

*International Relations*

There is no doubt in my mind, as one who has the responsibility of trying to deal with the issue of refugees and how to cope with them domestically, that many of the answers and many of the programs and policies we have in place have not been adequate. Yet we should be careful not to destroy what is in place by outright condemnation. We do have the United Nations High Commission on Refugees which this year has a budget of close to \$500 million, with close to 1,700 personnel in its operation, which commission is strongly supported by Canada. We are one of the major contributors to that commission and we support its work and activities. They provide worldwide services, whether in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Somalia, Eritrea, the Horn of Africa or Southeast Asia.

The commission is there to provide a basic service, but what is oftentimes missing is the political answer to some of the root causes of the refugee issue. It is not a problem that can be solved by one country alone. We make a serious mistake to think that by climbing on the barricades and beating our breasts we will solve the problem of the refugees. It must be solved in co-operation and co-ordination with other like minded countries. It must be solved as part of the North-South dialogue. It must be a solution jointly arrived at by all countries, rich and poor alike, because it is a problem we share equally. No one is immune from dealing with the problem of refugees around the world.

However, I believe that we do have a particular role to play because of our traditions and our recent history. We have a country which has developed a reputation, going back to the Second World War, for having a strong humanitarian and compassionate feeling for those who are displaced and homeless. This reputation has stood us in good stead. It is a base upon which we can build a reputable set of initiatives for others to follow. I believe this policy has been supported by all political parties and by all groups. It is not a partisan issue; it is not one in which one should make political points. We all agree upon the necessity of the country developing political moves and initiatives to bring together the different countries of the world as part of the dialogue concerning the changing conditions of refugees around the world.

● (1700)

We have attempted within our country not only to go beyond the question of simple intake, but to try to demonstrate to other countries that we can develop a fairly rational and comprehensive plan dealing with refugees. Now we have an annual refugee program which we table in Parliament, and hon. members should recognize that it has become a worldwide refugee program. It is not simply a reactive program; it is not simply set up to react to crises. We have set target levels for Southeast Asia, Africa, eastern Europe and Latin America.

It is important for hon. members who have asked what we are doing in Central and Latin America to realize that under our refugee program last year we doubled the target. We have now set as a level close to 1,000 refugees coming from that area. Furthermore, we have adopted a number of initiatives within Central and South America in the last year to demon-

strate our commitment. We offered to take in 300 Cuban refugees, even though our country was not an area to which they were particularly anxious to come because of the lack of strong contacts and roots. We have developed a major program for the resettlement of Haitian refugees this fall in co-operation with the Quebec government. Recently we adopted special measures to deal with Salvadoreans. These measures go substantially beyond those of most other countries.

I want to point out to hon. members that our decision on the Salvadorean refugee situation was made in very close consultation with the United Nations. The first priority of the United Nations is the necessity to provide for settlement within the immediate problem area. The advice we received from the United Nations was that until the problem clarified, until there was some sense of a political arrangement for settlement, it was not encouraging large-scale resettlement into host countries. Even with that measure we were prepared to relax the requirements for Salvadoreans who were in Canada, who had relatives here, or who were being displaced from other countries and had nowhere to go. We offered them asylum in Canada.

It is not fair for certain members to suggest that we have been blind and irresponsible in the area of Central America when it comes to refugees. We have been taking initiatives as they should be taken, in constant co-operation with the United Nations and with other countries. It is that basic principle upon which we should develop new initiatives in the international arena.

One problem which all countries will have to face is the issue of the definition of "refugee". The old definition of someone who is escaping for fear of political persecution no longer applies to the vast thousands of refugees who escaped from Cuba. In many cases they are escaping from countries where poverty is of a severe and tragic proportion. Are they refugees, or are they simply people who are driven by an enormous desire to escape from want and use the refugee route as a way to get around normal immigration practices? It is clear that we must establish different definitions and rules to apply to the definition of "refugee" in the world today.

The Secretary of State for External Affairs has begun such discussions. Certainly we will have an opportunity within the next year during the North-South dialogues, summit meetings and Commonwealth meetings, to use further our influence with other countries such as the United States, Australia and West Germany which provide the other major areas of host support and resettlement so that they will engage in a discussion about the general issue of refugee problems.

We have another important opportunity as Canadians. Not only do we have the opportunity to build upon our past reputation, but we can build upon the immediate experience which came our way as a consequence of one of the most fascinating and rewarding experiences through which the country has gone; that is, the large movement of Southeast Asian refugees. Approximately 60,000 people coming in over 18 months is a large swallow. It takes extraordinary efforts at