SUDHA COOMARASAMY

To: The National Consultation on Refugee Concerns

From: A refugee sponsored by Christ Church Cathedral, Anglican Diocese of Montréal, Québec.

Like the squirrel and the robin we built a cozy home in stages; What took us 20 years to build was burnt down in 24 hours.

We walked, we ran and began to live out of suitcases; Within assigned 6’ X 10’ rooms we paced, yearning for ‘home’

Like the monkey or the Kangaroo I hopped from place to place; with my infants clutching at me, putting up and taking down our tents.

Addressless and adrift our colour became our burden; In borrowed life-boats we floated.

Then at last we saw land — our new home.

Land of Indians, Inuits and Immigrants
Now I am one of you.
O Canada, the North Star, let’s together be
The Sanctuary of the stateless and rootless.

(Tamil from Sri Lanka. October 1986, Montréal, Québec.)

Statement on Canada’s ODA

We crawled in pain struggling to stand up.
You flew to our assistance and dressed our wounded knees and palms.
Now, we crawl with bandaged knees if we could only stand — there won’t be anymore wounds.

We cried out in hunger longing to feed at least our children.

You were quick to respond by transporting your excess food supply.
Now, with a full belly we hear the cry of hunger not far away. If we have lands or tools to till hunger could be forgotten for ever.

To all you donors we beseech do not dump your gifts and go. Please, rethink, remodel, reorientate your approach to the ‘Poor’ and the ‘Oppressed.’

(October 1986, Montréal, Québec. From an ODA recipient of Third World.)

Bienvenue Automne

Warmth of the Sun warmed them burnt.
Tanned and grilled we closed our eyes Unawares autumn crept behind us.
Now trees are shedding leaves — Golden, like the dreams of youth or, like people shedding their tattered skins we loose lustre and grow pale.
Grow pale at the thought of future — flurries, snow storms, boots and shovels,
laws, legislations and rejections.
Yet within us echoes, the promise of Spring and Summer sun, Always this little voice of hope springs, wars and blooms — hurts, heals and grows this year and the next again and again without rest we bloom, fade and fall only to bloom again — ready for another fall.

(Provoked by the new Immigration Bills: C-55 and C-84. September 1987, Montréal, Québec.)

Human or Humane

Seated on comfortable chairs_b that surround symbolic round tables we discuss and determine the fate of millions — who miles away seek to be free from oppression and deprivation of self determination, or even, access to basic human rights.

Using our rights as donors or enlightened democracies we seize their rights and schedule their lives.
Others we measure by our values find they do not measure up and then, make their decisions for them.
Always, ‘their best interest at heart’ we reach out or send aid to get rid of our self guilt.
The race between the ‘haves’ and ‘haves’ continues.
They race to treat the ‘havenots’ always with preconceived ideas of — the needs and goals of the marginalized.

(Reaction to the Summer Course on Human Rights. July 1988, Charlottetown, P.E.I.)

The Battle That’s Ever On

Many have to stay away from home shutting between jobs and eating from paper bags, inorder to keep their homes.
Mothers spend time away from their children so that they can ‘spend’ on them.
Governments uphold “Motherhood,” Future generation and improved lifestyles.

Yet — Homeless numbers increase
Adult-lifestyle condominiums expand, need for better and cheaper daycare increases while the response decreases.
Budget spending on hi-tech advancement and elusive submarines expands, spending on low-cost housing and daycare shrinks.
Where is the logic one wonders.

Election promises abound in housing, employment, environment and women’s issues only to be abandoned once the votes are cast and victory’s won.

The marginalized fight on armed only with hope and vision for better days and justice for all.

(November 1988, Scarborough, ON.)