

Supply

● (1250)

As Minister of State for Immigration I take those kind of charges personally. I can tell you that a second generation Canadian from Montreal, whose origin is Jewish and east European, whose family and himself would probably not be alive today were it not for coming to Canada, does not act out of motives of prejudice or racism, and does not serve in a Government in any way whatsoever influenced by such feelings.

Let there be no doubt that this Government's commitment to Canada's long and honourable tradition of refugee humanitarian assistance is 100 per cent solid. Our Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and our Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) have played leading roles in the western community, at the UN, in the Commonwealth, and other bodies, in championing human rights. They have been adamant and insistent that no compromise can be made when it comes to the dignity of man. They have argued compellingly that ideology means little to an empty stomach or body wasted through illness and disease.

Our international relief and development aid is among the most generous of all nations, some \$2.2 billion in the last fiscal year. Such aid is being directed with ever better management and sensitivity to local needs. It is making a real contribution to the elimination of those root causes which ultimately create the refugee.

As I said before, since 1945 Canada has welcomed over 500,000 refugees. In 1986 the people of Canada were awarded the Nansen Medal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for this commitment. That was the first time a country was so honoured. However, our work has not ended. We know that. We are but one country and this is a global problem.

The UN's approach to solving the world-wide refugee problem, an approach that Canada fully endorses, is threefold. First, the best option for some is to voluntarily return to their homeland when peace is re-established. A second option is local resettlement; and third, for a very limited number of refugees, resettlement in third countries.

Canada, as a signatory to the Geneva Convention, supports this approach. First, we make generous cash contributions through the Department of External Affairs and CIDA to international humanitarian agencies, including the Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, exceeding \$50 million in 1986-87. We provide food aid to countries for assistance to refugees, the total value exceeding \$16 million.

For those who can only be helped through resettlement, Canada is second only to the U.S. In 1987 we will resettle 12,000 refugees with financial assistance from the federal Government. Voluntary agencies and individuals sponsored 4,000 refugees in 1986. We anticipate 5,000 in 1987.

The Government helps match sponsors and refugees and provides travel loans. Sponsored refugees can access federal

language or occupational training. These resettlement efforts are complemented by a federal government fund of \$90 million for transportation loans and federal assistance of \$110 million to individuals for adjustment assistance and language training in 1986-87. In addition, we provide \$4.4 million in grants to immigrant and refugee aid groups for settlement and adaptation in 1986-87. We must also support international efforts in solving the refugee problem while meeting our convention obligations through our refugee determination process. It is designed to help those who arrive looking for protection and who have nowhere else to go.

The Bill that my colleague, the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Bouchard), tabled last week proposes a new streamlined refugee determination system to replace the process that has become bogged down. The system we have now cannot respond effectively to genuine refugees who need our protection. This new system guarantees that every refugee claimant will be seen by a member of the refugee board. The proposed system ensures that no genuine refugee will be returned to a country where he or she may face persecution. It also ensures that refugee claims will be processed fairly and quickly. It will now take only months to process a claim, not years.

[Translation]

The Bill provides for the creation of an independent agency: the Immigration and Refugee Board. This agency will consist of two divisions: an Appeal Division, dealing with immigration matters and a Refugee Division which will deal exclusively with claims for refugee status. Members will be selected for their competence in refugee matters.

The new process provides a number of safeguards for the individual, such as the right to counsel. Legal counsel will be provided if necessary. A list of safe third countries will be drawn up by Cabinet and the new Refugee Division will consist of members with special training in refugee matters.

The new Division will also have the resources to expedite the processing of claims, toward the obvious benefit of refugees who need our protection. Of course, all claimants will have the right to appeal to the Federal Court on questions of law.

[English]

It offers fair and thorough consideration of all claims. There will be an informed and independent decision up front to determine the need for a full hearing of the claim. This will be accomplished through the creation of an independent refugee board. Its expert members will see every claimant.

It will also be able to respond effectively to abuse by quickly removing those who do not need Canada's protection. People with refugee status elsewhere and people arriving from safe third countries who had a reasonable opportunity to claim protection will be returned to those countries. People with no arguable basis for their claims will be returned to their country of origin. A unanimous decision is required to remove these people. This means Canada will be able to concentrate on helping those who have no other options in seeking protection.