

[English]

Both they and I have so far met our obligations under the law and we must continue to do so. Finally, I am tabling for the House my letter to the Turks as well as a backgrounder on the situation.

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the Minister for the process by which this statement arrived today. I must say that to a certain degree I regret the philosophy that has characterized the Minister's statement because it is a philosophy that essentially gripped her predecessors. When I say I am regretful, I say with the utmost respect that I think the Minister's appointment as the new Minister responsible for immigration was met with substantial enthusiasm across the country by various organizations. It was perceived that the new Minister would bring a refreshing outlook in respect of the immigration policy. However, early in the mandate we still see the traces of her predecessors.

I believe, as do most Canadians, that the situation facing the Turkish claimants and the situation they in turn have imposed upon the Government and Parliament is very difficult. It is a difficult situation because it is emotionally charged. There are human beings involved and the future of young and old is affected. Anytime those variables are put into the equation any conclusion will be derived at through much pain.

I appreciate, as all Canadians do, the difficulty of the situation. We are not making impossible demands, nor are we trying to suggest an irresponsible response from the Government that would jeopardize our immigration or refugee programs. We have not suggested, nor will we suggest, that these individuals be given refugee status. Their own lawyers have concluded that the majority of them are not refugees under the United Nations Convention definition. We are also not suggesting that they break any Canadian law by overstepping or ignoring deportation orders. We may disagree with the law or with the deportation order, but our position is that in the end one must respect the laws of this country.

We are not recommending to these individuals that they camp here overnight regardless of the decision just handed down by the Minister. As much as we believe in the democratic right of individuals and groups to demonstrate before Parliament, we also value and respect the properties surrounding Parliament Hill. Therefore, we believe that that would be a set-back in terms of receiving the compassion this Government may be prepared to offer. Therefore, we are not making those demands.

As an opposition Party, we recognize something the former Minister of State for Immigration recognized. He told our committee that these individual claimants are innocent victims of an unscrupulous network of scams and con artists who have profited from these actions and that these are the symptoms of a larger, cancerous cause. He recognized the cause of these people coming here. He recognized that they have basically sold everything and have nothing to return to. The Minister in her own speech a few moments ago recognized that these

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persons are a by-product of an unscrupulous network of individuals. But what is the Government doing about the cause of this problem which continues to manifest itself? We saw a few months ago the same thing in Portugal. We placed a visa requirement on Portugal, and they moved to Brazil. We put a visa requirement on Brazil, and they moved to Turkey.

We put a visa requirement on Turkey. Where is this problem going to manifest itself now? How many other people will become the victims of individuals who profit from the desperation of human beings? Is it not a responsibility of this Government, or any other government, to stop the racketeering and trading in human flesh? Is it not their responsibility to prosecute, to throw these people behind bars, to strip them of their dignity as they have stripped these people of their dignity?

The Minister said she must abide by and respect the rule of law. We do not argue that. She stated that the Immigration Act must be respected. We are not urging the Minister to show disrespect. We are not urging the Minister to go above and beyond the Immigration Act. Section 115(2) indicates that it is completely lawful and in keeping with the Immigration Act to offer humanitarian assistance in some cases. It reads:

The Governor in Council may by regulation exempt any person from any regulation made under subsection (1) or otherwise facilitate the admission of any person where the Governor in Council—

That is the Government or Minister.

—is satisfied that the person should be exempted from such regulation or his admission should be facilitated for reasons of public policy or due to the existence of compassionate or humanitarian considerations.

● (1530)

This clause is not without precedent. Her own Government last year admitted under the humanitarian program some 27,000 individuals. Under the provision of ministerial permits, which waives all necessary processing because of the circumstances, an additional 18,000 people were admitted. This means that in 1987 alone there were some 43,000 people who were allowed into the country. Why?

The answer is because Governments, including this one, have recognized that immigration questions are not always black or white, that many times there are cases that fall between the cracks. Any Government is in need of a humanitarian stream that will allow it to react compassionately and humanely where justified. That is how we reacted to victims of natural disasters or, as in this case, victims of unscrupulous consultants. That is how we reacted in the 1970s and 1980s when, above and beyond our immigration program, there were waves of different special individuals coming in. Those Governments were open and recognized the dilemma that these individuals faced.

We have not been asking the Government to break the law, to go beyond what is empowered in the Immigration Act, but merely to consider—and not even to guarantee—that the Minister apply the humanitarian criteria that are at her