

Topic: Integrating Immigrants in Urban Centers

This presentation is an excerpt of one I delivered at the Integrating Immigrants Conference, Prague, City Hall.

Before I begin, it is my very great pleasure to share with you a powerful statement made by a former Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien:

“In the new, global knowledge economy of the 21st century prosperity depends on innovation, which, in turn, depends on the investments that we make in the creativity and talents of our people. We must invest not only in technology and innovation but also, in the Canadian way, create an environment of inclusion in which all Canadians can take advantage of their talents, their skills and their ideas.”

When Mr. Chrétien wrote these words in 2003, he was speaking of the vision Canadians have held for Canada for over thirty years,

that of a country in which there is a place for, and respect for, people of all cultures and backgrounds.

I live and work in the Greater Toronto Area, one of the most diverse areas in the world. It's been said that you can travel along any one of Toronto's main thoroughfares, and as you go from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, you will eventually visit the whole world.

I must concur with the presenter from the Czech Republic: many of the issues regarding immigrant settlement that she discussed are the same as those we experience in Canada's NGO sector. We see our efforts to meet these challenges as a continual work-in-progress. Our commitment to newcomers and our vision for them drives our unending quest to operationalize diversity and achieve a full and just society.

But while diversity can be a cultural and economic advantage, it can also be a source of constant stress, as different cultures and ideologies try to find ways of co-existing and thriving. We in Canada understand that we have a choice: we can invest in Canada's cities or we can disinvest in Canada's future. We can all work together to find ways in which everyone has the opportunity to grow and prosper, or we can see our world become increasingly more competitive and fragmented according to country, race, gender, ideology, or income.

Immigration is critical to the future of Canada:

- By the year 2011, 100% of Canada's net labour force growth will depend on immigration
- By 2030, immigration is expected to account for 100% of Canada's net population growth

Therefore, it is essential for us in Canada to realize that in ten to fifteen years, there will be a huge, worldwide, demand for labour.

This global shortage will be the result of many of today's demographic and labour market realities:

- Because of its one child policy and growing economic power, China will need to retain its human capital and will find ways to retain that capital in order to fuel its economic engine
- With the increasing recognition of its own skilled labor force, and as the frequent beneficiary of outsourcing by multinationals, India will make concerted efforts to retain the skills of its native population
- Industrialized countries such as Germany, Russia, and Japan have – like Canada – declining populations coupled with the need for skilled workers, while countries such as Turkey and Vietnam are well positioned for significant economic growth

Clearly, the pool of immigrants to be drawn from is shrinking. At the same time, global demand for human capital is on the increase, especially by industrialized countries looking to sustain their economic growth. With all these looming challenges, Canada – to

sustain itself as a country – has come to recognize the importance of effectively integrating immigrants, not just as an economic source, but as whole beings who are involved, engaged, and empowered.

Sustainability of cities, and the inclusion of all its residents, has become a critical issue for Canadians, and – I would assume – internationally, as well.

So, let me share with you the hallmarks of what I consider to be the critical elements of an inclusive city:

- Commitment to diversity that brings about the engagement and participation of all citizens
- Opportunities for human development that include growth and mobility
- Opportunities and encouragement for everyone for civic and cultural engagement, and political participation

- Minimal disparities in living conditions among residents through the availability of affordable housing and meaningful employment
- Availability of and access to the support services provided by community and social services, including such services as income maintenance, language training and recreation

Cities that commit themselves to inclusion, that develop a plan that will lead to opportunities for growth and prosperity for all residents are those that will grow and thrive in these increasingly troubled times. Such cities will forge the blueprint for the cities of the future, the cities upon which the rest of the world will come to depend for stability and leadership.

In conclusion, let me to share with you an immigrant integration model that we use in my organization to support our work with newcomers (the model is attached).

This model is designed to create a cohesive approach to immigrant integration. It places the immigrant at the centre of the entire process, and includes the pillars of sustainability that are linked in as essential factors in the development of human systems. Without the adoption of a systems approach, the “environment of inclusion” will remain only a pipe dream, and an unrealizable goal for most of Canada’s immigrant population. In fact, the vision so well articulated by Mr. Chrétien will forever remain unrealized.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.