**NEWCOMER ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR EXPORT DEVELOPMENT FORUM**

**Event Overview**

* On December 2nd the Intergovernmental Committee for Economic and Labour Force Development hosted entrepreneurs, services providers in international trade development, policy makers from all levels of government and chambers of commerce/diaspora networks at an event focused on leveraging newcomer networks for international trade diversification.

## Event Summary

**Opening Keynote – Mohamed Fakih, CEO, Paramount Foods**

* In his opening keynote address, award-winning entrepreneur, Mohamed Fakih, commented on the need for new markets outside of the United States. Fakih noted that newcomers are crucial to connecting to these new markets and cited this as a key benefit to businesses who hire newcomers.
	+ Fakih stated that his own businesses has greatly benefited from newcomer employees. These employees have been influential in introducing him to new higher-quality and lower-priced food products and distribution networks.
* Fakih also spoke to the importance of establishing a mentor-mentee relationship as a newcomer to Canada. Such relationships help both the mentor and mentee share valuable knowledge and learn from one another.
* In commenting on the dynamics between the Toronto community and government officials, Fakih noted that ‘perfection’ will only be achieved when those that lead and govern the city reflect the Toronto community as a whole.

**Introductory Remarks - Mohan Doss, Director of Newcomer Programs and Services, WoodGreen Community Services**

* Mohan Doss welcomed event attendees to the WoodGreen Community Services Centre. Doss spoke to the family settlement services offered by WoodGreen that strive to help newcomers adjust to life in Canada.
* Doss also reiterated earlier comments made by Mohamed Fakih, commenting on the many economic benefits and opportunities that are presented to businesses hiring Canadian newcomers.

**Panel Discussion: Diaspora Nation**

Panelists included:

* Viktoria Palfi, Global Affairs Canada Trade Commissioner Service
* Wendy Cukier, Ryerson University Diversity Institute
* Katy Baker, Magnet Export Business Portal
* Jacques Ndoutoumve, Canada-Africa Chamber of Business

In a panel discussion focused on the opportunities and barriers for using diversity to grow international trade, panelists stated the following:

* Immigrant exporters in Canada earn less than their Canadian-born counterparts
* Immigrants learn a lot of the skills they need for life in Canada through starting a small business, even if the business is ultimately unsuccessful.
* Immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada are much more likely to export, often harnessing their knowledge of international markets and regional dynamics abroad. Panelists noted that this information would be valuable to and should be shared with non-immigrant businesses.
* Canada has worked hard to provide preferential market access to Canadians through free trade agreements.
	+ Trade agreements should look beyond the United States and be focused on diversifying export markets.
	+ Reliance on the United States for exports is declining.
* Trade diversification must also mean enhanced support for under-represented groups.
* Relative to population, people born abroad are more likely to lead a business
* Service providers are not equipped to address the particular needs of newcomers (i.e. setting up bank accounts)
* Settlement officers don’t see entrepreneurs as a viable newcomer career. Entrepreneurship is often seen as a back-up career plan.
* Characteristics of entrepreneurs are often aligned with the characteristics of immigrants who chose to leave their country in search of a better life.
* More government interaction with community is needed to promote immigrant/ women-led export / entrepreneurs. Efforts must be made to get organizations thinking outside of their comfort zones.