

Immigration Act, 1976

I would like to share a few figures with you to give you some idea of the magnitude of the problem. In Central America today there are 1.5 million refugees. There are two million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. Some of these refugees are second and third generation. Some three million Afghans have fled to Pakistan and Iran since the Russian invasion of 1979. Some two million people were displaced in Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos over the last 10 years. Between 1980 and 1985, 400,000 people were forced to flee from Uganda. Millions of Africans have been displaced by war, internal oppression, famine and ecological disaster such as the advance of the Sahel. In the tragic split of the India subcontinent of 1947, at the time of the partition, over 14 million Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs were displaced. Some of them moved south into India from Pakistan and others moved the opposite way. This is the magnitude of the problem our world has faced in the last few years.

While we in Canada think we have a crisis, the heaviest impact of this crisis has fallen on Third World countries. There are 25 Third World countries where more than 50,000 unassimilated refugees live in camps. The 20 countries with the highest ratio of refugees to local population are all in the Third World, and those countries have a per capita annual income of less than \$700.

Sudan is perhaps a particularly outstanding example of the pressure this puts on a poor country. Sudan is under stress politically, economically and ecologically. It has had to create a special department with more than 1,500 people to look after the more than one million refugees who flooded into Sudan from Chad, Ethiopia and Uganda. In some of its refugee camps in the south the mortality rate is about 285 per 1,000. In a 12-month period 285 refugees out of 1,000 would die. That is the tragic condition of refugees in some parts of our world today. Yet we feel we have a crisis in Canada because of 174 boat people.

In May of 1979 there was a special conference on refugees in Africa. President Nyerere of Tanzania spoke to that and I would like to share some of his words. He was speaking particularly to the African situation, but I think it applies to all of us. He said:

Even if there was not a single new refugee in Africa from this day forward, it is relevant to remember that a refugee stays a refugee for up to 70 years if we do not make provision for his or her integration into our societies. Either we make arrangements whereby refugees can become self-supporting or they have to be fed for a lifetime . . . Refugees have only one thing in common—that they have fled from their country. Even the cause of their flight will be different. It may be persecution, or social upheaval, or war, or it may be famine which causes a disregard of borders. The refugees are usually, but not quite always, without property or means of earning a living.

But apart from the fact of seeking refuge they are as varied as Africa's people are varied. They will be of many ideologies or of none, of many different religions, and many different cultures. They may be nomadic or pastoral, just as they may be agriculturalists or urban workers. They will have different levels of education; they will be different in ambition, and in character.

All refugees are certainly victims, but they do not consequently lose their individual ideas about life and their own purpose. They will include the ambitious, the optimist, the pessimist, the honest hard-working man and the

sly delinquent; the person who will make the best of things, and the man who will grumble about everything. And so on. Generalizations about refugees are very dangerous; all that can safely be said is that they have sought refuge.

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He goes on to point out how refugees often create large problems for the countries in which they seek asylum. This is particularly the case for Third World countries. Then he says:

Yet refugees are in no position to consider the problems of the country they flee to.

I suggest we should think about that as we debate this legislation; refugees are not in any position to think of the problems of the country to which they are fleeing because they are so preoccupied with their own desperate struggle for some kind of freedom and dignity.

Nyerere talks about the very slow progress that has been made in dealing with the problems of refugees. Indeed, on a world basis, we have fallen back in the last few years. Speaking of Africa, he asks why this is:

I do not believe it is a result of ill will, but rather that all the governments of Africa are busy and hard-pressed, trying daily to perform the miracle of the five loaves and two fishes. They are subject to many pressures from their people and on behalf of economic interests elsewhere. And there is no countervailing pressure in support of the refugee victims of injustice and oppression. The only pressure is our own awareness of Africa's unity and of our common humanity with our brothers and sisters. It appears that this is not a very strong pressure in comparison with others to which we are subject.

I believe we can apply to our world what he said about the common awareness of Africa's unity. The only countervailing pressure to completely closing all doors to refugees is our awareness of our unity as humankind and our obligations as human beings to our brothers and sisters in our common humanity. The question we must ask, with Nyerere, is whether or not in Canada in 1987 it is enough to keep our doors open.

There has been less funding by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to deal with long-term solutions for the refugee problems. Indeed, of the funding available to the UNHCR in 1970, 80 per cent was going to long-term solutions. However, as the result of the pressure of immediate problems in 1981, that had fallen from 80 per cent to 20 per cent. Last year it had risen again to 40 per cent, but we are still devoting far too little money to the long-term solution of the refugee problem. We then wonder why it is snowballing onto our doorsteps.

There is an important role for affluent countries in the north, such as Canada, to play in helping Third World countries cope with the refugee problems within their own borders. Instead of doing that, we are shutting the door. We are applying more restrictive measures.

Bill C-84 is supposed to deal with an emergency, but the Bill has been hastily drafted, rushed through committee, and the Government has refused to consider some of the well thought out amendments that were presented by opposition Parties. It has refused to listen to the kinds of interventions that have been made by a wide variety of Canadian organizations that