

Demonstrators demand status for migrants

ANDY BLATCHFORD
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Montreal — Hundreds of civil liberties advocates marched through Montreal and Toronto on Saturday to denounce the deportation and detention of migrants and refugees.

Demonstrators said Canada should implement a more inclusive immigration program to help end the exploitation of undocumented workers.

“These people make up the fabric of our daily lives but somehow fall to the wayside,” said Aaron Lakoff, one of about 200 people who marched in Montreal.

“By being out here with colourful flags, with music, with people most importantly, we're trying to render some visibility to the struggle.”

He said there are an estimated 40,000 people without status in Montreal and as many as 500,000 across Canada.

In Montreal, supporters of Algerian-born refugee claimant Abdelkader Belaouni waved placards calling for the government to give him status.

Mr. Belaouni, who is blind and suffers from diabetes, fled Algeria in 1996. He lived in the United States before heading to Canada in 2003 and applied for refugee status.

Canada drew up a warrant for his arrest and called for his deportation in January 2006.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada denied his refugee claim on the grounds he was unemployed and has no family in Canada.

He sought sanctuary in a Montreal church, where he has stayed for almost 500 days.

Mostafa Henaway, a member of a committee dedicated to helping Mr. Belaouni, said Canada's Immigration Ministry has not responded to their requests.

“Despite this his spirits are holding up, but 500 days is 500 too long,” Mr. Henaway said before the march.

“His health gets worse every day in sanctuary, he can't see a doctor... the only way he maintains his health is through an exercise bike.”

Iranian immigrant Nader Goudarzi knows how it feels to be in immigration limbo in Canada.

He received his immigration status two months ago, after an 11-year wait.

Today, he is resuming his career as a dental lab technician, making bridges and ceramic teeth.

He said he battled depression and lived in fear during his wait.

“You don't have any vision for your future,” said Mr. Goudarzi, who participated in the march.

“I lost time, I lost my life.”

Meanwhile, more than 100 people turned out in Toronto to support a family facing deportation to their native Mexico next month.

Angelica Gallegos Perez said she left Mexico after getting into trouble with the police.

Her family was forced to come to Canada as refugees because of the lack of state protection in Mexico.

In the two years they have been here, Perez feels her family represents the hardworking immigrants Canada claims to be looking for.

Her husband has been working as a grocery store clerk, and she has been working as a cleaning lady.

“My husband is hard working, and I am too,” she said, as tears streamed down her face. “My kids go to school here and our lives are here. I would even bear the winters here to stay.”

The family has spent its life savings for legal resources and application fees, and now lacks the funds needed to apply for asylum on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

Ms. Perez said she believes that going back to Mexico will put the lives of her children in danger.

“I am afraid that if we go back, something will happen to my son and daughter.”

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Phillip Crawley, Publisher