

PRESS RELEASE



CANADA

COMMUNIQUÉ

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES EXTÉRIEURES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
AUGUST 31, 1968.

CZECHOSLOVAKIAN REFUGEES

The following statement was made by the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, Secretary of State for External Affairs August 31, 1968:

It seems increasingly likely that large numbers of Czechoslovaks will seek refuge in Western countries in the near future. They may well include many of the intellectuals who have taken a leading part in the Czechoslovakian reform programme. There are also reportedly over 100,000 Czechoslovak travellers in Yugoslavia, Austria and elsewhere.

The number of Czechoslovaks who have applied for admission to Canada has so far been relatively small. Our Embassy in Prague has been authorized on an urgent basis to streamline the handling of applications from Czechoslovaks who are able to leave Czechoslovakia. Most of those who have applied have relations and friends in Canada. Other urgent measures include the despatch of a senior immigration officer to Belgrade from Geneva to help deal with applications from Czechoslovaks there who were outside Czechoslovakia when the invasion took place. Immediate reinforcement of staff at Canadian missions wherever and whenever the number of applications requires it is already provided for. This action has been taken in accordance with my statement on August 21 that Canada was ready to welcome those Czechoslovak refugees who wanted to come and were able to do so.

At the same time we must realize that many who might want to leave may not be able to. Canada would be doing no service to them by moves which could lead to reprisals and more intense repression. Concern for the welfare of those who can leave should not blind us to concern for those who must remain.