

## Must Human Resources Be Wasted Too?

by Ralph C. Martin

About 60 million people in the world now have the status of refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) also notes that only one year ago, it was 52 million, an unacceptably high record number then.

The UNCHR definition of a refugee is “someone who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality .... Refugees have to move if they are to save their lives or preserve their freedom.”

Somewhat differently, "migrants, especially economic migrants, choose to move in order to improve the future prospects of themselves and their families.” In his book, *Climate Wars*, Gwynne Dyer tells us that we can only expect more migrants when climate change disrupts patterns of livelihoods.

As we come to terms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with profligate waste, we might also question the global waste of human resources and human potential and the disregard for human dignity.

In June, the East African newspaper reported that a definitive majority of refugees, 86%, live in the developing world, up from 70%, 10 years ago. For example, Africa supports over 4 million refugees, contrasted with a mere 400,000 in North America.

In 2013, the African GDP was US\$2.39 trillion, with decreasing development aid, and the North American GDP was US\$18.6 trillion. In other words, Africa was supporting 10 times as many refugees with an economy that was about 8 times less potent. Our African friends could be forgiven for quoting Mark 12:44 from the Bible. “For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had.”

Doug Sanders in a recent *Globe and Mail* article notes that “the Mediterranean boat crisis came into being when European countries stopped issuing seasonal work visas to Africans ...

The number of migrants arriving is absolutely manageable for the European Union.” Why has systematic planning and implementation been replaced by apparent *ad hoc* helplessness?

An Australian, Antony Loewenstein, wrote in the Guardian Weekly, in May, “The EU’s possible solution to these changes, mimicking Australia’s offshore detention network is to establish processing camps in non-EU nations ... as a way to keep the problem away from Europe.” Arguably the instability in source countries for refugees and migrants is at least partially related to the legacy of Western colonialism, cold war tactics and economic control and recent trade arrangements which exclude countries with too little economic clout to negotiate at global trade tables.

Paul Heinbecker, Director of the Laurier Centre for Global Relations, reminds complacent Canadians that Turkey receives the most Syrian refugees, 260,000 in 25 refugee camps, while permitting an additional 1.5 million to live outside the shelters, in Turkey. With a starkly contrasting and anemic response, Canada is on track, if all administrative hurdles are cleared, to receive 5,000 Syrian refugees, by 2018.

Statistics Canada numbers reveal that in the last 2 decades, on average, each Canadian woman gave birth to 1.5 babies. This is below the replacement rate of 2.1 babies per woman. If current trends continue, by 2030, there will be more deaths than births in Canada. At that point, immigration would be the only option for the Canadian population to plateau or grow.

Economic activities will require workers. In France, young couples are being offered economic incentives to have more babies. Many in Canada advocate for higher immigration rates. Of the two approaches, our global ecology will be less adversely affected, if displaced people move here, provided our habits do not influence them to consume and waste as much as we do.

The real benefits of immigration may be the knowledge we gain from immigrants, especially refugees, about how to live frugally, with less waste. Experiences of living with attitudes of resilience may be the valuable contributions we need to help see us through upcoming economic, ecological and social shifts.

To sustain our global civilizations we would do well to harbour our ecosystems, plants, animals, clean air and water and food systems, while minimizing waste. Surely we are also

compelled to avoid wasting human resources. Beyond the economic and social arguments, is a growing awareness of a spiritual prerogative to nurture humans as divine creatures, regardless of their lots in earthly birth lotteries.

Canadians cannot tackle the entire problem but in the spirit of our traditions, we could at least pull our weight. It might be good for us.

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