

Statements by Ministers

[Translation]

Since 1945, Canada has welcomed over 500,000 refugees to our land. In 1986, the people of Canada were awarded the Nansen Medal by the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees—the first time a country has ever been so honoured.

[English]

While the debate over refugee determination has concentrated on refugee claims made within Canada, we must not forget that our first priority as a country is to help genuine refugees who are confined to camps overseas. These people are desperate. They have nowhere to go and no future ahead of them. They deserve our concern and compassion.

The federal Government's sponsorship of these refugees has increased substantially since we took office. This year we will bring 12,000 refugees directly out of refugee camps and settle them here in Canada.

In addition, Canadian citizens have responded generously. Private groups, families, and individuals are expected to sponsor over 5,000 refugees this year. The Government encourages and supports these resettlement efforts.

We shall continue to use our resources to increase the number of refugees brought directly from camps overseas under government and private citizen sponsorship.

Our immigration programs are second to none. Under this Government immigration levels have been rising steadily—84,000 in 1985, 89,000 in 1986, and we will easily surpass our target of 125,000 in 1987. We intend to continue promoting this steady growth. I am announcing today that next year Canada will accept an even higher number of immigrants from around the world.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bouchard: In addition to increasing the levels of immigration, we have implemented almost all of the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration aimed at processing immigration applications more quickly. We also intend to respond to the recommendations made by the standing committee concerning family reunification criteria.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bouchard: I am announcing today that regulations to include unmarried children of any age will be introduced. This news, I am sure, will be welcome to many Canadians who wish to bring their relatives to this country through the proper channels—

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bouchard: I repeat, through the proper channels. They will now be able to do so.

[Translation]

Ultimately, the solution lies in the implementation of a refugee determination system that achieves the best possible balance of speed and due process. Such a system is embodied in bill C-55.

Bill C-55 will not be in place tomorrow. It requires, and it deserves, consideration not only by Members of this House, and members in the other place, but it deserves the attention of all Canadians.

I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that all Canadians want a system that assures fair play. All Canadians want an end to the abuse and we will put an end to it because we all want to preserve Canada's reputation as a fair, open and generous nation.

● (1140)

[English]

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, I am dismayed at the way the national Government has proceeded on an emergency basis. This Party was prepared to come back if the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and the Government deemed the situation to be of an emergency nature. However, what troubles us is that it took nearly 10 days from the time the Prime Minister announced that there was an emergency to the time we learned of the date of our return. Second, it was only late last night that we were able to look at the very legislation we as parliamentarians have been called back to debate. Third, we only received the news at 10 minutes to eleven o'clock this day that there would be a ministerial statement this morning.

I am not trying to cry sour grapes and suggest that somehow the Government should not control the legislative agenda. However, if we are to take a look at the very urgent nature of the immigration and refugee policies, then Canadians would expect their representatives and parliamentarians to engage in a mature and enlightened debate, a debate into which we are prepared to enter with the Government and the NDP. However, it does not add to a mature debate when other Parties are kept in political darkness, because this only solicits reactionary comments that we wish to avoid. That is the first premise I wanted to raise for your benefit, Mr. Speaker, so that we may avoid this kind of process in the future.

The second matter that must be placed squarely on the floor of the House of Commons is the fact that this situation could have been avoided. This situation did not have to propel itself into a recall of Parliament for the second consecutive summer. We have urged for nearly three years, together with members of the NDP, together with NGO groups, together with the Plaut report and together with Canadians across the country, that we should begin to reform and overhaul the system. Why? Because there has been a transition in the situation facing refugees, not only those who come to Canada but as well those who are fleeing and are searching for a home throughout the world.