



News Release

For Immediate Release
Oct. 11, 2011

B.C. IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH MEET TO SHARE THEIR JOURNEYS AND HELP SHAPE BETTER FUTURES

Vancouver – More than 120 immigrant and refugee youth are gathering in Vancouver this week with B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth, to discuss issues and barriers they face as they build new futures in British Columbia.

“We are finally getting a chance as newcomer youth to be at the same level as the policymakers, and we are going to get a chance to tell them how their policies affect our everyday life,” said Diego Cardona, 15, a member of the youth advisory group that helped shape the *Fresh Voices from Long Journeys: Insights of Immigrant and Refugee Youth* event. “We are going to share our experiences about what it is like to be a newcomer in British Columbia.”

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth, said the two-day event (Thursday, Oct. 13 and Friday, Oct. 14), is focused on hearing the voices of immigrant and refugee youth – voices that for a variety of reasons are all too often unheard in society. “Their voices reflect not one but two long journeys – from their homelands, and towards the fulfillment of their own potential,” she said. “The youth joining us at this year’s Summit have so much to offer and so much to teach us.”

Sixty invited business and political leaders and policy-makers are also attending, to listen to the youth and discuss topics ranging from classroom experiences to expectations growing up in an immigrant family, from identity and belonging to advocating for rights and equality for girls and women.

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The Representative is organizing this event in collaboration with the Vancouver Foundation and an advisory team of more than 20 young people who are immigrants and refugees living in the Lower Mainland. The youth advisory group met weekly throughout the summer to frame the Summit.

“The youth advisory group is inspiring, energizing and shaping this year’s Summit,” said Turpel-Lafond. “They have generously and courageously shared their wisdom, time, strong opinions and humor. Their personal stories and empathy for others should remind us that the topics to be covered here are meaningful.”

The Representative said this year’s Summit is an opportunity to explore practical, concrete ways to improve the experience of immigrant and refugee youth, and how B.C. can create or enhance the policies and services that support all families and children.

This is the third Champions for Children and Youth Summit held by the Representative. The 2011 Summit is generously sponsored and supported by a cross-section of business and private and public sector organizations, including the Vancouver Foundation, Coast Capital Savings, WelcomeBC, the City of Vancouver, and Harbour Air/Westcoast Air.

Media availability information and backgrounder attached.

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MEDIA AVAILABILITY AND INFORMATION

To create a comfortable and safe space for immigrant and refugee youth to speak freely about their lives and the barriers they face, the Summit sessions are **not** open to the media.

However, media are invited to attend the following:

Thur., Oct. 13

Morris J. Wosk Center for Dialogue
580 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC

- **10:30 AM – 10:40 AM:** TV/photographers allowed into youth-only session ***in Asia Pacific Hall*** for 10 minutes, to obtain footage and shots. No interviewing of youth in Asia Pacific Hall please.
(Filming/photography consent forms are in place for all attending youth.)
- **10:45 AM – 11:15 AM:** Scrum opportunity ***in Lower Concourse*** with:
 - Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth
 - three immigrant and refugee youth (1 female/2 males)
 - Mark Gifford, Director, Grants and Community Initiatives, Vancouver Foundation.

BACKGROUND

NOTE: These sessions are ***not*** open to the media but this information is being included to provide an overview of Summit activities.

Lunch Presentation, Friday, Oct. 14: “Following in Our Footsteps”

(Requested by youth advisory group) Accomplished British Columbians share details of their life path with immigrant and refugee youth attendees.

Facilitated by Michelle Eliot, a producer with CBC Radio's 'On the Coast'. Michelle's series, 'Survival and Arrival', featured stories of immigrants to Vancouver.

Speakers:

- **Shashi Assanand** – Exec. Director Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services
- **Ujjal Dosanjh**, QC – Lawyer, social justice activist, former Vancouver MP and former Premier of B.C.
- **Pascaline Nsekera** – Project Manager, La Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique
- **Eric Wong** – First Nations Education Steering Committee, Anti-Racism Consultant

Sessions:

Day 1

Session A - Beyond the Classroom: Creating a Sense of Belonging and Inclusion at School

Session B - Community Connections: Youth Programs and Services

Session C - Supporting Equality for Girls and Women

Session D - Family and Home: Dealing with Expectations in an Immigrant Family

Day 2

Session A – Identity and Sexual Orientation: Outside or Inside the Conversation?

Session B – Advocating for Your Rights: How Residency Status and Immigration Experience Impact the Ability of Young People to Complain and Advocate

Session C – Identity and Belonging: Building Bridges with Canadian-Born Youth

Session D – Schools Making the Grade: ESL and Academic Experiences

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