

For Immediate Release

For love or visa? ...
New documentary by VIFF filmmaker shines light on
marital immigration fraud, its victims and the system that puts up with it

The Price of Heartache
Airing November 15 at 10pmET/PT on CBC's *The Passionate Eye*

October 25, 2010 – What's the dirty little secret about spousal immigration sponsorships in Canada? Many Canadians are being duped into marriage, not for love, but for Canadian residency. The real kicker is, even if the fraud is discovered, the victims have no real power to get their fraudulent spouses deported from Canada — and are even financially responsible for them for three years!

The new documentary *Price of Heartache*, which airs on CBC's *The Passionate Eye* on November 15, at 10 pm ET/PT, introduces viewers to these startling facts about the Canadian immigration system and the devastation it causes to its shattered victims. Canada is, in fact, the easiest among all developed countries in which to commit marriage fraud — and without any repercussions. So many unscrupulous would-be immigrants woo and marry Canadians as a doorway into Canada.

The story of Lainie, of Ottawa, opens up the film. She is seen wearing a wedding dress and veil with a door strapped to her back, to symbolize her experience marrying a man who used her to gain entry into the country. “The easiest way to become a permanent resident in this country is to get married. As soon as you step into the country you're granted permanent residency status. There's no other country that grants this,” she says in the film. “I was duped into marrying this man who had no intention of staying with me.”

Her voice is tinged with anger and betrayal as she speaks to the judge in the real-life scenes from her “husband's” removal hearing. While she is happy with the result — he has been ordered removed from Canada — the reality is it is near impossible to get a permanent resident out of the country because of lengthy appeal processes. In the film, Akra admits he has no intention of going back to Guyana.

Foreign nationals who will do anything to immigrate to Canada — but can't get in through regular channels, which are getting stricter all the time — are finding unsuspecting Canadians, like Lainie, to marry and then dump, and then sponsor their own family — even secret spouses and children— over to Canada afterward.

The documentary follows the stories of other victims, including several men who have been used, dumped and even threatened by foreign women. But it also tells the stories of several women who have married foreign men, believe they are really in love and are willing to take the risk of sponsoring them. Viewers watching may be suspect, considering the men are substantially younger. Roxanne is 41, Caucasian, has a child and lives in a B.C. suburb; Abdel is 26, a Muslim and likes city life. But they're still together, living in Pitt Meadows. At least for now.

Stephanie is an obese woman much older than her new, fit husband, Abderrahim, who is still waiting in Morocco to join his wife in Canada. Both women know the risks — including the fact that, even if their spouse leaves them, they'll be on the hook to pay back any social assistance he may receive from the government — but they are clearly lovestruck and willing to take a leap of faith. Time will tell what will happen to these relationships.

For those whose dreams have already been shattered, it will take time for them to have their faith restored, not only in love but the Canadian government.

Abdollah, a male victim in the film who is still visibly upset, says he called Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency and was told that it happens a lot if in Canada. "They asked me to go and basically live my life."

Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, who is also interviewed in the film, says if the government removes the financial obligation of sponsors, he fears there will be more false marriages than now, only with Canadians paying the bill at the end of the day.

But, immigration lawyer Julie Taub says that "Love is blind and you see what you only want to see." So why are marriage victims in Canada still paying for the misdeeds of someone who betrayed them and the system? Why aren't the actual perpetrators facing any consequences?

"Marriage fraud victims are penalized twice. First by the fraudsters that cheat and deceive them and then by the government that forces the victims to pay back any assistance that these fraudulent spouses collect from the government," says producer, director and writer Julia Ivanova, a Russian-born immigrant in Canada whose most recent film *Love Translated* was shown at the Vancouver International Film Festival. "To add insult to injury, these fraudsters remain in Canada and may in turn go back home and marry their girlfriends and boyfriends that they've had all along and sponsor *them* into Canada as permanent residents."

While the federal government is currently consulting the public on this unjust system (www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/protection/fraud/marriage.asp), there is no word yet when any solutions will be presented.

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Price of Heartache was developed by Interfilm Productions and produced by Heartache Productions Inc. in association with Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Knowledge Network, and with the support of Canada Media Fund, Rogers Cable Network Fund, the Canadian Film and Video Production Tax Credits, and Film Incentive BC.

Director/Executive Producer Julia Ivanova is an accomplished documentary filmmaker. She wrote, directed and produced: *From Russia For Love* (2000), which aired on CBC Newsworld's *The Passionate Eye*, RDI and in 26 other countries; *I Want A Woman* (2003) for Newsworld's *Rough Cuts* and IFC; and *Moscow Freestyle* (2006) for Newsworld's *The Lense* and Knowledge Network; *Fatherhood Dreams* (2007) for Global and Knowledge which has been nominated for Best Documentary by the Canadian Media Production Association and was voted for Best Educational Documentary List by the Video Librarian Magazine. Ivanova's most recent film *Love Translated* was featured at the Vancouver International Film Festival and Chicago International Film Festival.

Producer Boris Ivanov has been producing films since 2000, including: *From Russia For Love* (2000), *Moscow Freestyle* (2006), *Fatherhood Dreams* (2007), and *Love Translated* (2010). other credits include theatrical recreations director/producer for one-offs and series broadcast on History, TLC, WeTV and Investigation Discovery.

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