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New immigration policy will shape the Canada of tomorrow

Robert Andras, Minister of Manpower and Immigration, announced on September 17, the establishment of a task force that would study ways to create a new basis for Canada's immigration policy.

"A new immigration policy must be based on a general agreement about the kind of Canada we want tomorrow," the Minister said. "We must define well-founded objectives about how fast our population should grow, how it should be spread between cities and rural areas and among the various regions, and what kind of social and cultural environment Canadians want." His statement follows:

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The present Immigration Act dates back to 1952. It was formulated in the spirit of the years after the Second World War, and its roots are really in legislation shaped by the conditions and problems existing in this country at the turn of the century.

In the meantime, dramatic changes have taken place in Canada and in the world. Not least, attitudes and values have undergone striking transformation. One trend concerns the increasing reluctance of Canadians to have large families. Our fertility rate has now decreased to the point where to rely on births alone could mean a levelling off, if not an eventual decline in Canada's population. Because of the decreasing birth rate and the prospect that we will continue to lose people through emigration to other countries, immigration seems likely to determine, more than heretofore, Canada's population size.

At the same time, we are witnessing the consequences — some good, some not — of population growth. A few of our big cities are getting bigger at the expense of rural areas and even whole regions. Are we willing to pay the penalties of this imbalance? If we want new immigrants, do we want them to continue to concentrate overwhelmingly in our big cities, where excessive and rapid population increase is already a serious problem, or do we want more of them to settle in those areas which need them most? Are there effective and acceptable means to encourage a better balance in the settlement of immigrants, given the general preference for urban living?

Meanwhile our sources of immigration

are changing. The traditional flow from Britain and Europe is slowing down, proportionately, while an increasing number of people from the developing world are anxious to settle here. What kind of immigrants does our labour market, present and future, require; and what kind of immigrants are we seeking in terms of our social and cultural future?

It will be as important as ever to give careful consideration to the impact immigration streams may have on the balance between English- and French-speaking Canadians and the present multicultural fabric of Canada.

Another trend is the tremendous increase in mobility. Revolutionized transportation has lowered economic barriers to people's movement, generating a radical growth in international tourism and profoundly affecting migration patterns.

When we look ahead there are many questions demanding answers.

Can we afford not to grow, or to grow at a slower pace than, for instance, our big neighbour to the South? It seems apparent that we should establish objectives and plan Canada's future in a way that will safeguard our economic well-being, and assure our social and cultural development within a sovereign community.

Labour requirements

There are other questions. How can we reconcile longer term immigration and population objectives with the immediate realities of the market place? An approach some countries use extensively is to invite "guest workers" from abroad to fill specific short-term