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CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

# REFUGEE

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## Power and the Powerless

A refugee claimant from China is given a preliminary hearing under the new Canadian legislation. She is found not to have a credible claim. In desperation, she slashes her wrists. Her suicide attempt is unsuccessful. In the ensuing publicity a story emerges of her and her father's imprisonment, of a poorly prepared duty counsel, of a hearing officer who wondered who Mr. Kuomintang was whom the woman kept mentioning.

In January, in Montreal, the claim of another woman is refused. She was from Haiti. She jumped in front of a subway train. Her suicide attempt was successful.

A young Vietnamese refugee in Phanat Nikhom sets himself on fire. His body is consumed by flames.

All these victims felt powerless. All three were obviously desperate. In death, they undercut the distinctions of academics and policy makers between convention and humanitarian refugees, between refugees and those displaced by civil war and repressive conditions in impoverished nations. Self sacrifice can be the final act of an individual who, when denied all other means to control and give some direction to his or her own life, can at least assert the right to take his or her own life.

They can also write letters appealing for us to help. We print one example of such a letter. In Canada, we can help. Ten

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*A Vietnamese refugee burns himself to death in Phanat Nikhom, Thailand.*

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