

Those people with an arguable claim or who do not have prior protection will be referred to the refugee board for an oral hearing. At the board their claims will be heard in a non-adversarial oral hearing before a two-member panel. Only one member of the panel must find in favour of the claimant. In other words, split decisions will be in favour of the claimant. Decisions will now be rendered in months, not years, and accepted claimants will have the right to apply for permanent residence.

[Translation]

The provision concerning return to a safe third country will be applied only with the greatest discretion, and only to persons who received refugee status in another country or who are likely to receive it. The provision will be applied on a case-by-case basis, after careful screening of a country's record with respect to certain nationals.

[English]

In designating safe third countries Cabinet will rely on information received from credible sources, as I indicated.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, in concluding, I may point out that this Bill reflects the Government's unswerving commitment to refugees. It represents a balanced approach Canadians can understand and accept, without detracting from the traditional humanitarian approach to refugees taken in our Immigration Program.

The process is fair. It is fair to genuine refugees, to claimants and to Canadians. In the case of genuine refugees, it puts an end to the delay and uncertainty to which they were exposed, and it maintains the intrinsic character of our Immigration Program.

The new process compares favourably, at the international level, with the situation in other countries that receive refugees. It enables us to meet our obligations under the United Nations Convention, to respect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Bill of Human Rights, and to maintain our traditional humanitarian approach.

[English]

In short, this legislation ensures that Canada's outstanding humanitarian record will continue. It affirms this Government's commitment to protect genuine refugees who need our help. Finally, it demonstrates our resolve to curb abuse.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr. Marchi: Mr. Speaker, the Minister finished by saying that this refugee legislation, Bill C-55, will continue the proud humanitarian record of our country. He suggests that it enjoys popularity and agreement across the land. If that is the case, can the Minister tell us why Tom Clark from the Inter-Church Committee for Refugees would say:

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Instead of access there is a screen, instead of bringing Canada a notch ahead of European countries, the immigration minister has brought it down to their level. It's despicable.

Michael Schelew, Amnesty International:

It's an about-face on Canada's humanitarian record, that may place people fleeing persecution in jeopardy.

Elie Wiesel, Nobel laureate:

I believe that a society can be measured and judged by its attitude towards strangers . . . I would hope that Canada would like to be measured according to these lofty rules. I say Canada should lead by example.

Lorne Waldman, Canadian Jewish Congress:

● (1300)

The long-term aim of the immigration department is to eliminate all refugee claims within Canada. The Government has spent millions of dollars and innumerable hours consulting on this problem, and everyone's recommendations have been ignored altogether.

Gunther Plaut said:

It does not do justice to our international obligation to protect refugees. Nazi Germany would qualify as a safe country under Canada's proposed new refugee rules. I don't think I would have been let in. I came in the 1930s from Nazi Germany. The Government is building a Berlin Wall around the country.

Those are quotes from leaders and representatives across the country. The last, Gunther Plaut, was the author of a Government-commissioned study on refugees. I would like the Minister to address those comments.

Why have the abuses, the schemes and scams intensified during his term in Government? The abuses which are happening in Lebanon, Portugal, Turkey and Brazil are happening under his administration as they happened under no previous administration. Why the increase in abuse? If the Minister is very intent on curbing abuse, why is he so lax in prosecuting the individual perpetrators and unscrupulous consultants who are reaping a fortune from the backs of individuals who do not know any better?

Can the Minister explain what a safe third country is? He has avoided that in Question Period and in committee hearings. I urge him now on the floor of the House of Commons to tell Parliament, and through Parliament, Canadians, what the definition of a safe third country is. Does he have the courage to tell us whether the United States is a safe country *vis-a-vis* Guatemalans and El Salvadorans and whether Great Britain is a safe country *vis-a-vis* Tamils? Would he place those countries on our so-called safe country list?

Finally, with regard to the pre-screening application, if he is genuinely sincere that this is not a pre-screening, why did he appoint one officer from the refugee board and one immigration adjudicator rather than having both officers at the border point from the refugee board?

In addition, when he talks about increasing immigration is he talking about increasing targets or increasing the actual number of people entering the country? While his targets have been high, the number of people who have come into this country is considerably lower than those targets. I urge him to stop playing politics with targets and to come clean with