

Ottawa Citizen

June 6, 2005 Monday
Final Edition

NEWS; Pg. A11

Visa mixup shows need for a probe of immigration

Bestway Zottor, The Ottawa Citizen

Re: Kenyan smashes 10K record after rival's finish line mixup, May 29.
The treatment that Ottawa marathon organizers got at the hands of Canadian immigration officials in Kenya is nothing new. Visa problems stopped 30 Kenyan runners from attending the men's and women's Ottawa Marathon and the MDS Nordion 10-kilometre races.

Most African-Canadians have been experiencing this treatment for decades. African-Canadians inviting their relatives to come over as visitors have consistently received less than third-class-citizen treatment from fellow Canadians in the Immigration Department.

Reasons for denying visas are very bizarre. Here are a few examples:
An African-Canadian had a nearly fatal accident. She had not seen her family for eight years. She invited her sister over to care for her during while she recovered.

The sister was denied entry on the grounds that **she did not have a bank account**. All her expenses, including the return trip, were going to be covered by the Canadian sister. So what does the African's bank account have to do with her visiting?

Another woman invited her college student sister for a summer vacation visit. The application was denied on **the same grounds**.

How many students in developing countries have bank accounts? And even if they do, how much must a student earn to convince immigration officials of a positive outcome? For example, one million Ghanaian cedis is worth only about \$150 Canadian.

When the college student did open a bank account and re-applied, she was still turned down.

Regardless of ability to pay for schooling, an African applying to study here can be denied a student visa simply on the basis of whether he or she intends to return to Africa. Where else do we have this policy?

I'm happy that the Ottawa Marathon's African immigration fiasco has brought this silent pain of African- Canadians, inflicted by fellow Canadian citizens, to the forefront.

It will be sad if any investigation does not go further to look at the overall visa-approval process for Africans to convince us we are wrong to believe that the root cause of the problem is systemic racism.

Bestway Zottor,
Ottawa

Mr. Zottor runs Grass Roots Action Community Endeavours Canada Inc. (GRACE), offering employment and training services to new immigrants and refugees.