

New citizens see hope in Canada

Canada Day will be appreciated as new lease on life

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With several tiny Maple Leaf flags sticking out of her hair, Tigist Hogos could barely sit still as she waited for the celebration of her first Canada Day to begin.

The 18-year-old, who emigrated from her native Eritrea in December, was one of hundreds of new Canadians gathered on Friday at NorQuest College's Westmount campus to celebrate the country's birthday.

"Canada is very free and you can build your future in Canada," said Hogos, working in her new language.

The students are part of the college's ESL program, which helps students of 35 nationalities develop their English skills and move into the workforce or higher education.

Hogos' cousin, Semhar Menghitab, 20, said her family came from Eritrea—where tensions between ethnic Eritreans and Ethiopians continue to plague the country with civil unrest for a new start.

"We have many plans for Canada Day," said Menghitab. "We want to have a barbecue and a party. We've made lots of friends here."

The girls and their friends stood proudly as they sang the national

anthem and later reaffirmed their citizenship.

After several of her family members were killed in religious strife between Muslims and Christians in her home country of Sudan, Angelina Dau, 45, feels she has finally reached a place where she can feel truly free.

"I'm so very happy with the government of Canada," she said. "I wrote a letter to the ambassador of Canada in Sudan in 1999 and he was very nice and helped me to come to Canada."

Svetlana Cksherbakova moved to Canada about 18 months ago from Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic just north of Afghanistan. She plans to spend her day in front of the Alberta Legislature building.

"We'll be going to eat hamburgers, drinking Coca-Cola and cheering," she said.

Cksherbakova hopes to extend her expertise in political science and history so she can resume work in publishing.

Svetlana Parkhomchik, 32, came to Canada to ensure her nine-year-old daughter, Polilla, could have a better life away from the economic stagnation of Belarus.

"We wanted to live in this beautiful country," she



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Meme Kebede, 21, who is studying English as a second language at NorQuest College, looks forward to her first Canada Day.

said. "It was a dream come true for us."

The ESL students were enthralled by the panel of speakers, which included dignitaries such as Health Minister Anne McLellan and Lt.-Gov. Lois Hole.

The panel led the group in the singing of the national anthem, which many hesitantly read from bookmarks. McLellan was rewarded with the most applause for her expressed

gratitude to the group.

"Thank you for choosing Canada; we are blessed because you chose us," said McLellan in her address to the new citizens.

Despite their diversity of nationalities, the students all have the same goal—to learn English and build a brighter future for their families.

As Cksherbakova said: "My favourite expression is 'I am Canadian.' "