



Statements and Speeches

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HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND REFUGEES

A Speech by the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Allan Gotlieb, to the Canadian Human Rights Foundation, June 11, 1979.

I was invited by the Canadian Human Rights Foundation, an organization that I hold in the highest esteem, to address this conference on a human rights subject of my own choice. Since the conference is focusing on human rights aspects of Canadian immigration and refugee policy, I thought I would attempt an analysis of the relationship between human rights violations and refugees, drawing in particular upon the situation in the Indochina region.

Displacement of Persons

Many factors can lead to the displacement of people within their own countries and on occasion from their own to neighbouring countries. Whatever the cause, be it civil war, regional conflict or natural disaster, the international community responds to the plight of those affected through international humanitarian organizations. It is Canada's practice to give full support to international relief activities. We have at times contributed as much as 10 percent of the total cost, particularly to Red Cross appeals for immediate and invaluable on-the-spot assistance to victims of disasters.

Refugee Situations

Movements of people of the kind I have just described may, though large in magnitude, be of a nature susceptible to solution in the short or medium term. More intractable, however, are the situations which give rise to the creation of refugees in the internationally accepted sense, that is, persons who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution, have left their country of nationality and are unable or unwilling to return.

Root Causes

The existence of small numbers of refugees from a country may suggest that it falls well below international standards in certain areas in the treatment of its citizenry, though it may have a relatively decent over-all record in human rights terms. When, however, the flow of refugees assumes major proportions, one must look to the root causes. National and regional conflicts may be a factor, but experience shows that there is frequently a relationship between major outflows from a country and gross and persistent violations of human rights in the country concerned.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are at present as many as 10 million refugees in different parts of the world. It is a distressing situation and one, I believe, which reflects the state of human rights in many areas of the world.

Repression and Instability

There appears to be a causal relationship between human rights violations and political instability — both within a country and within a region. The stability of most countries and of most regions is tenuous at best. When a regime severely represses its citizens, it causes a reaction which in turn threatens the country's stability. In re-
