

CELEBRATE!

Immigrant Women Voices



ALBERTA NETWORK OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN
NEWSLETTER
WINTER ISSUE 2006

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Linda Thomson, Past President
Cindy Tong, President
Papiya Das, Vice President
Minh Le, Treasurer
Grace Emblem (recently resigned as secretary)
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Agencies with the Network

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association - Calgary.
Making Changes Employment Association of Alberta - Calgary.
Tibetan Women's Association - Calgary.
Changing Together: A Center for Immigrant Women - Edmonton.
Indo-Canadian Women's Association - Edmonton.
Worlds of Women Together - Medicine Hat.
Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association - Red Deer

Annual IMG Banquet



Maria and Joaquin
Internationally Trained Medical Graduates



Dr Albert Ker
President AIMGA

From The Editor's Desk

Dear Friends, Colleagues, fellow immigrant women,

I am so glad to greet you all in the New Year with this second edition of ANIW Newsletter. With this edition our Newsletter has a new name "CELEBRATE - Immigrant Women Voices". And that is what we strive for this newsletter to be- a forum where we can express ourselves. Let's rejoice in our triumphs, share our concerns and face our challenges-TOGETHER. Let's celebrate our identity, our opinions and our contributions to the Canadian society. Let's celebrate our diversity.

Towards the end of last year there have been various new developments and many of us got recognition through awards and appointments. In this issue we bring you all the news! We also share some concerns of our community in an endeavor to work together towards resolving them.

This edition has received many more contributions than the last one. This is indeed encouraging and is much appreciated. With your cooperation we look forward to take this initiative to greater success with each issue. So, keep those e-mails with your feedback coming in!

As ANIW reaches its 20th year of service in 2006 it is time to celebrate all the achievements, assess various initiatives and set goals for the future. To mark these 20 years of service we will be taking out a special edition of the newsletter. So watch out for the next issue of "CELEBRATE-Immigrant Women Voices".

Shazia Javed
January 2006
Editor and Layout Designer

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President's Message

It is with great pleasure that I pen my first message as President for the Alberta Network of Immigrant Women. Firstly, I would like to welcome you to the second issue of our brand new newsletter. It is a great new tool that we have implemented this year and we hope to provide a forum and voice for all Women's Organizations in the province to share achievements and challenges. A big thank you to our editor Shazia Javed for a job well done! Please feel free to share your association's good news or the concerns of your community with us. Please contact Shazia now at shaziajaved@yahoo.com

I am honored to have been voted in as President of the new board and welcome my fellow Executive Members: Papiya Das, Vice-President; Minh Le, Treasurer; Grace Emblem, Secretary and Linda Thomson, Past President. We also welcome some new faces to our board of directors and you will be introduced to them in this issue of the newsletter.

On behalf of the new Executive and board, we would like to extend our thanks and gratitude to the previous Executive for their great works. And it is here that I would like to recognize the

dedication of our Past President Linda Thomson for the past two years. Thank you to the wonderful ladies from both Executive and Board for all of their expertise and passion regarding issues facing new immigrants and women in our province. And let us not forget the one person who makes it all happen - huge thanks to our magnificent Provincial Coordinator, Kamal Sehgal.

As the Network moves into our 20th year as an association, we have many new projects and research planned. We will celebrate our achievements throughout the past two decades and face the challenges that we still have ahead.

Oscar Wilde once said that "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars." The Alberta Network of Immigrant Women is definitely looking at the stars and beyond as we leave 2005 behind, and look ahead to 2006.

We wish you a very Happy New Year. May you and your family be blessed with happiness, health, love and prosperity in the coming New Year.

Cindy Tong
President, ANIW

1. ANIW's Communication Committee

We are now a full fledged committee! Yes, ANIW has formed a communication committee to manage and execute its various communication needs. The committee held its first meeting on November 15, 2005. Next meeting is to be held soon to further define its various goals and objectives and develop a concise strategic plan. The committee brought together by program coordinator Kamal Sehgal has five members:

Cindy Tong is currently a Mortgage Development Manager with Scotia bank. She is also the current President of the ANIW and has been with the association for 4 years in various volunteer capacities, including board member and Chair of the Fundraising Committee. She has received centennial award for her work with immigrants.

Genevieve Balogun is a teacher with the Calgary Public Board of Education. For the past thirty+ years, she has been an active volunteer in many areas of community development with special focus on Interculturalism. She is chair to this committee.

Shalini Gupta is a Marketing Analyst at Canadian Freightways. She has been involved with ANIW for the last 3 years primarily in the area of communication.

Shazia Javed is a professionally trained and experienced documentary filmmaker. She is currently the editor of ANIW Newsletter.

Sherry Bonde is a free-lancer web designer, she has previous professional experience in international marketing and web design.

2. New Board Election

ANIW elected its new Executive in the Bi-annual meeting held on October 1, 2005 at Calgary. We welcome Cindy Tong as the current President. Papiya Das is on Board as the Vice President, Minh Le as Treasurer and Linda Thomson is the Past President. Grace Emblem has recently resigned as the Secretary. This position is therefore vacant as of now. These members are to serve a two year term in their present capacities. They have set a goal to meet once a month as an executive to discuss issues affecting the Network.

We are glad to have some new members on the Board as well. Halima Ali is the Executive Director of Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association, Ajike oladoyin is a practicing Family Physician, Jehan Wassef is Volunteer Coordinator with Changing Together, Elaine Lupul is the Executive Director of Making Changes Employment Association of Alberta and Hina Thaker is a lawyer working with the Calgary police services.

3. Awards and Appointments

Centennial awards were presented to pay tribute to Albertans who have made significant contributions to fellow citizens, their community and Alberta. We take great pride in bringing you a list of members who got this prestigious award.

Amal Umar,
Founder member of the network

Cindy Tong
President of ANIW

Edna Sutherland
*Board Member & Executive Director-
CIWA*

Sonia Bitar
*Board Member & Executive Director-
Changing Together*

Jay Negi
*Formerly Executive Director with Indo-
Canadian women's association*

Member Agency, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association received the Southern Alberta Better Business Bureau Ethics award in the Non-Profit category.

Member agency Changing Together received Immigration Citation Award.

Congratulations to all the awardees!

We are also happy to announce that Sonia Bitar of Changing Together who is also a Board member of the Network has recently been appointed Citizenship Judge 2005. Unfortunately, Sonia has had to resign from the board but we wish her all the best.

4. Next Fundraising Event

The Fundraising committee is hard at work planning for African Safari 2006-next fundraising event –which will be held along with 20th Anniversary celebrations of ANIW. The event has been tentatively scheduled for September 2006. Committee is actively recruiting new volunteers and sponsors. Those interested may contact Chair person for the event Minh Le at minhle9097@yahoo.com

5. News from CIWA

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association has completed two phase of research into systemic barriers that immigrant women in Calgary face in accessing employment. CIWA conducted a research, interviewing 50 IW who had been successful and analyzed the data to develop a set of recommendations. These recommendations were presented at last Networking Breakfast for Unemployed Immigrant Women. Currently, proposals are underway to be able to implement these recommendations.

CIWA has also developed a Diversity/Equity handbook that will be presented to small and mid sized companies on how to improve hiring.

CIWA has done research on Health Care Cooperatives after which a Business & Implementation plan has been developed. Contributions have also been made to research on Foreign Trained Nannies. Besides the above, research is in progress on the impact of CIWA's Culture Clubs on female immigrant Youth.

CIWA student, Nisa Amin of the Pebbles-in-the Sand program received recognition as a Life Long Learner from Literacy Alberta. Chika Ibelo, a Youth Volunteer was awarded Shell Spirit of the Future Award and received a \$5,000 scholarship & CIWA received a match amount.

CIWA also organized an amazing World Art Show, featuring several talented immigrant artists. This event was held from December 5 to 9 at City Hall Atrium, Calgary.

6. AIMGA Update

Alberta International Medical Graduates Association now has its own Provincial Coordinator. This position is currently held by Nandini B. Raj who has a Masters in Public Health from Boston University.

AIMGA also held Annual Dinner and Dance for Internationally Trained Medical Graduates at Capri Hotel in Red Deer on November 19th, 2005. Dr. Jane E. Ballentine, Former President of Alberta Medical Association was the Keynote speaker at the event. We took some pictures to share with you!

7. Immigrant Access Fund -News you can use!

MCC Employment Development, in partnership with Immigrant Access Fund Society provides micro loans for the accreditation, training, and upgrading of internationally trained immigrants to help them enter into their field of prior training and to enhance their

employability and economic self-reliance.

Designed specifically with immigrant needs in mind this program runs with support from United Way, The Calgary Foundation and Alberta Lotteries and provides up to \$5000 in loans. Immigrants with a Calgary address who lack access to other sources of funding are eligible to apply. This loan can be used to pay their tuition fee as well as other costs such as qualification assessment, living allowance during study time, exam fees and so on. MCC-ED can also provide money management workshops to the applicants. Further information can be obtained from their website www.mcca-ed.org or by contacting the Program Facilitator Vic Rempel at (403) 272-9310 ext.234

8. Federal budget-making process not meeting women's needs-News from CCPA

OTTAWA — The federal government's current budgetary process is leaving women behind. A new report by Isabella Bakker, released today by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) and the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), concludes that if women are to be equal benefactors of federal budget surpluses, the federal government must stop ignoring its domestic and international commitments to undertake gender budget analysis in Canada.

Gender budget initiatives analyze public money through the lens of gender and attempt to break down national or local budgets according to their impact on women and men, boys and girls.

While the budget appears to be a gender-neutral policy instrument, government expenditures and taxes impact men and women differently, particularly since men and women generally occupy different social and economic positions. As of 2000 in Canada, the average wage for a full time full year female worker was \$34,892 versus \$49,224 for male workers. Further, half of all women with paid employment earned less than \$20,000.

Canada, as a signatory to a number of UN human rights treaties, and participant at the Beijing World Conference of Women, is required to create budgets that are responsive to women's realities.

However, evidence demonstrates that women's socio-economic circumstances in Canada have not significantly improved since the Beijing Platform for Action was signed. This is despite seven years of multi-billion dollars federal surpluses. It is clear that the current budget-making process is not meeting the needs of women.

"Gender budget initiatives are increasingly recognized as an important tool for analyzing the gap between expressed commitments by governments and the decision-making progress involved in how governments raise and spend money," says Bakker. "Despite their increasing legitimacy as a public policy tool, no federal, provincial, or territorial government in Canada to date has embarked upon a gender budgeting exercise."

Bakker's study is a next step towards putting gender budgeting in place. In December 2004, FAFIA commissioned a

ground-breaking study of the gendered impact of the last 10 federal budgets, written by award-winning economist Armine Yalnizian. In the lead up to the 2005 federal budget, Finance Minister Ralph Goodale agreed to ensure future federal budgets take women's realities into account.

According to Bakker, "Applied gender budget analysis is not simply a technical exercise but a more long-term process that requires government officials to think about the economy in new ways that include the unpaid sector where much of women's time and efforts are concentrated."

9. Migrant Workers at Pork and Poultry Factory in Red Deer -A report

At the previous board meeting of ANIW, members from Calgary Alberta Immigrant Women's Association (CAIWA) brought to notice the concerns of migrant workers in a pork and poultry factory in Red Deer. These workers who came on contract from Republic of El Salvador were facing some problems with language and accommodation. Below is a report by our editor based on interviews with some of these workers. Names of all the migrant workers have been changed to protect their identity on request. Many thanks to the workers who shared their concerns and to Isabell Herrera of CAIWA for facilitating the interviews by translating between us. Thanks also to Yellena Maric, Past President of CAIWA for sharing her views.

Florencia Perez has brought along her work permit. She points out at a clause

that says “Unless authorized, must not attend any educational institution or take any academic, professional or vocational training course.” She is disturbed by this clause as she wants to learn English, language spoken in the country where she now works. If she is able to learn English then she can overcome many limitations she faces right now. For instance, she could express herself, attend her phone calls and seek information from different avenues. Elementary. Things we all do every moment of the day. Her major fear is if her children were to fall sick in El Salvador and the news reaches her at the middle of the night what will she do?

Rebeca Hidalgo also came from El Salvador last year. She was one in a group of five who came to work in a Pork and Poultry factory. On her arrival she signed a contract which was in English. The management had arranged for an apartment for her to live in. As per the arrangement she shares this apartment with four other women she did not know before. After three months she wanted to move out because the four women were not getting along well. It was only then she came to know that she had also signed up a lease of six months for this apartment. On inquiring she was told that even if she moves out now she will still have to pay the rent for this apartment till the lease expires. This rent is deducted from her salary before she gets it. Unable to pay rent for two places Rebeca has conceded with her fate.

Most of the migrant workers face similar problems. They sought help from CAIWA which started English classes for them. CAIWA ran first session of “Beginner English for Migrant Workers” from February to March 2005. At that

point CAIWA was able to secure a funding of \$ 600 for resources after which they were told that Migrant workers are not eligible for any funding. As Halima Ali, Executive Director of CAIWA informs, “This, despite the fact they live with this community and their needs, for example for communications, are as necessary as the rest of the society.”

CAIWA has still kept the classes going but with mostly volunteer inputs. However, due to lack of financing, they are unable to provide many materials this time, nor do they have a designated room to conduct these classes. This also results in constant change of venues causing inconvenience. Many of these workers also want to acquire computer skills and such to keep up with the technology in the country they will soon be applying for a Landed Immigrant status in.

Florencia has also brought along a list of questions which she hopes I will be able to answer or help find answers to. Her list of questions goes like this:

- *“Can I study English?”*
- *“Is there any way to resolve the problems with the accommodation?”*
- *“When a worker’s spouse comes to Canada does s/he also have to work in the same factory?”*
- *How will the single mothers with three or four children be able to survive on the same salary they have right now after their children come here?”*
- *“Can single mothers bring their parents or siblings for support?”*

It is not difficult to see that most of these problems and anxieties originate from lack of education about their rights, policies and procedures in Canada. As Yellena Maric who is a member of social justice committee of Sacred Heart Church, Red Deer summarizes “What needs to be done is for all the immigrant and refugee organizations to coordinate and get a lawyer who is a specialist in immigration field and hold sessions to get these workers educated on what their rights are.”

Yellena also believes that these workers should be allowed to look for better jobs once their primary contract with the factory is over. Some of these workers are skilled in tasks like carpentry which are high in demand. This will give them an opportunity to reach their full potential. Another of Yellena’s suggestions is that instead of bringing individuals a way has to be figured out to keep families together. Single mothers specially should be allowed to bring their children along and when factories look for workers they should give first preference to relatives of the workers already employed. This will resolve many settlement issues.

But the work permit migrant workers have states clearly that they cannot work with any other employer than the one mentioned. If they do choose to apply for some other job instead of extending their contract with the current employer then they have to first go back and follow the entire procedure again. Most of these workers are likely to stay in Canada and wish to bring their children at some point. They therefore apply for Landed Immigrant Status so what difference does it make to the government if at the time of application

they are with one employer or the other as long as they are able to support themselves?

These workers therefore find themselves in a peculiar situation. They are not eligible for many programs that are available to immigrants like ESL classes. Some clauses in the work permit prevent them from gaining education even if on their own expense. These workers contribute to the Canadian economy by providing work force and paying taxes. Should not they have the right to learn and upgrade skills? Should not they have the right to “express” themselves? Perhaps the answer lies in a simple question- Do we want them to integrate with rest of our society or do we just want cheap labour?

10. Twelve Hundred Islands – a poem by Weyman Chan

“**Twelve** Hundred Islands” was written for Silk Road to China (last year’s fundraiser) by Weyman Chan. Chan’s parents immigrated to Canada from the Toi San district of Guangdong province in China. Chan was born in Calgary, Alberta in 1963 where he continues to live. He has published poetry and short stories in a variety of literary journals and anthologies. In 2002, he was awarded a silver prize in the poetry category of the National Magazine Awards for his poem "At work", that appeared in The Capilano Review. His poetry book Before a Blue Sky Moon was awarded the Stephan G. Stephansson Award.

We were honored to have Weyman come personally to perform the reading of this poem on last year’s fundraiser.

A big thanks to him for penning this great poem for us!

Twelve Hundred Islands

By Weyman Chan

It was Freud who once wrote that the only important thing that women throughout history were responsible for inventing was weaving.

In Edwardian England, Virginia Woolf was not allowed to set foot in the university library.

In the 1950s, Rosalind Franklin's x-ray diffraction work on DNA did not merit a piece of the Nobel Prize with Crick & Watson.

In the bright Balkan summer of 1905, three papers were submitted by joint authors Maric and Einstein; only one name stands alone today on those groundbreaking papers on Brownian Movement, the Photoelectric Effect, and Relativity. You see, Maric was a woman, Mileva Maric, and you know the story: the only important thing that women throughout history were responsible for inventing was weaving.

Someone once told me that women and history have a lot of catching up to do. Every time they approached a place of intellectual and social equality with their male peers, their status would slowly erode once again over the course of succeeding changes in government.

You have Sappho's days in ancient Greece, when lyric poetry reached its height as an art form.

You have the Heian era in feudal Japan, when the novel was invented by a woman twelve hundred years ago.

I'm convinced as a man that women's power to change the world is profound. Pro-found. Proto. Progeny. In the beginning, I also find my end. We need to celebrate the owner of the place of birth, our doorway into immortality as mortals. Women are that pathway, the life-gift, the tunnel of light into a new earth. That's why the term, "Mother of God," makes such wise inner sense to so many, even though it seems to fly in the face of dogma.

That is why, and all men know this deep down—without women, there would be no creation myths.

*A new day—
the trees are made of their own light shading then shining on your face
your face was once a seed
that latched on and I
watched your eloquent purity of growth that learns.*

*Without women, there would be no creation myths.
Twelve hundred years ago in the foot-binding culture of China
where women were crippled into beauty so they might marry well and never leave their husbands,
these women invented their own spoken language and their own writing.
These women would encode poems on gifts, would stitch them on pieces of clothing that they gave to each other.
The words would give them courage over the years of servitude to a culture that kept them obedient to father, husband, and son.*

How could a culture so old and civilized, I wondered, value one aspect of human creation—the male aspect—so highly,

*but then so thoroughly devalue the female
aspect,
treat it as mere birthing machinery?*

*Nu Shu, or in my dialect, Nui Doo, means
"Women's writing."
For each word that fell strangely upon men's
ears,
these women had also invented their own
written symbol.
Twelve hundred pictures for twelve hundred
words
memorized in their hearts:
these women bonded to each other in
sisterhood and in the gifts
they gave each other only occasionally
since they were housebound to duty, unable to
walk far on their feet.
I could not imagine their life in such a
misshapen world,
where twelve hundred words had to represent
a tiny circle of influence in which shared ideas
among equals
was where they could physically never be.
Their place between simple words was a better
place than heaven
for these women, who would otherwise suffer
their moments and lifetimes of reflection
without a mirror,
on an island without writing.*

*Twelve hundred pictures for twelve hundred
words:
each word an island found, an emotion voiced
silently, but at least voiced.
Each word no longer afraid. No longer a-
Freud.*

*A new day—
I never knew true happiness until you came
into my world.*

*You come from a lineage of greatness:
your mother and your grandmother
so full of courage. You are only little now
but I'm already watching your bright eyes,
how they dart and deepen in laughter and
insight.
I'm watching you
become extraordinary. And over the years, the
girl will become a woman of strength and
power. And that is the dream come true.*

11. Last but not the least!

We are happy to announce the birth of Rachel Folasayo Arike Oladoyin (Sayo for short, pronounced "Sha-yaw") on November 4th, 2005. She weighed 3.82 kg (8lb 7oz). Her older sister Olamide and brother Abiodun, as well as her parents, Ajike and Bode, are all overjoyed and thankful to God for her safe arrival. Welcome to world, Sayo!

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