

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 12, 1987

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

WAR CRIMINALS

TABLING OF REPORT OF COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the report of the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals, also known as the Deschênes Commission report.

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[Translation]

PETITIONS

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 106(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Government's response to petitions Nos. 332-623, 332-644, 332-792 to 332-821 inclusive, 332-872 to 332-878 inclusive, 332-893 to 332-916 inclusive, 332-924 to 332-933 inclusive, 332-987 to 332-992 inclusive and 332-999 to 332-1005.

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[English]

WAR CRIMINALS

REPORT OF COMMISSION OF INQUIRY—STATEMENT OF MINISTER

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address an

issue of great importance, the report of the Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals.

[Translation]

At the outset, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the government and all Canadians to express our sincere appreciation for the important contribution that has been made by the Commission. Because of the dedication and efforts of the honourable Justice Deschênes and those who assisted him in his work, the resolution of the difficult problem of war criminals has been brought much closer.

The problem of war criminals has been of serious concern to Canadians, and to the entire world from the time when it first became clear during World War II that crimes of unprecedented scope had been perpetrated. In order to ensure that those guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity were tried and punished, the Nuremberg war crimes trials were held. As a result many major war criminals were tried, convicted and promptly punished.

[English]

It should be remembered that under its War Crimes Act, Canada also conducted war crimes trials from 1946 to 1948. One hundred and seventy-one cases of crimes against members of the Canadian Armed Forces were investigated and seven individuals were found guilty of war crimes.

In the 1950s, as individuals and nations decided to put the trauma and horror of World War II behind them, the active pursuit of war criminals became much less of a priority in many countries.

Strong public attention did not focus on this problem again until the 1970s when suggestions emerged that not all war criminals had been identified and convicted by earlier processes. That alleged war criminals might have found refuge here became clear with the arrest and extradition of Helmut Rauca from Canada to West Germany.

Reports during the early 1980s suggested that the number of war criminals in Canada was in the area of 2,000 to 3,000 and could reach as high as 6,000. There were claims made that Josef Mengele, notorious for brutal and inhuman medical experiments, had come or attempted to come to Canada. As these accounts persisted, it became increasingly apparent that the Canadian Government should take action to resolve old uncertainties and to see that the interests of justice were served. However, the absence of clear information on the scope of the problem and any consensus among legal authorities on appropriate remedies were impediments to decisive action. It is a substantial accomplishment of this Government that, despite