

Consular activities

Despite economic conditions, there was no apparent decline in foreign travel by Canadians during 1977 and, in fact, a significant increase took place in the demand for consular services at 108 Canadian posts round the world.

In Ottawa, the Bureau of Consular Services co-ordinated the consular activities of these posts to provide assistance to Canadians living or travelling abroad. It dealt with day-to-day consular cases abroad (e.g. distressed Canadians), long-range emergency planning, family reunification, applications for non-immigrant visas from certain countries, registration of Canadians abroad, and responses to enquiries from the public. It also dealt with consular reports and statistics, consular conventions and multilateral and bilateral agreements, consular-training and -evaluation programs, monitoring of relevant legislative developments, liaison with the travel industry and advice on questions about consular activities. At diplomatic and consular posts abroad, consular work ranged from the issuing of passports, the providing of notarial services and the succouring of Canadian travellers who were ill, penniless or in legal trouble, to full emergency-evacuation procedures.

Consular assistance

In 1977, Canadian missions abroad reported over 520,000 cases of consular assistance, the large majority of which were routine enquiries, involving the issuing or replacement of passports and help in obtaining visas. There was a significant decline, however, in most of the serious categories of consular assistance to distressed individuals. Fewer than 2,800 Canadians (compared to 3,200 in 1976), encountered financial difficulties requiring the aid of Canadian posts in obtaining funds from relatives and friends in Canada or emergency assistance. The number of Canadians repatriated on a cost-recovery basis was at the same level as in 1976—250 cases.

Canadian posts provided assistance and advice to next-of-kin in connection with the deaths abroad of 405 Canadians. There were fewer reported instances of Canadians being

arrested or detained by foreign authorities; over the year, consular officers helped 833 Canadians to obtain legal counsel and to remain in touch with their families. Besides ensuring that Canadians were not denied due process of law in accordance with the laws of the country concerned, consular officers endeavoured to ensure humane treatment of the accused and maintained regular contact with Canadian prisoners. In 1977, fewer than 275 persons were detained or imprisoned on drug charges, compared to 312 in 1976. The number of Canadians who encountered emergency medical problems abroad last year requiring assistance from Canadian posts was 568.

The coming into effect of the new Citizenship Act on February 15, 1977, was accompanied by a major increase in the number of enquiries about Canadian citizenship. Two provisions of the Act were of special interest to many Canadians living outside Canada, viz. that children who had been born to a Canadian mother and non-Canadian father outside Canada between January 1, 1947, and February 15, 1977, became eligible for a grant of Canadian citizenship, and that Canadian citizens no longer faced automatic loss of their citizenship if they acquired the citizenship of another country. While all posts registered an increased demand for citizenship information, Canadian posts in the United States received large numbers of applications and requests for information owing to the considerable number of Canadians living in the United States.

In 1977, Canada signed treaties with the United States and with Mexico on the execution of penal sentences (exchange of parolees and prisoners). Ratification and implementation are to follow passage of the enabling legislation, which had been introduced into Parliament by the end of the year. Once the treaties are in force, more than 90 prisoners in U.S. penal institutions and eight in Mexico will be eligible to return to Canada to serve the remainder of their sentences. Consular services are to continue for detainees not yet sentenced who are not covered by the proposed legislation.

Under the amended Old Age Security Act, proclaimed as law on July 1, 1977, former residents of Canada with at least 20 years of residence in Canada after the age of 18 became entitled to receive a portion of the full pension at age 65, without returning to