

welcomed this vigorous intervention, because public discussion of these issues has long been overdue.

● (1120)

Before this process began, refugee matters, and one could say immigration issues as well, were largely confined within a select community. Today they are in the public domain as never before. Because of that open visibility we have not only the opportunity to reconfirm Canada's long-standing commitment to the world's refugees, but also new possibilities as a people to work together to meet the challenges of such great need in our world.

It is time to eliminate the confrontational debate and begin to create the hospitable environment to continue building an even more generous refugee policy and an even larger immigration program. There has been a positive benefit from the outcry of the recent past. It allows us to focus on the positive contribution that immigrants have made and continue to make to our society. It has also increased the consciousness of all Canadians to the very sorry plight of the refugees of the world and to how much more we may be able to do together.

The country is all mixed up about immigrants, refugees and illegal aliens and we must clear up the confusion to avoid having decent Canadians fearing everybody from abroad. Clearly we are saying no to illegal aliens and yes to real refugees.

If we compare the situation before with what will be, we see that it was chaotic and unfair. We are bringing forward a system which will be fair and will deal with a real world situation. It is very important that we have criteria which are fair for all. We had a system which did not work. We will be putting in place a process which will work and will guarantee open determination to all in need of a secure and safe home.

It is only now as we reach the conclusion of our work in this Chamber that we can see that this is only the beginning of all that we must do. Our responsibility henceforth will be to ensure that this new refugee determination system works as it is intended to work. It will only be through such a system, one which works with compassion, fairness and justice, that we can affirm to Canadians that their sense of fairness and justice and their generosity have not been misplaced. Let no Member of this House be mistaken. The abuses which we have witnessed almost daily over the past year have given many Canadians cause to question their generosity, and not only toward refugees.

The new process will be a disincentive to abusers. Unfounded claimants will be disposed of very quickly. It will manage our resources effectively and eliminate the risk of backlogs and bottlenecks. It will give us the opportunity to remove, very quickly, security risks, war criminals, terrorists, and persons convicted in Canada of serious offences. There will be protection only for those who need protection.

Immigration Act, 1976

We have listened to the great debate. We have been very concerned about exploring ways to handle the situation. Under this new process every individual will be seen and heard by a Convention refugee determination board member. Independent board members will hear all cases in quality, oral, non-adversarial hearings with the benefit of the doubt going always to the claimant. Claimants will be represented by counsel at all stages.

The deluge of false claims for refugee status has been undermining one of the very pillars of our society, immigration itself. That is an erosion which we cannot and must not allow to continue. That is why Bill C-55 is so very important and why I remain ready, indeed eager, to meet again and again with Members of this House, with the refugee serving community, and with the ordinary citizens of Canada to help make our new refugee determination system work, to meet those concerns which remain, and to find the common ground. In return, the responsibility of the Government must be clearly understood. We will help the genuine refugee in need of help. We will not help those who are not genuine refugees or do not need that help.

[*Translation*]

That is our duty, and it is also the commitment we have made, a commitment which has rallied Canadians from coast to coast.

Mr. Speaker, the need to come up with a new refugee status determination process has been obvious for years. Indeed, each passing day makes that need more urgent still.

This year alone we can expect to receive about 30,000 refugee status claims in Canada—30,000 despite the imposition of control measures in February, measures which Members of the Opposition have described as being drastic and inhumane. Mr. Speaker, you and I as well as every Member of the House know full well that the great majority of these 30,000 claims we will be receiving this year will be false. Roughly 70 per cent of these claimants will be recognized as not being genuine refugees. As to the others, a good many of them already benefit from the protection of another country or have had an opportunity to seek such protection.

Obviously Canada must devise a practical and effective refugee status determination system which will enable us to make a quick and fair distinction between a legitimate refugee in need of our protection and all other claimants. This is what Bill C-55 will enable us to do.

[*English*]

It will do that in a way not only consistent with the stringent criteria set up under Canada's own Charter of Rights, but also in complete agreement with our obligations to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees as a signatory of the Geneva Convention.

Yet the Opposition is set to persist. We have been told in no uncertain terms that every obstruction will be used in the upper Chamber to delay this Bill. I do not think the public will