

Region launches plan to assist immigrants

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

For Faduma Mohamed and Ranjit Kumar, actions speak louder than words. The two York residents, members of the region's bur-

geoning ethno-cultural community and human services planning coalition, were on hand yesterday to endorse the launch of an ambitious initiative to increase York's capacity to meet the needs of new Canadians.

Ms Mohamed, who arrived from Somalia in 1995, and Mr. Kumar, a York resident for 40 years, originally from Kenya, have experienced challenges and barriers immigrants face when they arrive in Canada.

Ms Mohamed, a Vaughan resident and executive director of Labour Community Services, recalled her arrival and the sting of narrow-minded perception. "It's not that many chose to come to Canada," Ms

Mohamed said. "We chose to escape to Canada. We brought a lot of trauma. When I first arrived, my credentials weren't accepted. I can't give Canada a very good grade in 1995. I think it's time people have to be honest. Canada is losing valuable resources because we can't open our hearts and minds to people who look or talk different."

by taking the message to board rooms in the region." The coalition identified the issue of diversity as a priority for all human services in December 2003, regional human services planning director Susan Taylor said.

"Given the huge impact of rapid growth in the number of immigrants arriving in York Region, (the coalition) decided to focus its efforts on ethno-cultural diversity in the region," Ms Taylor said.

A task group was established in 2004. A discussion paper was developed and distributed to more than 1,000 regional service providers. Early this year, 180 people representing 95 regional organizations contributed to the development of the plan.

"Bigotry still exists in our communities and discrimination is something we may never eradicate," said coalition co-chairperson and Regional Councillor Joyce Frustaglio.

"What we need to focus on is action," he said. "I hope this plan will have significant results. There are glass walls and ceilings that exclude qualified individuals. Some strides have been made to break the barriers in private industry, but it's not the same in the public sectors."

"I believe this plan will vigorously advocate for change

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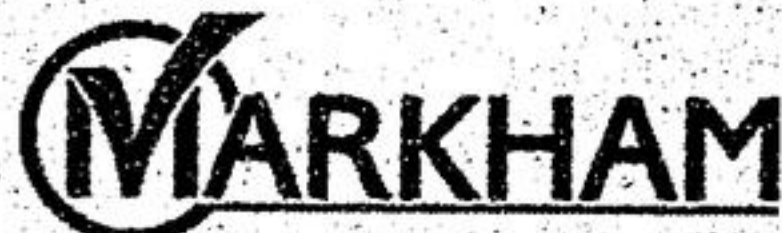
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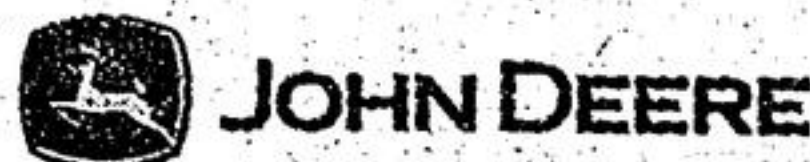
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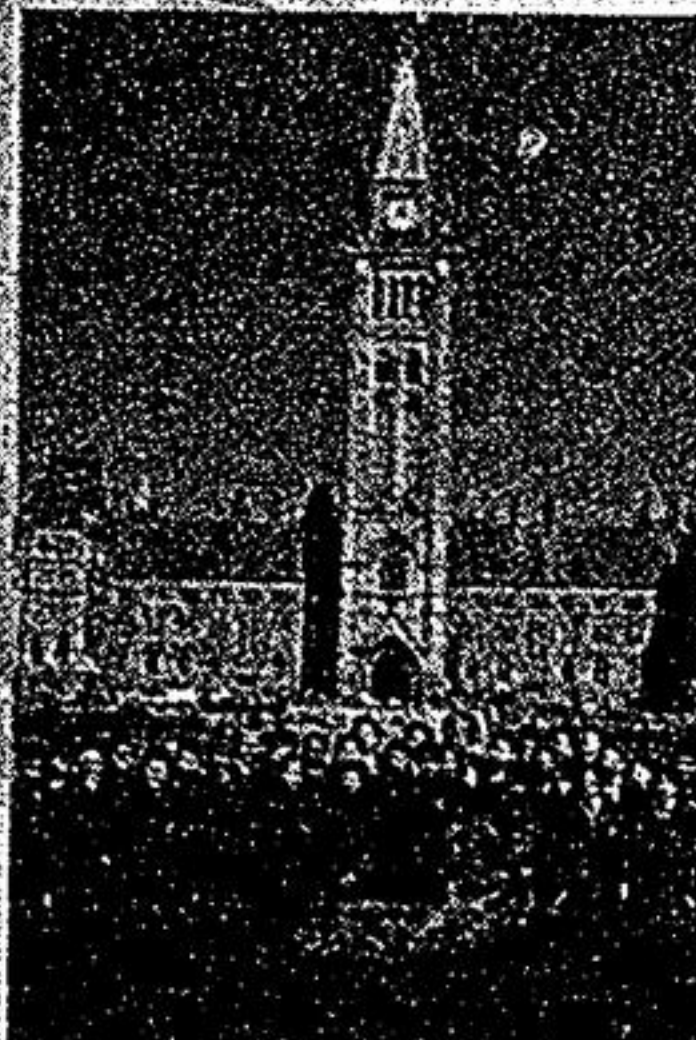
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