



Rt. Hon. Jean Chrétien, PC, MP  
Prime Minister of Canada  
House of Commons  
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October 28, 1995 (National Day of Action Against the Head Tax)

Dear Prime Minister,

It was encouraging to hear you address the nation on October 25, 1995 with the words "we have built and founded our country on the values of freedom, peace, tolerance, generosity, openness to differences, sharing and compassion towards those less fortunate among us." Those words are consistent with your party's assertion in the Red Book, that "Canadians have to see themselves as belonging not to a society composed of isolated individuals or of competing interest groups, but to a society of reciprocal obligation, in which each of us is responsible for the well-being of the other" (p. 11). In your Red Book the "well-being of others" includes the refugee: "the need to respond humanely to the world refugee crisis...is particularly important to Canadians" (p. 87).

**As board members of Citizens for Public Justice we believe that the \$975 Right of Landing Fee, or "Head Tax," contradicts these publicly stated Liberal commitments. As Canadians we are ashamed that Canada charges a landing fee for refugees.** Not only do refugees suffer at the hands of some in their country of origin, but they are further punished when they seek protection in Canada. Freedom does not demand entry fees from the poorest of the poor. Generosity does not require further sacrifice from those who have already lost so much. Sharing and compassion do not involve putting a person or family in situations where there is no hope.

While \$975 may merely be "the cost of a colour TV" to many middle- and upper-income Canadians, it represents an unattainable amount of savings for most people fleeing desperate situations. A refugee family of four — two adults and two children — has to pay over \$3150 in fees alone in order to immigrate to Canada. That represents the annual salary of an accountant in El Salvador. A nurse in Sri Lanka would take three years to earn that amount.

While we recognize that the refugee processing system requires money for operational costs, we believe that there are alternative sources for this money. An appropriate tax on lottery winnings, for example, would generate an adequate amount.

The Head Tax imposed by your government violates Canada's international and national commitments. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (Regional Bureau for the Americas and the Caribbean) expressed serious concern about this policy. The International Council of Voluntary Agencies describes the tax as a violation of international law and a perversion of the idea of refugee protection (Canadian Council for Refugees, Oct. 16/95 Press Release).

Recently, Canada took an active role in proposing and then drafting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This document says that family reunification is a *right* of children. Yet many families cannot afford the landing fees required to reunite both parents with their children. This puts additional strain on an already stressful situation. Parents may not know if their children are safe or even alive, and vice versa.

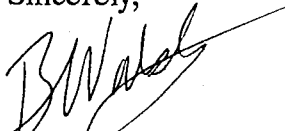
Most alarming to us is the general direction your refugee policies are taking. We draw your attention to the similarly unjust \$500 processing fee put in place in 1994. The proposed "Safe Third Country" agreement with the United States, which allows Canada to refuse entry to refugees coming here via the U.S., is also of great concern.

Rather than fostering mistrust about refugees, we believe the government must give Canadians a true and accurate account of the contributions made to our society by the immigrants and settled refugees. In this context we refute the assumption of many Canadians that refugees and immigrants take more than they return to the Canadian economy. In fact, "over a lifetime, the [average] foreign-born households contribute between \$34,615 and \$46,695 more in taxes than [it] extracts in public services" (reported in the Toronto Star, March 7, 1995, p. A10).

As Christians we hear God directing us to treat with respect the stranger in our land: "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you, you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:33,34). Jesus also instructs us to protect the rights of the poor: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:35-36).

**Mr. Prime Minister, in the name of freedom, of peace, of tolerance and generosity, and in the name of the Lord, we urge you to rescind this oppressive head tax.**

Sincerely,



Brian J. Walsh, Chair  
National Board of Citizens for Public Justice

cc: Hon. Sergio Marchi, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration  
Hon. Paul Martin, Minister of Finance