

The provision of humanitarian assistance to refugees is a major commitment for Canada. Such assistance is crucial in most refugee situations to supply basic necessities such as food, water, shelter, and medical aid. In fact, it is often a matter of life and death. Canada's financial expenditure in this respect totalled, in 1981, approximately \$52 million in assistance. Many millions more were contributed through our food aid programmes and support for NGOs.

I would not wish to characterize one refugee situation as worse than another, but the Government must establish priorities based on such an assessment in order to use effectively the finite financial resources at its disposal. In 1981, Africa, where there are presently 5 million refugees, was one of Canada's highest priorities. I attended the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa last April, a conference that brought the problems of African refugees to world attention and raised over \$550 million (US). Canada was a major contributor, announcing \$22.4 million in the form of contributions to UNHCR programmes and emergency food aid. These contributions covered refugee situations in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Uganda, Chad, Zaire and Angola. This list speaks for itself in indicating the vast refugee problem facing Africa.

In other regions, Canada also made major contributions: \$7.4 million to Palestinian refugees, \$10 million to Afghan refugees, \$0.5 million to Central American refugees and over \$6 million to relief operations in Indochina. The latter contribution brought to over \$23 million Canadian assistance to this area since 1979. Further contributions were made to other agencies and Canadian NGOs involved in refugee relief.

We have, in recent years, witnessed an alarming increase in mass refugee situations. One need only catalogue them -- Central America, Indochina, Afghanistan, Horn of Africa -- to realize their gravity and widespread nature. In these very serious cases of mass exodus, the refugee problem extends far beyond its humanitarian impact. Emergency aid is therefore not, in itself, enough. It is not enough to treat the symptom of a problem; if we wish to cure the disease, we must work towards preventing it.

What are the root causes of these refugee situations? How, if at all, can they be prevented? The origins of mass refugee situations are usually found in a variety of causes unique to each particular situation, and are often unpredictable or difficult to control. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods and droughts will very often tip a delicate balance between subsistence and starvation, thereby providing an impulse to a mass movement of population. The other main causes -- wars, civil disturbances and human rights violations -- which we categorize