

category, which is mainly people from the Caribbean Islands. Someone from Pakistan, South Africa, South America or the Middle East who does not speak English is going to have to wait.

I have people coming to my office who have been waiting to be reunited with their families for four, six, and eight years. Yet this government is doing nothing else but saying: "Tough luck. We are going to put you on the back-burner".

The Toronto office will be able to handle 7,000 hearings over the next year. That is working full tilt every day, working straight ahead and that is dealing only with English speaking cases.

The minister's officials are overworked. They work late in the evening, on weekends, on long weekend and on holidays. They say: "We are trying to do whatever we can in order to cope." They are human beings and they can see clearly that these other human beings have to be united with their family. They have within them some humanity, but the humanity should be with the minister and her officials.

Clearly the department has failed. It has failed Canadians and it has failed these people who are coming to Canada seeking refuge.

In the summer of 1987, when a boatload of Sikhs landed on the coast, the Prime Minister declared it an emergency and recalled Parliament. These people were doing nothing else but seeking refuge in Canada. We have 80,000 of them in Canada right now. Departmental officials scrapped the old legislation. They said that it was not working. They introduced new legislation which was supposed to clear this backlog by September 1991. Then they extended it to January 1992. This practice or what this department is grossly unfair, especially to the people who do not speak English, the non-English speaking refugees. A lot of them have taken up different methods. They are depressed. They have contemplated committing suicide. A lot of them are saying: "I cannot stand it any more. I am going to go back home." I know cases of Ahmadis refugees from Pakistan who came to this country. I spoke to the minister's officials and warned them that a man was going to leave and go back to Pakistan. Do you believe, Madam Speaker, that they did not react? They could not care less if somebody was

going to go back and face uncertainty or prosecution. Clearly they could have moved up his hearing. This man was at his wit's end. He was ready to commit suicide. He had not seen his family for eight years, and he went back. I found out that he ended up in jail as soon as he went back.

• (1805)

It is not only that, but we clearly see from the Auditor General that this department is abysmal. I quote:

The system was extremely prone to large-scale abuses and became overloaded by a growing number of claims that compounded existing delays.

It continues:

Changes had either not been implemented or were not operating as intended. The number of claims greatly surpassed the capacity of the system.

The Auditor General clearly states:

The backlog clearance program will cost more than estimated.

When will this minister finally realize that the system has failed? When will she do something about it? We need results, and we need them today.

Mr. Rob Nicholson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to expand on the reply given by the Minister of State for Employment and Immigration to the member for Scarborough—Agin-court on October 12, 1990.

As of October 26, more than 54 per cent of the backlog of 85,000 cases had been opened and 31 per cent had been decided. The time has now arrived, as everyone knew it would, to begin processing claimants from Caribbean countries. Any suggestion that this or any other group has been singled out for special attention is simply wrong.

Any grouping of claimants from a single language group is made purely for reasons of efficiency. It is not a departure from the principles guiding the backlog process. For example, to maximize operational efficiency, sometimes panel hearings are scheduled according to language based upon the availability of interpreters. If the hon. member wants us to forget about efficiency, he should say so. His party has had a long history in that regard.