



Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers
Association canadienne des avocats et avocates en droit
des réfugiés

CARL LAUNCHES 'REFUGEE TRAVEL IS ESSENTIAL' CAMPAIGN CALLING FOR FAIR AND HUMANE REFUGEE POLICY AT OUR BORDER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers (CARL) today debuted its new “Refugee Travel is Essential” campaign that gives viewers a glimpse into the painful experiences of many refugees who approach the border and are turned away.

The campaign features an interactive video that allows viewers to choose their path as they flee their home country to the United States, and then attempt to seek safety in Canada. The video reflects the true story of a courageous woman who escaped death in her home country, but was turned back to the U.S. by Canada, and was imprisoned for nearly two months. The woman, known in the campaign as “Sarah” in order to protect her identity, narrates the video and her efforts to seek protection.

The Canada-U.S. border is effectively closed to refugees. Our current border policies—the Safe Third Country Agreement (“STCA”) and the pandemic-related restrictions—prevent nearly all refugees who approach the border from applying for protection in Canada. This is a sharp turn away from Canada’s commitment to refugee protection and puts people at risk.

The Federal Court of Canada declared the STCA to be unconstitutional in July 2020, relying heavily on testimony of people like Sarah, who were jailed after Canada turned them away and handed them to American officials. The Canadian Government has since indicated it will appeal, but CARL strongly encourages the Government to reconsider.

“Ending the STCA is good for refugees and is good for Canada,” said Maureen Silcoff, CARL President. “There are crucial benefits: we would no longer be turning people away and putting them at risk, irregular crossings would largely cease, and refugees would arrive at border points across the country. And there is no evidence that we would see a surge in refugees, so there’s no downside.”

CARL’s new campaign also calls for an exception for refugees to the broad border restrictions imposed during the pandemic. The Government’s initial COVID-19 plan was to allow refugees to seek protection here, subject to health screening and quarantine. This is a sensible plan, and in keeping with public health requirements. We do not need to keep the border closed to refugees to keep Canada safe from COVID-19; refugees can quarantine too.

“A pandemic is no excuse for turning a blind eye to the risks faced by refugees. Everyday, thousands of exceptions to the border closure are made for truckers, business executives, sports teams and even TV contestants. Refugee travel is essential, too,” said Coline Bellefleur, CARL Executive Member.

CARL encourages everyone to take a walk in a refugee’s shoes by viewing the campaign interactive video [HERE](#), and taking the message to Ottawa that “**Refugee Travel is Essential.**”

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