

Canada's Initiative

We feel particularly well-placed to concern ourselves with refugees and human rights because our country has responded generously to virtually every major refugee crisis since the Second World War. We have, since the War, taken in 350,000 refugees and displaced persons. We have also provided significant financing to the UNHCR for this important task. Our contribution in the five years from 1973 to 1978 totalled \$13 million. This year alone we are taking in 10,000 refugees and more through private sponsorship. We have allocated as much as \$4 million for support of the UNHCR and special refugee appeals and an additional \$5 million for international emergency relief for natural or man-made disasters. In addition we have contributed \$4 million to UNWRA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), \$8.5 million to UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and \$95 million to the World Food Program, all of which respond substantially to refugee and other serious humanitarian situations.

Therefore, at the Human Rights Commission this spring we determined to explore on a humanitarian and non-political basis the question of refugee outflows and human rights abuses. We tabled a resolution which noted concern about large-scale exoduses and the human suffering they cause, as well as the problems they create for the international community. Our resolution called upon all states to alleviate the conditions which precipitate such exoduses and to find enduring solutions for such situations. It asked that the Chairman of the Human Rights Commission — who was, by the way, Canadian Ambassador Yvon Beaulne — to appoint a special rapporteur to investigate situations which had led to large-scale exoduses in order to determine possible relationships between violations of human rights and these exoduses.

The Canadian draft resolution was favourably commented upon in debate by a few western states but apart from those, it was received in silence. Countries were silent we believe, because they feared the implications of any such investigation given that refugee situations exist in all parts of the world. It was not possible to bring the resolution to a vote, but we plan to continue to explore it. The draft resolution did provoke discussion in corridors, and may thereby have exerted some moral pressure on the states of exodus.

Other Situations of Gross Abuses of Human Rights

In many countries human rights abuses occur but people cannot flee to tell the tale. They have either been imprisoned, killed or have disappeared. Increasingly, not only western countries but also some third world countries are coming to realize that the international community must in grave situations make its concerns felt. They are beginning, though very tentatively, to support "in camera" discussions, and subsequent contacts, with countries which appear to have serious human rights problems.

We hope that such contacts and subsequent investigations will become a matter of course. We hope that in the longer term, it will become inevitable, rather than exceptional, that the international community as a whole will take up the cause of victims of persecution.