

update

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Is this our Canada?

Schools deployed in the war against "illegals"

by Roger Langen

Thursday, April 27, was a terrible day for two students in Toronto. That was the day that officials of the Canada Border Services Agency paid a surprise visit to Dante Alighieri Academy, a Catholic high school in North York, a suburb of Toronto. The purpose of their visit was to remove two students, Kimberly Lizano-Sossa, Grade 10, and her brother, Gerald Lizano-Sossa, Grade 9, to a waiting van. The children had been students at the school for two years. Kimberly was sporting a 92 percent average and planning a career in architecture.

But this day would be different. The polite and well-suited representatives of Canada's war against illegal immigrants, gave instructions to the children to clean out their lockers, as they would not be returning. Crying, they begged their distressed principal to save them but to no avail. They were removed to the nearby Toronto Immigration Holding Centre, where they would spend the night with their distraught mother and grandmother.

The next day, as protesters gathered outside the detention centre for a vigil, two more children, Lisbeth Serdas, 7, and her sister, Hacer Serdas, 14, were removed from St. Jude Elementary School. The "threat" was made that if their mother did not come to the school within 30 minutes, they would be taken away. Mom, who was wanted for immigration questioning, perhaps deportation, arrived in a panic. They all went to jail together.

Thanks to the vigorous protest, organized by the No One Is Illegal coalition in Toronto, and the strong media coverage, the children were later released and the immigration authority set back on its heels. But who could help asking the question: Is this our Canada? Are children and schools now sites for delivering deportations?

OSSTF issued a press release deploring the Government of Canada's action, joining a chorus of other voices who did the same — activist groups and unions, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, Toronto District School Board, Liberal MPs, trustees, Kimberly and Gerald's classmates.

But should we be surprised? In March, federal officials had stopped persons at random at a west end Toronto mall, asking for papers—trolling for "illegals."

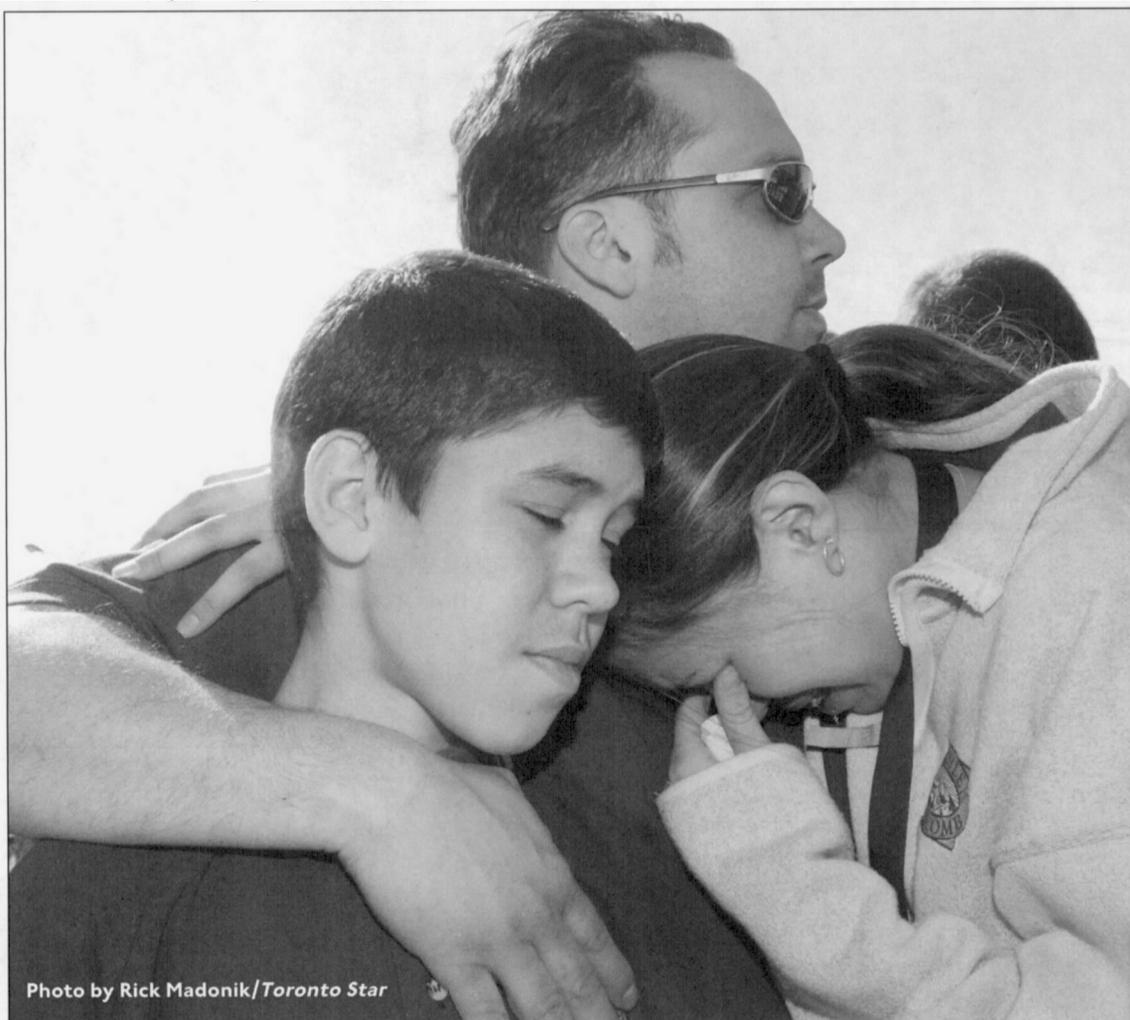


Photo by Rick Madonik/Toronto Star

Students Gerald Lizano-Sossa, 14 and his sister Kimberly Lizano-Sossa, 15 are comforted by their uncle Wendell Sosa. The two were pulled out of school by Canada Border Service agents

Ironically, another Dante Alighieri student, Licia Ferreira, who had spent much of her life in Canada and would have graduated this June, would be deported. The school continued to mark her absent for a month before seeing her pictured in the *Toronto Star*, standing forlornly in a Portuguese orchard. She had had no time to say goodbye.

According to the *Toronto Star*, in a statement to curtail the public relations fiasco, Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day issued a directive to Canada Border Service agents "not to go to a school unless requested to by the parent, legal guardian or school official for the purpose of family reunification."

/Roger Langen is an executive officer with OSSTF District 12, Toronto 🐦

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