

Immigration Act, 1976

Bills complement each other. We must ensure that our system can put an end to abuses while allowing refugee claimants to present their views. These two Bills give us such an assurance. They guarantee the rights of everyone, but will deter many fraudulent applicants.

The two Bills will enable us to establish a fairer, faster and more effective refugee determination system which will benefit all legitimate refugees and respect the basic rights of all potential claimants.

Mr. Speaker, we are firmly determined to guarantee the rights of all claimants. However, we also want to limit abuses. The legislation on deterrence and detention will attack the very roots of the problem and give us the control we need over the process.

● (1240)

[*English*]

I wish to make it absolutely clear that our commitment to genuine refugees is as firm as ever. In fact, Bill C-55 is a step that is consistent with the traditions of fairness and humanitarianism which saw the people of Canada awarded the Nansen Medal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This was the first time that an entire country had ever been so honoured.

I wish to remind Hon. Members that since taking office the Government has substantially increased the number of refugees taken from refugee camps around the world. This year it will sponsor 12,000 refugees from these camps, while private Canadian groups and families will sponsor approximately 5,000.

Canada has a long tradition of proving its humanitarian concern for genuine refugees who need its protection. The new determination system will uphold this tradition of commitment to true refugees. Our commitment goes back a long way. It is an essential part of a policy that, since the Second World War, has brought some 500,000 refugees to Canada for resettlement, and which has helped thousands of others through special humanitarian measures. On a per capita basis Canada's record of aid to refugees over the past few years has been second to none.

[*Translation*]

We provide refugee assistance under three specific formulas. First, direct financial assistance; second, the settlement in Canada of refugees selected outside this country; and protection given in Canada pursuant to a determination process carried out here. This three-prong approach is in line with the United Nations refugee policy.

For 1986-87, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Government set more than \$170 million aside for refugee financial assistance. One third of these funds—over \$66 million—was given to international humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or to various countries in the form of food assistance for refugees.

In 1986 two-thirds of the refugees selected abroad received only financial help from the Government. Groups made up of private citizens and volunteer agencies sponsored more than 5,000 other refugees. In such cases the Government paves the way for refugee sponsors and makes transportation loans as well as language and vocational training courses available to refugees. Canada has also set up unique mechanisms to help victims of oppression even though these people do not necessarily fall within the terms of the United Nations definition because they are still in their country—for instance, political prisoners and other displaced personalities in Poland, Salvador, Guatemala, Chile and Uruguay.

Our aim in introducing Bill C-55 was to make the refugee status determination process effective again because, Mr. Speaker, this third prong of our refugee program is quite simply no longer operational. Right now this process no longer enables us to give protection to genuine refugees who need it because they are unable to sustain the pressure due to a sharp increase in the number of applicants. Thanks to the proposed process Canada will be in a position to live up to its commitments under the Geneva Convention, while at the same time honouring the principles of justice which are the very basis of our legislation. We will thus be able to maintain our humanitarian tradition. The adoption of Bill C-55 does not mean we will be turning our backs on refugees. On the contrary we want to make sure that those who really need help will be guaranteed our protection. However if we are truly intent on protecting genuine refugees we have to put a stop to abuses and reinstate an orderly process.

[*English*]

Canada's refugee program measures up to that of any country in the world. Our commitment to refugees is internationally renowned. Our best contribution is resettlement from camps abroad. Many of the people in these camps have been there for years and they have no other options. But, to do that, the refugee determination process must be changed as it is no longer workable. In its present form many people who are honestly entitled to refugee status in our country are prevented from attaining it. Canadians can no longer tolerate this situation. They want a new refugee process, one that is fair but tough on those who abuse it. We have the solution to this problem in hand. Now is the time to refer Bill C-55 to a committee.

[*Translation*]

I think that in conclusion you will allow me to say that it is clear we have not only the support of my government, but also my own support as President of the Quebec Conservative Caucus, and also the full support of the Chambly riding which I have the honour to represent in the House, to do the utmost to adopt this Bill as soon as possible.

The time has come for us to stop talking and take action.

[*English*]

It is time to stop talking and start acting.