

# Refugees: A crisis



Refugees offloading in Australia, one of the leading refugee accepting countries in the world. The other? New Zealand.

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Refugee, a word that we have heard so much in our media, especially after the landing of the 174 east Indians at the shores of N.S. on July 12, 1987. After the weather, it was the main topic of discussion for many people. Emotions were high. The public opinion was divided; some held banners that said "Trash, go home" while others gave them water and food. Some people had already made up their minds and issued a verdict concerning the matter - most were really confused. The question was should Canada close its door on foreigners, either immigrants or refugees? Should they be allowed to stay or should they be shipped back home? Parliament Hill was also divided over this issue.

It's only fair that before we make up our own minds, we should know more about the matter, and then decide.

## Definition

The definition for refugees that was adopted by United Nations was, "Refugees are people who flee their homeland because they fear persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. Once *outside* their country, these people are no longer able or willing to avail themselves of the protection of their country." The problem with this definition is that a person has to step outside the political borders of his/her own country to be considered a refugee. People who escape from a war zone, but remain within the political boundaries of their country are referred to as "displaced". Being displaced within your own country could mean a direct danger to you and your family, in that you have no protection from or in your own country.

## Source

The number of refugees world wide has increased from ten to twelve million in about a year. This increase reflects the continuous unrest in the Third World countries such as Central America, Southern Africa, East Africa, Afghanistan, and Southeast Asia, which have been the main source of refugees.

## Transit

Many times after a civil war, people flee their country to a bordering one, and end up in a refugee camp. Some of these camps are behind barbed wire (Hong Kong), others are vulnerable to attacks from their original country (Southern Africa). In most camps life is unbearable, filled with agony and despair. Refugees wait there for the mercy of God, and hope that mankind will help them.

As most refugees leave their country in a rush, many arrive with no documents. While refugees stay in these camps life continues, they trade, marry and give birth. Many children are born in these camps and that is all they know of the world. They may grow up - if they are lucky enough to survive through the diseases - looking to the world through a dark glass. Their parents look for the day that may carry the good news of the end of the struggle back home so that they can return and start again, or they may be lucky enough and one of the first world countries pick them up for resettlement. For a refugee to qualify to be chosen for resettlement in the first world countries, they have to meet certain criteria such as health, education and security clearance. Those who meet this criteria are usually the elite class, thus leaving behind the sick and the illiterate having robbed them of their teachers, nurses, etc.



Laotian refugees at Phanat Nikhom Centre, Thailand.

"... looking to the world through a dark glass."

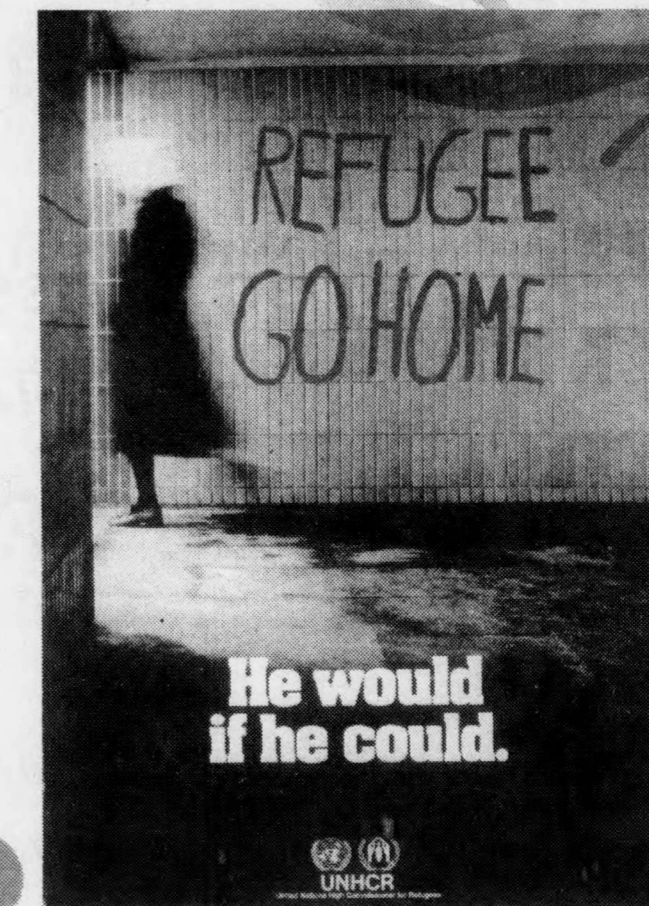
## Destination

Once the lucky refugees are accepted for resettlement in another country, they pass through orientation classes, in which they are told what to expect and what not to expect. They usually have culture shock upon arrival to the designated country. These new immigrants usually arrive with nothing, not even the appropriate clothes. The host country with a local network of organizations such as churches and non-governmental organizations try, to the best of their knowledge, to help in the integration process of the refugee in the society.



Afghan refugees at Zangai Panai camp, Malakand, Pakistan.

There is not enough money to supply the needs ...



He would  
if he could.

But he can't . . . So help him

## Responsibilities

The refugee problem is not hopeless unless we think so. Refugees are people like all of us, they have the right to life. Refugees would like to have your problems. They have no country to protect them, nor an embassy to look after their affairs. Most of them are wanted to stand unfair trials in their homeland.

World opinion is a powerful force that greatly assists refugees in their struggle for a better life. They need many helping hands in order to start living useful and productive lives again. Are we willing to lend that hand?

UNHCR  
of our souls