

*International Relations*

resettlement to ensure that they have proper opportunities for work, homes and education.

One of the most important developments arising out of our major commitment was the tremendous involvement of private sponsors. Under the changes to the Immigration Act of 1978, we now have the power to join in partnership with a wide variety of voluntary groups, church groups and ethnic organizations, so that they can provide sponsorship, resources and support for the settlement of refugees in this country. It is satisfying to see the tremendous response to those groups throughout Canada. There were close to 7,000 sponsors for Southeast Asian refugees alone. Many ethnic groups are now undertaking sponsorship for eastern European refugees.

I have indicated to various organizations that I am prepared to sign agreements similar to the ones I have already signed with the Polish congress and the Czechoslovakian association. We are prepared to sign agreements with them so that they can bring in refugees under sponsorship agreements. The same offer to provide such resources applies to any group that wants to bring in refugees from Central or South America.

In almost the last 2.5 years we have built up a very strong and forward-thinking constituency of Canadians who are active and interested in the problems and plight of refugees. Now we are asking the questions: what do we do next; where do we go from here? Perhaps the most important refugee priority to mention would be to engage our interest and resources in developing programs in refugee camps around the world. We should draw upon the inspiration and the commitment of church organizations and voluntary organizations to bring their resources to bear upon the huge refugee camps in Africa and Central America.

When I met with the Somalian ambassador a few months ago, we talked about the refugee issue. He said that there were close to one million refugees in camps in Somalia alone. Somalia is one of the poorest countries in the world and it has to bear the full cost of almost a million refugees. He said that they needed people who could provide medical and agricultural services as well as technical assistance.

This is a tremendous opportunity for Canadians to find a new cause. Those many thousands of Canadians who have committed themselves to the resettlement of refugees at home now have a tremendous opportunity abroad. It is certainly my ambition—and I know it is shared by my colleagues—to begin providing such support and assistance for the outward reach of Canadians to deal with the refugee problem where it is most serious and most drastic; that is, the vast number of camps in various regions around the globe.

We have taken a major step toward restructuring the Canadian Foundation on Refugees to enable it to begin providing support for the co-ordination of technical assistance in the development of an international aspect of Canadian involvement in the refugee problem. We have met with a number of refugee organizations. For example, I met with perhaps one of the most prominent and effective groups, the Mennonite Central Committee, about two weeks ago.

**Mr. Friesen:** What was the name of that group?

**Mr. Axworthy:** They are a group which deserve full recognition.

● (1710)

As for the question about what we do next, the answer given to them was, "Let us begin to broaden the base". We have said to them, "Let us use the resources and the money that you can collect and the commitment of those who want to work abroad to begin working in the camps abroad". In a sense, we have a chance to set a different model, a different example in the area of refugee policy. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that is something we intend to do. It is a commitment we are making to provide leadership in the outward reach of refugee programs and policies and to give Canadians the opportunity to become engaged, not in a passive way by reading about the tragedies in newspapers or by watching them on television, but by active involvement in a direct way with a vast problem which is growing by leaps and bounds.

I would say, in particular, that we recognize increasingly the importance of the issues as they appear in South America and Latin America. That is why we have taken a number of steps to begin developing approaches to the settlement of refugees from that area. We have indicated to the United Nations that we are prepared to accept Salvadorean refugees who cannot find homes elsewhere.

We are taking measures to strengthen our embassy connections, as the Secretary of State has said. We have taken measures to strengthen our reporting missions and our ability to organize and develop political control and contact. In effect, we are really talking about a two-pronged approach with regard to dealing with refugee aid and settlement. It is important to state that none of these initiatives is possible or probable unless we have an underlying consensus and agreement that we are prepared to do something in these areas.

I commend the New Democratic Party for giving up one of their opposition days in order to allow the government to continue this debate. It is only unfortunate that others did not have the same sort of zeal and commitment. There is a broad base of support in this area. We will be able to develop a better understanding among Canadians of these issues. It is necessary for us to go beyond our view and perception that refugees come as a result of a crisis. We must begin to develop an approach to the refugee issue which is consistent, cohesive and long term.

Refugees will be around for a long time and the problems associated with them will not be subject to easy solutions or panaceas. The problems are not subject to grandstanding or rhetorical flourishes. This situation requires a painstaking effort and an allocation of resources. As we well know, any foreign policy initiative will not succeed unless it receives a basis of support from the people.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** I regret to interrupt the hon. minister but his allotted time has expired.