

In 1981, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in recognition of its outstanding humanitarian work for refugees. We all applauded this decision and the worthiness of the recipient. However, the fact that this is the second time in thirty years the UNHCR has been awarded this prize points to a disturbing fact. Not only has the refugee problem remained all this time, but it has in recent years worsened significantly. We are faced with a daily human tragedy of ten million refugees around the globe. Refugee situations, diverse and complex in nature, afflict every continent. The common denominator to this appalling situation is the misery of the women, men and children. They are the unfortunate victims of invasion, civil war, human rights violations and natural disaster.

Apart from the refugees' plight -- alone sufficient to cause great concern -- the situation has seriously undermined the social, economic and political stability of many developing countries and regions to which the refugees have fled. That these countries can ill-afford this, is evident to all. It is a bleak and discouraging picture that, frankly, shows every sign of continuing into the future.

In the face of this complex and serious international humanitarian problem, concerned Canadians may well ask: What is the response of the Government of Canada to this problem? I should like, therefore, to address this question in the light of the international ramifications of this problem for Canada's foreign policy. In doing so, I should like to indicate the active and comprehensive nature of Canada's response and the mechanics of its formulation. More specifically, I wish to deal with such questions as humanitarian aid, and the causes of refugee situations, particularly human rights violations. I do not propose to deal with the refugee determination process or re-settlement, as these are already being discussed in depth at this conference.

The refugee problem is of major interest to Canada for two reasons, both of which form a fundamental part of our foreign policy: first, our traditional humanitarian policy towards disadvantaged people; and secondly, our interest in an international order that is stable and just. These two policies are buttressed by the moral support of Canadians generally.

Canada's response to the refugee situation covers wide-ranging government activities which deal with all aspects of the refugee issue. We play an active and leading role internationally through resettlement, humanitarian assistance, support for multilateral institutions and initiatives in United Nations fora. Within Canada, the Immigration Act of 1976 forms the basis of our obligation, under the 1951 UN Convention, to protect bona fide refugees.