

Barriers refugees face in limbo

Ten of the best years of Sami's life have passed as he has waited, watched, and wondered whether he would get landed status. In 1993, the waiting appeared to be soon over when Doug Lewis, then Minister in charge of immigration, granted Sami a "Minister's certificate" with the assurance that when he had gone through the normal and routine landing procedures he would obtain landed status.

After receiving Lewis' letter, Sami paid for work and student permits. He finished high school while supporting himself by working at Hasty Market for \$6 an hour. He then enrolled in the Business Logistics Management program at George Brown College in the fall of 1995. Sami was under constant pressure to pay the foreign student rate of \$14,000 a year, as he was not landed; because Sami was not landed, he was also barred from receiving student loans. Despite the incredible odds, and with intervention on several levels, Sami finished his program but has yet to receive his diploma. Several prominent companies wanted to offer Sami jobs, but did not follow through when they saw by his social insurance number that he was not as yet landed.

Suleyman, too, wants to get on with his life. The professional engineer has been unable to continue his career in Canada because he needs to be landed to get an engineering license. "I want to get out of this limbo situation," Suleyman wrote in his March 27, 1998 letter to the directors of CSIS and SIRC. "There must be some time limit on these investigations. Nothing and no one is served by simply letting time pass. At a certain point, this becomes a violation of human rights."

Sami's and Suleyman's frustrations reflect the situation of many thousands of undocumented refugees in Canada, who are in "legal limbo" for a number of reasons, writes Andrew Brouwer, manager of the Refugee and Immigrant Program at the Maytree Foundation. His March 1999 report, *What's in a Name?: Identity Documents and Convention Refugees* describes the barriers faced by refugees in legal limbo (pages 5 to 8). Although this report looks at the situation of Convention refugees, all people without status face similar challenges:

"Life in Canada [without landed status] is, in many ways, like living in legal limbo. While safer and in most respects better than life in a refugee camp or facing persecution at home, the lives of Convention refugees [who are waiting for] permanent residence are very much 'on hold.'..."