil Congress
Catholic Cross-Cultural Mississauga Services
Centre for Information Community Services
Centre for Information & Community Services (CICS)
Community Resources Connection (CRCT)
Community Resources Consultants of Toronto
CTBC
Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood
Family Service Association
ICNSS
IDRF
India Rainbow Community Services of Peel
Inter Cultural Neighbourhood
Intercede for the Rights of Domestic Working Caregivers and Newcomers
Islamic Society of Toronto
Kenyan Community in Ontario
Midaynta
Midaynta Association of Somali Service Agencies
Multilingual Community Interpretive Services
Muslim Community Services
North Etobicoke Tamils Association
OCASI
South Asian Family Support
South Asian Family Support Services (SAFSS)
St. Joseph Women's Health Centre
Tamil Eelam Society
Tamil Eelam Society of Canada
The Scarborough Hospital
Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office
University of Toronto & CAMH
University of Toronto, Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement
V. IPU CANADA Sosisly
Vasantham - Atamil Wellness Centre
Voice of Somali Women for Peace
Voice of Somali Women for Peace, Reconciliation & Political Rights
Zanzibar - Canadian Association

Round Table Consultations – MONTREAL - January 7, 2005
Community Participation

ORGANIZATION NAME

Alliance des Communautés de l'Asie du Sud
Association Inde-Canada
Association mondiale tamoule
Association nationale des Canadiens d'origine indienne
Bharat Times
Carrefour d'intercultures de Laval
Centre communautaire des femmes sud-asiatique
Centre éducatif Maanavat Arivalayam
Centre social d'aide aux immigrants (CSA)
C.O.F.F.R.E.T. (Centre d'orientation et de formation favorisant les relations ethniques traditionnelles)
Coalition québécoise pour la paix au Sri Lanka
Congrès tamoul canadien (Québec)
Fondation Bharat Bhavan (Maison de l'Inde)
Groupe de support pour les familles sud-asiatiques de Petite Bourgogne
L'Hirondelle, Services d'accueil et d'intégration des immigrants
Maison internationale de la Rive-Sud inc.
L'Organisation Inde-Canada inc.
PROMIS (Promotion-Intégration - Société nouvelle)
Service d'aide et de liaison pour immigrants La Maisonnée
Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes inc.

Round Table Consultations – NOVA SCOTIA - January 9, 2005
Community Participation

ORGANIZATION NAME

Acadia University, International Student Advisor
Adult ESL (HRSB)
African Society of Nova Scotia
Anglican Diocese of Nova Scotia and PEI
Asha Indo-Canadian Women and Youth Assoc.
City of Halifax
Dalhousie University
Department of Education, Immigration and Settlement Division
Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre
Indo-Canadian Association of Nova Scotia
Islamic Association of the Maritimes
Islamic Community Centre of Nova Scotia
Maritime Sikh Society
Metro-Region Immigrant Language Services
MISA
Mount Saint Vincent University
MultiCultural Association of Nova Scotia
Multicultural Council of Halifax/Dartmouth
Nova Scotia Community College
Nova Scotia Department of Community Services
Nova Scotia Treasury and Policy Board Immigration
Province of Nova Scotia
Red Cross
Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Halifax
Saint Mary's University
South East Asian Association
South India Cultural Association of the Maritimes
Sri Lanka Canada Association of Atlantic Region
St. Francis Xavier University
United African Canadian Women Association
University College of Cape Breton (UCCB)
YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth

Round Table Consultations –NEWFOUNDLAND - January 10, 2005
Community Participation

ORGANIZATION NAME

African-Canadian Association of Newfoundland
Anglican Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador
Association for New Canadians
Canadian Red Cross Society, Newfoundland and Labrador, Disaster
Services/International
City of St. John's, Mayor
College of the North Atlantic
Friends of India Association
Health and Community Services
Hebrew Congregation of Newfoundland and Labrador
Heritage Canada
Hindu Temple Association Corporation
Innovation Trade and Rural Development
International Students
International Students Resource Centre
Memorial University
MUN International Office
Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland/Labrador
Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador
Newfoundland - Labrador Human Rights Association
Newfoundland and Labrador - Health in Pluralistic Society
Newfoundland and Labrador Federal Council
Newfoundland and Labrador Multicultural and Folk Arts Council
Newfoundland Department of Education
Newfoundland Government
Newfoundland Sikh Society
Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador
Red Cross
Sri Lanka Association
Sri Lankan Assoc. of Newfoundland
Sri Lankan Students at Memorial University
United Baptist Convention of Atlantic Provinces

Round Table Consultations – PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND – January 6, 2005

Community Participation

ORGANIZATION NAME

Charlottetown, Deputy Mayor
Cooper Institute
Employment Equity Committee of Veterans Affairs
First Baptist Church
Holland College
Holland College, International Office
HRSDC
Indo-Canadian Association of PEI
Mayors
PEI Association of Newcomers
PEI Development and Technology
PEI Federal Council
PEI Government
PEI Multicultural Council
Province of PEI, Department of Dev. and Tech.
Red Cross, PEI Operations
Roman Catholic Episcopal Corp Diocese of Charlottetown
SPO
UPEI, International Student Centre
Winslow United Church

Round Table Consultations – NEW BRUNSWICK - January 7, 2005
Community Participation

ORGANIZATION NAME

Canadian Red Cross
CCNB Bathurst
CCNB Campbellton
CCNB Dieppe
CCNB Edmundston
CCNB Peninsule Acadienne
Edmundston Campus
Enterprise Saint John
HRSDC
Ind-Canadian Community
MAGMA
Mayors
Mount Allison University
Multicultural Association of Fredericton
National Ind-Canadian Council
New Brunswick Community College Network
New Brunswick Family and Community Services
New Brunswick Federal Council
New Brunswick Multicultural Council
Province of New Brunswick - Business New Brunswick
Red Cross, Saint John
Roman Catholic Bishop of Saint John
Shippagan Campus
Thai Student Association
UNB
UNBF, International Student Advisor
UNBSJ, International Student Advisor
YMCA – SJ