

Oral Questions

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, once again this has been constantly in the forefront of our discussions internationally, both at the UN and in the European Community. As monitors of the potential ceasefire in Yugoslavia, we are very much a part of what is going on, both through the European Community and the WEU.

Certainly we are prepared to raise the issue of an airlift of goods for humanitarian reasons and to try everything that we can to ensure that things get through to the people in this really tragic situation in Dubrovnik.

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the same minister.

Mr. Anton Kikas, a Toronto businessman and Canadian citizen has been under arrest in Belgrade, Yugoslavia since August 31 of this year. As of last night, no charges have been laid against him by either the civil or the military authorities. The military courts holding Mr. Kikas refuse to release him or to begin legal proceedings against him.

We are talking about a Canadian civilian who is being held by military authorities. What is the Canadian government doing to protect Mr. Kikas' rights?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, at Mr. Kikas' personal request he has claimed the provisions of privacy and has specifically requested of the Canadian government and others that his case not be discussed publicly by anybody. Our consulate is in touch with Mr. Kikas and is also in touch with the Yugoslavian authorities in an attempt to protect the rights of a Canadian in another country. Beyond that it is not possible for me to comment at the request of Mr. Kikas himself.

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to Mr. Kikas' counsel. What Mr. Kikas asked is that counsel address all issues in the press and that was the extent of his request. I add again that Mr. Kikas has been held for 60 days without charges. That surely is unreasonable.

Will the minister press the Yugoslav authorities today for an immediate release of Mr. Kikas? Such release is already authorized under Yugoslav law.

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I would assume that Mr. Kikas' request for privacy should apply to other members of this House besides myself and that we respect that request on his part. I think it is most appropriate to address inquiries through his lawyer. Beyond that, once again I have no further comment.

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REFUGEES

Mr. Bill Attewell (Markham—Whitchurch—Stouffville): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

On September 30, the Canadian chairman of a south Asian community wrote to the minister making a one time request to sponsor about 400 of their co-religionists who have been stranded for years in New Delhi, far away from their homeland. The committee has also tried to assist these desperate refugees through various Canadian church organizations and NGOs. Sadly to date only a small number of Afghan Ismailis have been successfully sponsored.

Does the minister really understand the serious plight of these refugees and will he give the utmost priority to the request to include them in the 1992 refugee cycle which I think he is announcing today?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's concern. I can assure him that we are always prepared to help sponsors seeking to bring convention refugees to Canada.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, and as members of the House know, we work very closely with the UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and we will continue to do so.

I must tell the hon. member, however, that the UNHCR is encouraging repatriation for this group and not third country resettlement. Of course we are always prepared to consider individual cases.

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CANADA—U.S. FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Mr. Speaker, I would like to return to the Secretary of State for External Affairs on the matter of the shredding