

## President's Report

Arsalan Kahnemuyipour

Iranian Canadian Congress AGM, May 15, 2016

In the last Annual General Meeting of the organization, four new members were elected to the Board of Directors of ICC (hereafter the Board): Bijan Ahmadi, Soudeh Ghasemi, Arsalan Kahnemuyipour, and Mitra Saffari. They joined the five board members already in office: Behrouz Amouzgar, Farhang Farid, Reza Ghazi, Shahram Namvarazad and Arshak Shojaie.<sup>1</sup> The new board had its first meeting on June 1, 2015. Since then the Board has met 29 times, totaling approximately 700 person-hours, spent only in board meetings. This figure does not include the hundreds of person-hours spent on e-mail communications, organizing the various events and activities detailed below.

Over the past year, the Board has managed to make significant improvements to the infrastructure of the organization. This is particularly visible in areas such as establishing online memberships and renewals, maintaining electronic lists of new members, sending automatic renewal notices to new members, updating membership lists, and disseminating information to members via automatic e-mails and phone communications. In the meantime, there have been significant improvements to the online presence of the organization by means of the revamped website in addition to the official Facebook page, which now has over 2000 members. The organization also had a significant presence in Persian and English language media over the past year.

The Board has organized numerous events and activities over the past year. Below, you will find the list of these activities with a brief description categorized according to the months they took place.

### **July:**

- The Board was approached by the media to gauge the views of Iranian-Canadians on the Nuclear Deal between Iran and the P5+1 countries. The board had made a commitment to not speak on behalf of the ICC membership without their input. Consequently, two surveys were conducted before and after the deal and the results were conveyed to the media through four interviews, two with Radio Canada, one with New Canadian Media and one with CTV News. The first three interviews were with myself and the last one was with Behrouz Amouzgar.

---

<sup>1</sup> On February 25, 2016, Farhang Farid resigned from the Board of Directors. The Board approached the candidates in the previous election who had not garnered enough votes to get elected and invited them to serve. As a result of this process, Ali Nikjoo was appointed to the Board on March 24, 2016 and will serve until the new board is elected. On February 15, 2016, I announced that I would only complete my first year of service and will resign as of this AGM. Mitra Saffari made a similar announcement on April 29, 2016.

- The Board held a Meet and Greet event with the membership to discuss its achievements in the first three months and answer any questions the membership might have.

### **August:**

- Bijan Ahmadi had an interview with Salam Toronto on behalf of the Board to provide a three-month report to the community.

- Soudeh Ghasemi had an interview with ITC TV on behalf of the Board to discuss ICC activities and plans.

- The Iranian Canadian Congress got involved with the case of Maryam Rashidi, the Iranian Canadian woman who lost her life in a gas and dash incident in Calgary with the help of one of our volunteers Ms. Maryam Nazemi. The ICC helped her family and tried to advance the Jayesh-Rashidi bill in the parliament of Ontario.

### **September:**

- The Cultural committee of ICC planned a visit to the Toronto Distillery District

- Mitra Saffari had an interview with Shahrvand about an upcoming event on the occasion of the International Peace Day.

- The Cultural Committee of ICC organized a full day event with various workshops and lectures on the occasion of International Peace Day. The speakers at this event were Dr. Nastran Adibrad and Dr. Shekoufeh Sakhi, with an art workshop for children organized by ArtCave.

### **October:**

- ICC held a Candidates' Forum with the six candidates representing the three major federal parties in the ridings of Richmond Hill and Willowdale. Four of these six candidates were of Iranian descent. The event was very well attended and the videos of the event were watched by many many more people in the days leading to the election.

- In the aftermath of the tragic death of Maryam Rashidi, the ICC held a workshop on workers' health and safety with speakers prominently involved with workers' health and safety issues in Canada.

- The ICC held its first Pub Night, which turned into a regular event happening on the last Thursday of every month. This popular event brings tens of members of the Iranian Canadian community together to discuss ICC and community issues in an informal setting.

### **November:**

- The ICC held a job search workshop entitled to help newcomers learn about the most effective ways of searching for jobs in the Canadian context.

- In response to an article about suicide bombers which wrongly made connections to a few Iranian students by the use of an unrelated photo, the ICC organized a petition and wrote letters of complaint to the respective media, namely Associated Press, Toronto Star, Metro and CTV News. These objections led to a few corrections and apologies.

### **December:**

- On the occasion of the international day for the elimination of violence against women, the cultural committee of the ICC organized an event with an invited speaker, Ms. Lily Pourzand, who led a discussion about the role of gender stereotypes in reproducing violence against women.

- I had an interview with Shahrvand about the upcoming Yalda Night event.

- Following the November federal elections, which led to the election of two Iranian Canadians, Mr. Ali Ehsasi and Mr. Majid Jowhari, to the federal parliament, the ICC decided to organize an event coinciding with Yalda night to celebrate the participation of Iranian Canadians in the recent federal and municipal elections. This celebration was held on December 11.

Approximately 170 members of the Iranian Canadian community from all walks of life and different political affiliations attended this sold-out event, where all the Iranian Canadian candidates who ran in the latest federal and municipal elections were given a certificate of appreciation from the ICC. In addition, the Persian version of Canada's National Anthem was performed for the first time by Mr. Kamal Taravati and his choir.

- In response to the passing to law of a US provision, HR-158, which made nationals of certain western countries with a dual citizenship of Iran (and three other countries), letters were sent to the US Ambassador in Canada and the Canadian Foreign Minister on behalf of the ICC, expressing our objection to this provision and raising our concerns with these officials about the possible extension of such regulations to Canadians of Iranian descent.

### **January:**

- A discussion forum on the relation between freedom and responsibility was held which gave community members an opportunity to have a dialogue about two issues that had created a lot of controversy in the community.

- The ICC held an information session in collaboration with Microskills entitled "Bridge to Employment for Internationally Trained Professionals"

- I had a three-hour interview with Salam Toronto about the organization's 8-month activities

**March:**

- On the occasion of the International Women's Day, we co-organized an event with the Iranian Women's Organization of Ontario on Iranian Women in Cinema, with Dr. Khatereh Sheibanifar as the invited speaker

**April:**

- The ICC co-organized a breakfast event with the York Region and the City of Vaughan which brought together business and real estate stakeholders from the Iranian Canadian community and the municipal economic development staff to discuss commercial development opportunities in the York Region. The event was attended by dignitaries such as MP Majid Jowhari, the Mayor of Vaughan, Maurizio Bevilacqua and City Councilor Sandra Racco. The event was a great success and brought a lot of positive attention toward the Iranian Canadian Congress and the community.

**May:**

- Last Sunday, the ICC held a candidates' forum, which brought nine candidates running for the ICC board positions together to present their visions for the ICC and answer members' questions. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time an event like this is held before the election.

The above summary is clear proof that despite some claims to the contrary, the current board of ICC has been very active over the past year, leaving a commendable record behind and setting a new record for community activities organized by its volunteer board.

In what follows, I point to some challenges that the organization currently faces, ones that will hopefully be addressed by future boards.

**Challenges:**

**Financial Resources:** Currently, the biggest source of income for the organization is the membership fees, which stands at \$10 per member per year. In addition, there are occasional donations and sponsorships for various events. This does not lead to enough funds for an organization with the goals and ambitions of the ICC. Future boards need to seriously explore means of securing more funding for the organization, either in the form of fundraising events and more significant donations or government funding.

**Space:** Another challenge that the organization faces is the lack of space for board meetings or for members to be able to physically access their representatives on the board. With the ability to secure city facilities becoming more difficult in the second half of this year, many of our board meetings were held at the office of one of the outgoing board members. This is far from ideal for a community organization such as the ICC. As a result of this shortcoming, we were not able to allow member observers to our board meetings in the last two months. Future ICC boards should

seriously explore options with respect to having a fixed space, albeit one day a week to begin with, where ordinary members can meet board members, where board meetings can be held and where mail can be received. Ultimately, this organization needs a fixed dedicated office with a fixed address.

**Workforce:** The ICC is currently completely run by a group of volunteers, primarily the nine board members of the organization, in addition to a good number of volunteers who help out the organization in various ways. Most board members have full time jobs, which makes it very difficult for them to dedicate the tremendous amount of time needed to keep the organization running and fulfilling its duties. The needs of the organization and the expectations of the membership and the community far exceed what can be accomplished by an entirely volunteer workforce. I suggest that the future board(s) work toward hiring one (or preferably two) full-time employee(s) to take on an executive role and allow the board to have more of a leadership responsibility. To start with, perhaps a part-time employee can be hired. This, of course, requires better financial resources, see above.

**Growth and expansion:** Since its inception, the Iranian Canadian Congress has not managed to attract a large number of Iranian Canadians to the organization. This is largely the result of the negative atmosphere around the organization due to infighting among various factions in the community and the spread of hurtful and destructive writings in print and electronic media. Future boards need to focus on ways of maintaining peace and tranquility within the community and portraying a more positive image of the organization by focusing on the commonalities that exist in our community. While this is partly the responsibility of the board, it is truly and largely the responsibility of every member of the organization and the community to help establish an environment which individuals aspire to be part of and to serve. Once that is achieved, the growth and expansion of the organization will happen much more naturally and organically.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude toward those members who have offered their help and support to me and to this board over the past year and wish the next board and the organization all the success in the coming year and many more years to come.