



Closing remarks: Kanya Adam,
Retired Past President of the
Board

Good evening honoured guests,
friends, staff. It's a pleasure to
see you all here this evening and
for the chance to provide some
closing thoughts.

The work which MOSAIC
engages in is perhaps more
relevant now than ever before and organizations such as MOSAIC are clearly
having a profound impact on the Canadian landscape.



Michael Adams in his book "UNLIKELY UTOPIA – The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism" says that when compared with a host of other countries' citizenry, Canadians emerge as exceptionally open to people of different backgrounds and exceptionally positive about the contributions newcomers make. Newcomers themselves also register high levels of pride in Canada and considerable optimism about their future in this country. According to Statistics Canada – 84% of recent immigrants (after 4 years in the country) say that if they had to do it over again, they'd make the same decision and come to Canada.

Every year I continue to marvel at this organization's high standards, goals and achievements, which continually strives to engage our community and serve our immigrants and newcomers day after day with such commitment and compassion.

Despite these optimistic trends towards newcomers in Canada - Western citizens are divided on how they should receive a growing number of illegal migrants, often smuggled by criminal gangs into the country and in some cases falsely claiming persecution at home. There is however no doubt that most illegals desperate to escape persecution and poverty undertake perilous journeys at great risk to their lives to improve their life-chances abroad. Canada admits on average 57% of refugee claimants, compared with Europe's 6%. However, a great majority of Canadians also doubt that the country can afford open borders for millions of poor in the world and therefore they support, like the US does, stricter border controls and speedier processing of refugee claimants.

The attitude to unwanted immigrants has often been denounced as “a new racism”. However the everyday “racism” is proud of its tolerance. When Canadians are asked to identify the best word to describe themselves, 38% chose “tolerant”, while the second most popular choice was “polite” at 26%. Unlike the US, a majority of Canadians now think that homosexual marriages should be legally recognized. Such attitudes cannot be labeled old-style prejudice. Traditional racism includes all members of an outgroup, regardless of their standing or behaviour. The new normal “racism” celebrates individuals from the other side as proof of its broadmindedness. Most of the staunchest previous supporters of Apartheid in South Africa genuinely love and admire Mandela. This phenomenon merely confirms that class and ideology transcends race, unlike the Nazi anti-semitism that did not make exceptions or differentiate among the outgroup. A perceptive paragraph in a book by the German critic Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1994:120) points out the often neglected class and status dimension of racism:

“The better qualified the immigrants, the fewer reservations they encounter. The Indian astrophysicist, the star Chinese architect, the Black African Nobel Prize winners are welcome all over the world. The rich are also never mentioned in this context; no one questions their freedom of movement. For businessmen from Hong Kong the acquisition of a British passport is no problem. For immigrants from any country, Swiss citizenship too is only a matter of price. No one has ever objected to the Sultan of Brunei’s skin colour. Where bank accounts look healthy, xenophobia disappears as if by magic. But strangers are all the stranger if they are poor.”

Therefore, does it make sense if we lump rich and poor together under the label “visible minorities” who qualify for preferential treatment regardless of need?

In short, contemporary Western racial attitudes display considerable inconsistencies. Racist exclusion can exist together with respectful humanness towards the outsider. Often the same person disdains, envies and admires aspects of the other simultaneously. Rather than generalizing about monolithic group attitudes, theories of contemporary racism and anti-racist policies have to come to grips with these contradictions.

Canada has been immeasurably enriched by the contributions of succeeding generations of immigrants and refugees and what we must continue to do is break down the barriers which still impede the successful integration of newcomers. The ongoing work of MOSAIC in all of these areas therefore is as critical now as ever before.

As Canadians we have much to be proud of. Whereas the rest of the world is filled with news of ethnic and racial conflict, Canada is often sought out as an example of harmony. I don't mean to neglect the many areas of our own shortcomings and our need to continue to work on inclusiveness, massive aboriginal under education and overrepresentation in prison populations and other such areas. Yet, there are some things that are praiseworthy.

Recently a 10-person Danish delegation came to Vancouver and Toronto to see "what they could learn from the good, bad and different aspects of Canadian multiculturalism." There was one problem with which they struggled, they were not sure how to move beyond ethnic tensions and respond more creatively to immigrants, particularly those from Muslim countries. Their consultation with three UBC faculty working in this area highlighted some positive indicators. Mention was made that in Scandinavia, it takes a typical immigrant about seven years to get a job, and in contrast, it takes about seven months in Canada. Another factor pointed out was that "half of the new immigrants to Canada are able to buy a house, usually in an expensive city, after being in the country for just four years." (This is something I find hard to accept, given what I see the cost of housing!!). And yet the experts were NOT ABLE to pinpoint WHAT it was that made a difference.

FINALLY, one of the Danish professionals charmingly concluded comparing Canadians to bumblebees. "Bumblebees," he said, "don't really KNOW why they are able to fly. But they do it quite well!"

Thank you to all of you who have committed yourselves, and each of you who in your own way has enriched this worthy organization with different perspectives and unique skills.

This organization would not be the same without the perceptive leadership of its executive director Eyob Naizghi. He has provided incredible leadership to this organization often balancing multiple demands and sensitive to many different needs of stakeholders and communities alike.

Thank you also to our hardworking executive and staff and of course to all of the members and communities we serve who continue to inspire us all on a daily basis.

I wish all of us at MOSAIC, our partners and the communities we serve continued success!

Good evening everyone!