

Reeve worried about crossers after flood

RCMP NOW REFUSING TO RELEASE NUMBERS

By: Randy Turner

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Not long ago, Greg Janzen was worried for asylum seekers crossing the border during spring floods — now he's concerned about a potential flood of border jumpers when the waters recede.

The reeve of the Municipality of Emerson-Franklin is also disturbed by the refusal of the RCMP or Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) to continue releasing the exact number of asylum seekers crossing, after initially publicizing the numbers once a week.



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Greg Janzen, reeve of the Emerson-Franklin municipality, is concerned about the increase in asylum seekers.

The *Free Press* reported last week that between Jan. 1 and March 30, the number of asylum seekers who crossed the Canadian border at Emerson was 332.

"The numbers are going to be through the roof," Janzen said on Thursday. "I hope they post the right numbers. It's every day. I wouldn't be surprised if we were at 400 since January.

"They might miss one day, then there's three or four groups the next day. It's pretty constant."

The problem, said Janzen, is that federal departments — both enforcement and government officials — refuse to tell local community leaders just how many refugee claimants are arriving. Most reports are anecdotal, such as the two asylum seekers who were found in Dominion City (about 15 kilometres north of the border) on Monday.

Said Janzen: "I don't know what's going on and it's really starting to piss me off. Our local MP Ted Falk can't even get numbers and he's an elected federal official. It's coming all the way from Ottawa. The RCMP and CBSA have been told not to give anyone any numbers."

Due to recent flooding, tributaries into the Red River that run past Emerson have been rising, confining the routes of asylum seekers to the train tracks into town or the old No. 75 highway, the reeve said.

"There's a lot of water in these drains and it goes as wide as two or three miles," he added, noting that some of the drains are six to eight feet deep.

For that reason, water rescue teams at Dominion City and Emerson held a refresher meeting on Monday. "Just in case we get a call," he said. "They just want to make sure everything is working and everybody knows the drill and how to pull people out of the water."

Janzen expects the water to recede in two to three weeks.

"They're coming, and lots," he predicted. "Enforcement are bracing for a lot more. They're gearing up once the weather warms up and the water recedes. IBET (the RCMP's Integrated Border Enforcement Team) is getting a lot more resources and equipment."

RCMP spokesperson Tara Seel would not confirm any additional resources for IBET, but noted, "It stands to reason that the warmer months will continue to see people crossing the border illegally. We have all appropriate resources in place along the border to effectively manage any issues."

Abdi Ahmed, the coordinator of Immigration Partnership Winnipeg, echoed the reeve's concerns.

"The numbers are not receding at all," said Ahmed, who volunteers to help refugee claimants seeking asylum. "If anything... I know for certain the numbers are more."

In fact, Ahmed is currently attempting to send updated Manitoba flood reports to leaders of the Somali community in Minneapolis, where a large portion of the border jumpers at Emerson now reside.

"I'm worried about people being stuck in floods," he said. "It's a dangerous situation. Most of these people (Africans) come from places where there's no bodies of water so most of them don't know how to swim."

Ahmed said a troubling development at the border is that in the past two months, three asylum seekers have been unaccompanied minors.

A spokesperson for the Manitoba Department of Families confirmed on Thursday that one of the minors was from Somalia (February), while two from Djibouti crossed the border in March. All three were 17 years old and they have been placed with Winnipeg Child and Family Services.

"In general, the process would be that each child is assessed to determine their unique needs and could be placed in a variety of care settings — just as for any child in care: a foster home, residential care setting, a place of safety, independent living situation with supports — it can even be with a local family from the same geographic area," the spokesperson said in an email. "Due to terms of the CFS Act, including protecting the privacy of individuals, we are not able to provide specific details about any child or family (i.e. where they are now located)."

Ahmed said he has met the minors in question.

"What happens is the CFS will work with the (Somali) community in Winnipeg to find someone who can host them," he said. "They've had success in having people in the community step forward to provide a home to some of these minors."

In the instances of minors, Ahmed said they may have lost one or both parents and were travelling with others, or their parents send them alone to get them out of Somalia (especially boys) so they would not be forcefully recruited by terrorist groups, such as al-Shabab.

"It's extremely tough," Ahmed noted. "But we've had worse situations. We've had 10-year-olds making long trips across borders without their parents (in other countries, such as Somalia and Syria) to seek safety."

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