

supporting Charles.

"I found out that we were the only country that charges this kind of cover to get in," says Connolly. "I think it's ridiculous!"

Dolgoy was equally disappointed when she learned of the fee.

"It's scary [that this fee] is not a more widely publicized thing," Dolgoy says, "because Canadians don't know they think we're such a welcoming place."

Connolly and Dolgoy have quickly turned their frustration into action, coordinating a cross-Canada letter-writing campaign, and seeking a meeting with Citizenship and Immigration Minister, Elinor Caplan.

Connolly and Dolgoy have already found support from many of U of T's college councils and from other universities in Canada.

They are hopeful that they will receive support from U of T administration and perhaps eventually from Minister Caplan herself.

"We have issues with the tax in general," explains Dolgoy, "but we started with refugee students specifically because it directly

relates to us."

Francisco Rico-Martinez, President of the Canadian Council of Refugees, has many issues with the Right of Landing Fee.

"We've proven that people who come to Canada as immigrants and refugees quickly start producing and paying taxes," says Rico-Martinez. "But this \$975 charge prevents them from becoming productive citizens."

Rico-Martinez explains that the requirement to pay the fee has forced many newly arrived people onto welfare. He dismisses the government's argument that the loan program makes the system more flexible and accessible.

"In order to get a loan you have to prove that you can pay it back," he explains. "This discriminates against women especially because single mothers are seen as a bad risk by loan officers."

He recounts the story of a Rwandan woman who sought help from the Canadian Council.

"She is a single mother with two daughters whose husband and older son are missing after the civil war," says

Rico-Martinez.

The woman and her daughters recently had their refugee claim accepted. When Rico-Martinez heard the news, he was happy for the mother and her daughters, but he

"Why are we imposing this head tax on the poorest of the poor?"
-Francisco Rico Martinez

felt the need to warn her of what was ahead.

"I told her to start to save all the money she could," he says. "The positive decision [for refugee claimants] is a double edged one. They tell you 'Congratulations . . . now pay us 975 dollars!'"

In addition to the Right of Landing Fee (R.L.F.), newly arrived immigrants and refugees must also pay a processing fee of \$500 per adult and \$100 dollars per child.

Rico-Martinez's Rwandan friend was able to scrape together the initial \$700 needed in

processing fees, but only through cutting back in other areas.

"It was food banks all the way for her. Before having to pay the fee, she and her family had gone to food banks rarely," explains Rico-

Martinez.

"But now she had to go to 15 food banks in one month in order to survive. Now she's worried what will happen if she doesn't get a loan to cover the R.L.F."

It's a worry shared by many newly arrived refugees.

Rico-Martinez and other refugee advocates believe it's a worry that should not be added to the already stressful situation of re-starting life in a new country.

"Why are we imposing this head tax on the poorest of the poor?" he wonders.

Rico-Martinez believes the Canadian government is in total violation of the Geneva Convention.

"It specifically disallows charging fees," he says, referring to the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees. "This fee was imposed in 1995 because of the deficit, but now we have a surplus, so why can't it be abolished?"

When this question is posed to Citizenship & Immigration spokesperson Peter Lamey, he has little to offer in response.

"The R.L.F. remains a policy of this government. You may need to ask someone else about that. I'm not sure if I can answer this," Lamey says. "When the R.L.F came into being in 1995, it was to recover costs for settlement programs, and those costs are still there."

Lamey explains that he views the rate of loan repayment as a gauge of the program's success.

"Anecdotally, this program seems to be working," he says. "If whether or not repayment has occurred is one indication, then it seems to be working, because these loans are being repaid."

When Lamey is further queried about the difficult circumstances

many refugees face and how more flexibility in the program would be welcomed, he suggests that the loan system is the answer.

"I think this is addressed through the loan," Lamey says. "The loan itself is a demonstration of flexibility in terms of not having to pay it up front."

Lamey is quick to defend Canada's record with regards to the UN Convention.

"Granting permission to become landed is a bit different than safe asylum," he argues. "Landing permission is permanent residence rather than temporary protection."

Lamey explains how Canada's refugee and immigration system is actually uniquely generous.

"Canada is distinct," he argues, "in that it quickly gives refugees the same status as immigrants."

Unfortunately for many refugees, equal status also means equal obligation to pay Right of Landing Fees.