



PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Celebrating the Strengths Refugees Bring to PEI

On this year's World Refugee Day recognized on June 20, the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada (PEIANC) invites all Islanders to reflect on refugees' will to survive and the huge contributions they make to their new communities here on the Island.

"In escaping persecution and human rights violations, natural disasters, or displacement from war, refugees increase our awareness of the potential for human strength and resilience," said Kevin Arsenault, PEIANC Executive Director, "they teach us how to meet the challenges in life with their personal stories of overcoming huge obstacles to reach a place of safety, reunite with their families and start a new life."

Prince Edward Island became home to 58 refugees in 2008 and has welcomed 45 refugees so far in 2009. These families come from a wide range of backgrounds and countries, including Bhutan, Burma/Myanmar, Colombia, Afghanistan, Congo, Somalia and Egypt.

"Prince Edward Island is made stronger by the refugees who join our society," said Arsenault. "They bring their talents, survival skills and new perspectives. They encourage us to build a more equitable society where the dignity of all human beings is respected."

Despite the efforts of many, the needs of refugees worldwide are far from being met. Worldwide, there are over 34.2 million people who are refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless people, and asylum seekers. These are not just numbers, but real people with real stories. World Refugee Day is a time set aside for all of us to realize the many needs of refugees worldwide and to see the people behind these needs.

"Islanders have much to be proud of in our province's response to refugees, although there is always more that can be done. In particular, we could be offering a new home and safe haven to many more refugees through private sponsorship," said Arsenault. Step-by-step guides to private sponsorship of refugees can be found on its website: www.peianc.com. The PEIANC challenges Islanders to work together to make our province a welcoming community, where refugee men, women and children are valued, offered protection, and able to participate fully in society. The PEIANC can offer assistance to those who are interested in forming a refugee sponsor group.

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Since 1993, the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada has been providing short-term settlement services and long-term social inclusion and community integration programs for immigrants. PEIANC is also involved in numerous cross-cultural awareness and public education programs.