

Cambodian refugees:

Canada provides \$1.6 million to international relief agencies

THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER and Secretary of State for External Affairs, Allan MacEachen, announced in April that Canada is providing grants worth \$1.6 million in response to appeals on behalf of refugees along the Thai-Cambodian border.

The grants are to go to the International Committee of the Red Cross (\$750,000), and to the World Food Program/United Nations Border Relief Operation (\$850,000). The funds will be provided through the international humanitarian assistance program of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Since the events following the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia in December 1979, Thailand has borne the burden of a massive influx of 800,000 displaced Cambodians. While the number has been considerably reduced through repatriation and third country resettlement, there remain 83,000 displaced Cambodians within Thailand and 207,000 living in makeshift

camps along the border between the two countries, waiting for a political solution to the problem.

The displaced Cambodians along the border are living in a very precarious situation with protection and security being a major problem as attacks on the camps frequently occur. Hazardous health conditions, the fear of sudden evacuation, and injury from land mines have contributed to this difficult situation.

Since 1979, Canada has provided \$23 million in humanitarian assistance for affected Cambodians. The grant to the International Red Cross will be used for emergency medical assistance, tracing and protection of the displaced population, and the administration of mobile medical units and two surgical hospitals. The UN border relief grant will be directed towards the most vulnerable groups, providing supplementary feeding, mother and child care, health programs and sanitation, shelter, rations and potable water.

In addition to providing humanitarian aid, Canada has been in the forefront among countries trying to assist in the Indochinese refugee crisis by providing re-settlement opportunities. A recent announcement underlined and confirmed the commitment in this regard.

In November, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, Lloyd Axworthy, announced that in 1983 a total of 5,000 Indochinese refugees would be resettled in Canada (3,000 government-sponsored, 2,000 assisted by relatives or private sponsorships). Further numbers will be taken directly from Vietnam through Canada's bilateral family reunification plan.

In resettlement, Canada's record is second to none. The total number of Indochinese refugees resettled in Canada, as of Dec. 31, 1982, was about 80,000. Approximately half were sponsored by ordinary Canadians, testimony to the humanitarian commitment amongst the Canadian public to assist Southeast Asian refugees.

Canada investigates claims of chemical warfare in Cambodia and Laos

CANADA HAS BEEN CONCERNED about the alleged use of chemical weapons (CW) in Laos and Cambodia since reports of the use of some sort of lethal or incapacitating agents began to be received from Laotian refugees in Thailand in 1976. In addition to the humanitarian aspects, Canada has also been concerned about the credibility of the 1925 Geneva Protocol which prohibits the use of chemical weapons.

To ensure that the extensive reports of the use of chemical warfare agents in Southeast Asia were investigated, Canada co-sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution in 1980 which established an international group of experts to investigate these reports, and a subsequent resolution in 1981 which extended the group's mandate. In March, 1981 Canada submitted to the UN Secretary General information volunteered by refugees to Canadian immigration officials in Thailand on the alleged use of chemical weapons.

During 1982 Canada undertook a number of studies designed to apply Canadian expertise in areas in which scientific data was incomplete. The first study was undertaken by Dr. Bruno Schiefer, Director of the Toxicology Research Centre at the University of Saskatchewan. Dr. Schiefer, recognized as one of the foremost experts on toxicology (mycotoxins) in Canada, was invited by the Canadian Department of External Affairs in February, 1982 to undertake a scientific study on certain aspects of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia, in particular the use of mycotoxins as a lethal agent.

Dr. Schiefer's report is based on the results of a two-week visit to Thailand in February where he held discussions with Thai Government authorities, Thai scientists and Canadian Embassy officials. In addition, he visited refugee camps in Thailand near the Laotian and Cambodian borders, where he collected control samples and conducted interviews with victims of alleged attacks.

His report concludes that events which are reported to have taken place at the time of alleged chemical weapons attacks cannot be explained on the basis of naturally occurring phenomena. Neither mycotoxins nor diseases naturally occurring in Southeast Asia can explain the reported symptoms

of victims of the alleged chemical weapons attacks. The symptoms described, however, are consistent with tricothene mycotoxicosis.

The report serves to answer the many scientific questions that have been posed, particularly by the Soviet Union, regarding the natural occurrence of mycotoxins in Southeast Asia. In addition, the study, which was submitted to the Secretary General of the United Nations on June 25, 1982, identified an urgent need to improve the verification and control procedures for chemical and/or biological weapons in order to determine if they are being used in Southeast Asia.

Two other Canadian reports were submitted to the U.N.: an epidemiological study by Dr. G. Humphreys, Dept. of National Defence, and a collection of testimony from refugees who claimed to have experienced CW attacks.

On December 1, 1982 the Secretary General submitted to the General Assembly the report of the UN Group of Experts pertaining to its investigation. The report (document A/37/259 of December 1, 1982) which makes use of Canadian evidence, was disappointing in that it did not establish, after two years of investigation, whether or not CW agents have been used in Southeast Asia, though given the very real analytical problems as well as certain other sensitivities, this was not surprising.

Nevertheless, the report is useful in that the UN Group records some of the problems which contributed to its inability to make a more definitive assessment, including (a) the refusal by certain countries to permit the Group to conduct any on-site investigations in territories in which chemical attacks were alleged to have occurred and (b) the prolonged lapse of time between alleged exposure to chemical attack and the time of interviews.

These, and other findings, will be of use to the Secretary General as he discharges his responsibilities under the General Assembly's resolution 37/98D. This resolution, fully supported by Canada and ASEAN, calls upon the Secretary General to take certain steps to ensure that future allegations are investigated and that certain support mechanisms are in place.