

□ IMMIGRATION — TODAY AND TOMORROW □

“Canada is a nation of immigrants and refugees,” said the Minister of State for Immigration, Gerry Weiner, in a recent interview, “and Canadian immigration policy will continue to reflect their importance to social and economic growth.”

Speaking of Canada’s “proud, humanitarian tradition,” Mr. Weiner stressed that the interim action taken by the government in February, 1987 to control a sudden influx of claimants does not signal a move away from that tradition.

“On the contrary,” he said, “these measures were taken to maintain the integrity of our refugee determination system and to ensure the efficient and humane processing of legitimate refugees and other immigrants.”

The interim action was a response primarily to an unprecedented flow of claimants caused by American measures to clamp down on illegal U.S. immigrants. “The object of the exercise was clear,” said Mr. Weiner, “and I think we achieved what we set out to do — control the flow of claimants, curb abuse and protect those in genuine need of a safe haven.”

With refugee claims escalating from 8,400 in 1985 to 18,000 in 1986 to 6,000 in the first six weeks of 1987, the government moved to replace its blanket non-removal policy with case-by-case reviews. Related to this, the government sought and received assurances from the American government that claimants would be allowed to remain in the U.S. while their cases were under review.

Another control measure required anyone visiting Canada to have an in-transit visa, reducing airport claims made while en route to another

country. In addition, it was decided that special programs for Iran, Lebanon, El Salvador, Guatemala and Sri Lanka would apply only outside Canada. People wanting to submit refugee claims can do so at any Canadian immigration post around the world.

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Mr. Weiner said he believes the temporary measures “diffused the potential for chaos and served to clarify for Canadians and claimants alike the distinction between the refugee and immigrant streams.” He added that long-term reforms currently before Cabinet will underscore the government’s commitment to the fairer, more

streamlined procedures needed in a period of controlled expansion of immigration levels.

Overall levels for 1987 will increase by a projected 10,000 to 125,000, reflecting Canada’s need for immigrants’ enterprise and energy. Within this policy framework, the Minister of State said that “sensitivity to refugees will not only be maintained but enhanced.” He anticipated acceptance of 17,000 bona-fide refugees in 1987 — 12,000 of them government-sponsored.

Mr. Weiner stressed the importance of consultation to establish levels. Last year, more than 600 immigrant organizations were consulted, as well as provincial and territorial governments and federal departments, such as External Affairs, with an interest in immigration matters.

Canada also continues to work closely with and contribute significantly to international refugee relief organizations such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the Red Cross.

“In addition to reacting with prudence and humanity to specific situations, it is essential for Canada to consider immigration in the broader context of long-term global population movements and our own national demographic needs,” he said. With this in mind, the government is undertaking a comprehensive study of levels and their impact on growth as far ahead as the 21st century.

The framework for growth, Mr. Weiner emphasized, will continue to be defined by the family. “Simply put,” he says, “the family unit remains the central fact of Canadian immigration.”

“Family reunification is our policy cornerstone. There is no numerical limit