Human Rights Conference in Edmonton
by Vera Rosenbluth, President of Board of Directors

At the end of November I had the great privilege of attending a conference in Edmonton marking the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. For two and a half days, 700 delegates from over 30 countries discussed where we stand now in terms of world-wide human rights, and what we might do in order to move ahead to a world of greater peace, social justice and freedom.

The challenges are many and obvious, both in Canada and abroad; poverty, racism, religious and political strife mean that those “universal human rights” are in fact denied to a great number of people in the world and the principles flouted by despotic leaders. But the conference was inspirational in that it focussed on the core values that were agreed to at the UN in 1948, and highlighted the ways we have achieved progress as well as the vast work that remains to be done. It emphasized the importance of individual as well as collective action to achieve common goals, and reaffirmed for me a commitment to organizations like MOSAIC that work daily with courage and integrity for social justice.

Some memorable moments:

- Ed Broadbent reminding us what the students at the APEC conference were demonstrating about, and urging people to examine the human rights impacts of international trade policies. As he said, “rights are not just abstractions; they are about human beings.”
- Anti-poverty activist Midge Cuthill passionately describing her work with Poverty in Action in Alberta.
- Lawyer David Lepofsky, speaking eloquently on behalf of people with disabilities (he is blind), and telling a hilarious but probably apocryphal story about a power blackout in a courtroom where he was counsel and his opponent asked for an adjournment. He of course objected to the request. But his serious message was “we want to live in a barrier-free society. That’s what equality means. It’s not a left wing issue, or a right wing issue, but everyone’s issue.”
- Max Yalden’s thoughtful discussion about common elements of freedom and repression in both Western and Eastern cultures.
- Ujjal Dosanjh speaking of the need to promote institutions that foster ideals of fairness and equality. He held up the creation of the hate crimes teams in B.C. as a positive step. It was somewhat ironic that the Attorney General had to leave a conference on human rights early in order to attend the funeral of the murdered Sikh newspaper publisher Tara Singh Hayar.
- Francine Fournier, assistant Director General of UNESCO, saying “extreme poverty is a violation of human rights.”
- Fatoumata Sire Diakite, a feminist activist from Mali,
speaking about ending female genital mutilation in her country.

- Oxfam’s Anne McGrath, quoting Alice Walker who said, “activism is the rent I pay for living on this planet!”

- Justice Rosalie Abella’s anger and indignation at what she sees as the failure of all countries to honour the declaration of human rights with anything more than rhetoric. “Today, human rights proponents are called biased radicals. Opponents are called impartial realists.”

There were panels on disarmament, transnational corporations, the role of individuals and nongovernmental organizations, the rights of women, crimes against humanity, sexuality and discrimination, human rights and indigenous people, and about the challenges of poverty, disability and children in need. There was a special session for youth, with the main speaker being Craig Kielburger, and participation by youth delegates throughout the conference.

Of course, part of the value of going to this kind of conference is in the informal and somewhat serendipitous conversations I had during the lunch and coffee breaks: people like the Metis woman from Yelowknife who told me about her mother’s experiences in residential schools, or the Australian woman who talked to me about her work with aboriginal Australians, or the Honourable Jules Deschênes, who was a judge on the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and is known in Canada for the Commission of Enquiry on War Criminals.

By far, the highlight of the conference for me was the appearance of Desmond Tutu at the banquet attended by 1500 people! As I was lining up with two friends to enter the huge room where the tables were set up, I chatted with the man who was standing behind us, who seemed to be by himself. I asked him if he had ever heard Desmond Tutu speak. “Oh yes,” he said, “I’m from South Africa.” So we continued to talk about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, about his feelings, as a black man, of going back to South Africa after apartheid ended, and after years living abroad. As the line began to move, I asked him if he would like to join us at a table, or if he had plans to sit with someone. It turned out he did have plans. He was to sit at the head table with Tutu, and Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. It seems that this unassuming man was the South African High Commissioner in Ottawa!

It was an elegant affair, with performances by singers and dancers, greetings from the Prime Minister (via video) and Premier Klein (in person), and a moving taped message by Aung Sang Syu Chee. Although there were several speakers, the undisputed star of the evening was the small white haired smiling man who symbolizes the defeat of the apartheid system in South Africa. With humour and humility, he talked about his country, its past and its future, and the considerations that led to the controversial approach taken by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He spoke warmly and sincerely about the role played by countries such as Canada in the victory over apartheid. And he articulated his vision of a world where racism can be overcome; if it can happen in South Africa, where racism was so solidly entrenched, surely it can happen in other countries as well. He spoke about dreams and ideals and especially about the young people of the world whom he exhorted to “reach out for the stars and say, ‘the sky is the limit!’”

And then a group of African drummers and dancers took the stage and the Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, began to dance.

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**Obituary**

July brought us heavy rains, some timid sun rays and the passing away of a former colleague, Sylvia Arguello. Sylvia died after a long battle with cancer. During her convalescence she was as inspiring as usual, courageous and gentle, calm and compassionate.

Sylvia devoted some years of her life working at MOSAIC and serving the Latin American community. Her commitment and passion for work was contagious. She helped hundreds of people and had a particular ability to make her clients feel at ease, find hope and solutions to their problems, always with a smile, always with dignifying professionalism. She touched the lives of all of us at MOSAIC: clients, volunteers, board members and staff.

We grieve her departure, we share the sorrow of her family and extended family: the community she served and cared for.
REPORT ON POVERTY
Released

A report commissioned by the Working Group on Poverty (WGOP) and funded by the Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism & Immigration called “Unfulfilled Expectations, Missed Opportunities: Poverty among Immigrants and Refugees in British Columbia” highlights serious ways in which immigrants and refugees experience poverty in their new home.

The poverty report illustrates some dramatic facts. Almost 25% of all immigrant and refugee families surveyed for this report, and 51% of those who arrived between 1991 and 1996, live in poverty. For many of them, poverty is an entirely new experience. Poverty is also unexpected in this prosperous western country which has been proud of being listed as one of the most desirable places to live in United Nations reports.

Other findings indicate that immigrant families reach the Canadian income average after ten to fifteen years, and that a higher proportion of immigrants have university degrees than do other Canadians. In 1997, B.C. attracted 22% of all immigrants to Canada, despite B.C. having only 13% of the Canadian population. On average, within two years of arrival, each business immigrant invested about $155,000 and created or preserved five permanent jobs for British Columbians. What then is the problem now?

The economy is part of the problem. The fact is that many people are not as well-off in the 1990s than a decade ago. As well, newcomers to Canada are more vulnerable to the difficulties many people have in looking for work and for an affordable place to live. The other part of the problem is the political unwillingness to deal with the problem. In the 1960s, Canadian governments decided that it was not acceptable that seniors suffer poverty after contributing to this country during their working lives. In the 1990s, seniors are relatively better-off than they were thirty years ago. In other words, it is a matter of political will to reduce people’s poverty.

The challenge for the WGOP, and for all organizations and people who wish to help immigrants and refugees get a fair chance to become part of the life of this country, is to convince governments that we can make the necessary changes.

In the long term, the report emphasizes that Canada must deal with basic, underlying problems that contribute to poverty. As a society, community organizations, businesses, and governments must cooperate to reduce unemployment, to reduce child poverty, to make available affordable housing, and to eliminate inequities in the programs that are there for the whole population. People should be treated equally and fairly.

The WGOP wants to cooperate with organizations and government offices to make life better for immigrants and refugees. Can we reduce immigrant and refugee poverty? If you want to help, or learn what we are doing to reach this goal, feel free to call or drop by our office.

If you would like a copy of the report “Unfulfilled Expectations, Missed Opportunities: Poverty among Immigrants and Refugees in British Columbia,” please contact John Argue at 254-0244 ext. 254.

Membership has its benefits...

Join MOSAIC and share in the good news and exciting developments. As a member you will receive all our newsletters and be entitled to vote at the Annual General Meeting.

To support MOSAIC’s programs and advocacy work, fill out the form on page 8 of this newsletter and become a member today!

Memberships are annual from April 1st to March 31st.
If you were a member last year, it’s time to fill out your renewal form!
MOSAIC was delighted to have had the opportunity to work with the United Way on a Partners in Organizational Development (POD) project from January-May/99. The $4,000 project allowed us to hire a consultant—the well known Vancouver-based consultant, Sandy Berman—to help us examine our mission statement from a service delivery perspective and formulate up-to-date operational goals and outcomes for the new millennium.

We receive regular requests from funders, clients and staff to offer programs and services to mainstream clients (non-immigrants). Historically, we have provided free settlement, language and employment-related programs and services only to immigrants and refugees. The exception to this is in the area of translation and interpretation where we have provided services to both mainstream and immigrant communities for about 10 years.

The purpose of the POD project was to survey MOSAIC’s constituent base—in other words, our board, staff, clients, funders and community partners—to collect feedback to three key questions:

1. Who are the audiences that MOSAIC intends to serve?

2. What programs and services are appropriate for the agency to deliver?

3. What impact would expanded service delivery have on the agency?

The project unfolded in three phases. Phase I (Consultation) provided an opportunity to develop the project design and communication strategies with representatives from the constituent groups. Phase II (Responses) was the activity-based phase of the project. Focus groups with board, staff, clients and community partners were held, in addition to in-class presentations for students and telephone surveys with funders. During Phase III (Final Report), the results of the focus groups, telephone surveys and presentations were analysed and distilled into a series of observations/recommendations that formed the essence of the final report.

The concluding paragraph of the Executive Summary clearly illustrated the overall consensus reached on the report questions:

"MOSAIC serves very specific needs for a clearly defined population. The agency is highly regarded for its demonstrated effectiveness and is widely recognized as the only provider of specialized services in some areas. Expansion to serve a wider range of people is seen as something that would, almost inevitably, be detrimental to the agency’s current service users. Enhancement of partnerships and collaborative projects with agencies that serve other client groups is seen as better way to share expertise and resources and provide additional opportunities for all service users."

The project is now complete, and we have on hand a report that will facilitate a number of positive outcomes for us. The report’s findings will allow us to develop a suitable mission statement, goals, programs and services that speak collectively to the constituency groups’ recommendations. They will also contribute to our annual strategic planning efforts, both from an agency and a departmental perspective. Lastly, the report supports our ongoing commitment to clarify and strengthen our mandate, especially during times of such rapid change.

Housing and Homeless Network of B.C.
by John Argue, Program Director, Working Group on Poverty

On May 28, 1999 the Working Group on Poverty (WGOP) organized a housing forum at Progressive Intercultural Community Services in Surrey in cooperation with other anti-poverty, immigrant/refugee-serving organizations, and housing-oriented groups. Over 70 people took part in the meeting from 9 municipalities in the Lower Mainland, and also from Kelowna, and all agreed to establish the Housing and Homeless Network of B.C. to advocate for federal government assistance to build social housing.

Linda Mix from the Tenants’ Rights Action Coalition and John Argue from the Working Group on Poverty agreed to be the contacts for the network. The network’s primary goal is to encourage the federal government to invest in housing once again, since that level of government decided as of 1993 to leave social housing to the provinces.

However, only B.C. and Quebec are funding new units of social housing. It is clear that the provinces do not have sufficient financial resources, nor in some cases, the political will, to take responsibility for building social housing without federal money.

The Surrey housing forum’s political panel featured Libby Davies, M.P. from the NDP and Gilles Bernier, M.P. from the Progressive Conservatives. No Reform M.P. was able to attend, and Claudette Bradshaw, M.P., the Liberal Minister of Labour and recently given federal responsibility for the issue of homelessness, had to cancel her trip to B.C.

Nevertheless, both M.P.s at the meeting agreed that homelessness is an issue that requires the financial commitment by the federal government. They each informed the meeting that people have told them across the country that the federal government needs to be involved again in social housing. The network’s challenge is to convince other politicians and governments to listen to what people are saying about housing in every province across Canada.

The WGOP has been able to explain that immigrants and refugees who live on low income have additional hurdles in finding affordable housing while at the same time learning about the customs of their new country. It is vital that affordable housing be available for them in order that they settle and integrate in their new country.

The WGOP’s participation has been useful as well to highlight the particular needs of immigrants and refugees. The likelihood that immigrants and refugee families will need larger units since they are more likely to have more children, and that different generations are more likely to share housing, means that government and private sector planning for the usual social housing units must be aware of these different factors. The WGOP has also advocated for information about housing to be made available in different languages, that information be available upon arrival in Canada, and also that application processes for subsidized housing be simplified.

Housing and homelessness are issues that must be resolved by governments and communities working together. As ever, we must affirm that the needs of people on low income, and of immigrants and refugees, be heeded when making social housing available.
The Family Co-Counselling Program
by Dan Kemlo - M.A. Psychology, Family Counsellor

The Family Co-counselling program was designed to reach families who may have barriers that prevent them from accessing mainstream agencies.

This is a partnership between eleven bilingual counsellors, representing ten communities and a family counsellor who was hired in May 1998. The bilingual counsellors have extensive experience and a critical awareness of the requirements and the unique strengths of their respective communities. The family counsellor has worked extensively in community based settings providing family counselling services.

The focus of training has been to further develop a perspective that acknowledges the strengths, resiliency and resourcefulness, often hidden or discouraged, in individuals and families within our communities. As individuals and families become increasingly discouraged by the many stresses and complications of settlement survival, this alternative perspective to the frequently dominant story of oppression and despair can become a catalyst for change that is real and lasting.

Counselling is provided with both the family counsellor and the representative bilingual counsellor present, solely with the bilingual counsellor (with the family counsellor available for consultation) or solely with the family counsellor (with the bilingual counsellor available for consultation).

This program works in partnership with other agencies such as the Ministry for Children and Families, Mental Health, Health Units, Education and Family Services of Greater Vancouver.

The Vancouver/Richmond Health Board has provided the funding for this program, as well as additional funds for a Participatory Evaluation. This process will directly involve communities with whom we are providing support services. This evaluation process has been a wonderful opportunity in guiding us to provide a service that is relevant to the diverse needs of our respective communities and possibly a model that other communities may find helpful. We would like to thank the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board for continued funding for 1999-2000. If you would like further information on this program contact Dan Kemlo at 254-9626.

Vietnamese Community Service Coordination Project
by Ngoc Tran Pham, Coordinator of Vietnamese Services

May 1998 saw the completion of the Vietnamese Service Review Project, which addressed the effectiveness of community services available to Vietnamese-speaking clients in the Greater Vancouver area. This project identified areas of service need, gaps in service and recommendations for bridging these gaps. In particular, the project emphasized the importance of maximizing existing resources through a coordination of services.

Since the spring of this year, seven different committees, composed of approximately sixty community members and service-providers, have been meeting on a monthly basis in order to implement recommendations for the enhancement of services. These committees are responsible for addressing the most pressing issues in employment, ESL, health, family and youth services. The strength of the committees lies in the combined expertise of frontline workers, managers and funders working towards a common vision, that of providing a blueprint for a service-delivery model that best fits the needs and profiles of Vietnamese clients.

An important part of this coordination project involves examining settlement and integration services provided to Vietnamese youth. To this end, there is a committee of service-providers devoted to youth issues. In addition, a forum for Vietnamese youth is currently being organized for September 1999, with the purpose of celebrating the strengths and abilities of Vietnamese youth. It is also an opportunity for youth to meet one another, discuss issues that they are concerned about and generate possible solutions. The information gathered from the forum will be sent to the City of Vancouver and will influence the future direction of Vietnamese youth services.

The Vietnamese Youth Forum is organized by a committee of about a dozen bright, committed and inspiring Vietnamese youth, under the guidance of the Coordinator of Vietnamese Services. It is hoped that youth will gain from the organizing process and from participating in the forum an increased sense of social responsibility and of being an agent of change with regards to matters deeply affecting their lives.
ARTS AND CRAFTS: A Tool for Integration
by Mercedes Mande, Latin American Family Counsellor

MOSAIC’s Family Programs provide a variety of services for women and children from four communities. The Latin American Family Programs have been running for approximately ten years and have five different support groups. Among these, the Arts and Crafts group has been a pleasure to work with. The activities for this particular support group are developed in partnership with Britannia Community Centre and East Side Family Place.

The group represents women from almost every country of Latin America, with different backgrounds, levels of education, and ages. What they all have in common is the hope of building a better life for themselves and their families in their new country.

Through an empowering process these women now run this group. By this I mean that they have developed their own dynamics as a group, and each woman takes on a role as a leader. They decide what their concerns are, and act to change conditions affecting their lives.

In a regular crafts session the women bring materials from their homes and ideas to share with others. They share great stories about their childhood, their struggles as immigrants or traditions of their home countries. They care about each other, they worry when someone is sick and celebrate good news together. They help find volunteers or volunteer themselves to teach crafts. Their children also have their own activities with the help of the well trained childminders. At the end of the session each child (between three and five years old) goes back home with a beautiful handicraft made by her/himself.

The women have participated in community craft fairs, and in other community projects, such as “Our own backyard”. The purpose of this event was to express through art the values that are important to the individuals, their families, and their communities. This project was developed in collaboration with the Multicultural Family Centre (African and Vietnamese groups). As part of the project, the Arts and Crafts group made different drawings using words such as “love”, “respect” and “integration”. Then, community artists used the drawings to create a piece of art work on the sidewalk of the Multicultural Family Centre located on Commercial Drive.

These women are also entrepreneurs. They organize themselves to fundraise in order to buy materials. A second-hand sewing machine was bought, and we facilitated sewing classes that enabled them to make clothes for themselves and their families. They are well-organized and they plan ahead. They see the group as a long-term entity which they themselves want to maintain.

This process takes these women one step closer to increased independence and integration every day. I am proud to be a part of this!
MOSAIC'S COMMUNITY ROOM

For the past 25 years, MOSAIC has maintained an ongoing commitment to working with a variety of community based groups and organizations. We have long been aware that the most common barrier hindering their work was the lack of accessible and affordable meeting space. This barrier has been an especially difficult one for community groups involving women and children.

We believe one of the best contributions we could make to the development and growth of the communities we work with is to facilitate access to a comfortable, child friendly place to meet. Late last fall, when space became available on the main floor in our building, the time was right to transform it into a Community Room.

We envisioned a bright, clean, and inspiring environment, a room where children are welcome participants; a place where community members could dream, plan and realize a better future for themselves and their extended networks.

Last spring we had the great pleasure of opening the Community Room for the communities we work with. It was a heartwarming ceremony, particularly when women from the Afghani Women's Group and the Somali Women's Group unveiled a mural created by Nora Patrick and Juan Sanchez.

The Community Room is fully equipped and to date has been used by a variety of groups and organizations, free of charge, including: Afghani Women's Group, Latin American Community Council, Windows of Opportunity participants, Vietnamese Youth Forum Planning Committee, Hispanic Seniors, Common Journeys group, Women's Research Centre, Vietnamese Inter-Generational Women's Group, etc...

We hope to increase the use of the Community Room. When people meet to discuss, reflect, share ideas and take action, the whole community benefits. We are delighted to be able to host these initiatives. Keep those requests coming!

For more information regarding the use of the Community Room, please contact the MOSAIC Community Outreach Program at 254-9626, extension 226.

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