

Adjournment Debate

that was taken with respect to Chile, and an objective, high level commissioner will be appointed immediately to investigate the full facts of the situation. I have reason to believe that the information that the minister has operated with has not even canvassed the full range of the Department of External Affairs but has relied very heavily on two or three of the immigration officers who, as I have said, are in the day to day business of processing refugee applicants. They are not in a position to give an over-all or political perspective to the situation. It is vitally urgent, in view of the commitment that the minister's predecessor made earlier this year, to extend the refugee program with respect to Argentina, that we do not operate with these gross misconceptions which exist.

As I mentioned in my question to the minister yesterday, I can think of no competent observer who has visited Argentina in the last six months who has not confirmed, on the same basis that a recent article in the *Saturday Review* of books of October 24 suggested, that there is very great terror in Argentina, very largely in the first instance for those who have come as migrants from Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay or Bolivia, and increasingly for some residents of Argentina itself for whom we may well be seeking an oppressed minority category.

While the minister's parliamentary secretary may not be able to provide us with anything this evening than more of the same half-baked information from junior officials, I hope he will convey the thrust of our concern for accurate information and assessment of the real refugee situation in Argentina very, very soon.

[Translation]

Mr. Arthur Portelance (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, in answer to a series of questions that the hon. member has asked previously of the minister, I would add, as the Minister has already indicated that recent reports presented by our embassy in Argentina reveal that the government of that country has adopted a more tolerant and humane attitude towards foreign refugees within its boundaries. It is important to keep in mind that since the Argentine government has ratified the United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees, along with its various geographical restrictions, it only recognizes European nationals as refugees. Some 10,000 refugees, mainly from Chile and Uruguay, living in Argentina as refugees according to the UN definition, are considered by Argentina as simple illegal non-immigrants. Nevertheless, the Argentine

foreign affairs under-secretary has stated that his government does not intend to deal harshly and rashly with these people, even with those whose documents are not in order after the registration program deadline.

Indeed, since this program has been terminated on November 30, 1976, there have not been any mass expulsions of Chilean refugees. The latest reports from our embassy in Buenos Aires show that the Argentine government does not intend to do anything before at least mid-February against people who forgot to register or who are recognized as ineligible for permanent residency in Argentina. Our officials in Argentina are looking closely at the refugee situation. If this situation should change and if expulsions were threatened, in agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, we would consider what additional action be taken.

We do not consider that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has acted irresponsibly as concerns his mandate in Argentina. This mandate has been extended to people who did not always meet the definition of the convention on refugees because in Argentina, housing and survival allowances are available only to recognized refugees. Our officials work in close co-operation with the Buenos Aires office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In fact, the representatives of this office are making a preliminary study of the immigration applications of refugees to identify those who are really interested in coming to Canada and who can meet our selection criteria. We depend mostly on the reports of our qualified and experienced officers on duty in Buenos Aires. They are well aware of the situation of refugees in Argentina and have good contacts with Argentine authorities and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Moreover, we take into consideration the reports published by world wide organizations such as Amnesty International.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat that in answer to the calls of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and as concerns the situation of refugees in South America, Canada has accepted as permanent residents more South American refugees than any other country. As of November 30, 1976, the admission of 5,300 people was authorized under the special Chilean program.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 o'clock p.m.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.27 p.m.