

*Statements by Ministers***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***IMMIGRATION****TURKISH NATIONALS—GOVERNMENT POSITION—STATEMENT
BY MINISTER**

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, like other Members of the House and other Canadians, I have concerns for the situation in which the Turks who arrived in Canada to claim refugee status, ultimately without success, find themselves.

Last Friday evening I went to meet the group of marchers to explain the Government's position to them. I met them collectively and individually so that they would have an opportunity to ask any questions.

Today I met with their leaders again to explain directly to them my position at this moment and to reiterate once again that our Immigration Act must be respected.

[Translation]

I repeat, Mr. Speaker that last Friday I went to meet the group of marchers, and today I met them again to explain directly my position and to reiterate that the Immigration Act must be respected.

[English]

As Hon. Members in the House know, Canada's Immigration Act provides us with a legal process to assess claims to refugee status that are made in Canada. The process allows for various levels of appeal, all of which have been tried and exhausted by these people.

We recognize that these Turkish citizens were originally the victims of unscrupulous travel consultants, but once in Canada they have taken every opportunity to exercise their appeal rights under due process of the law. Those who remained chose to continue with the process.

The prevention of this kind of unfortunate situation is one of the reasons we have been attempting to introduce new legislation in the form of Bill C-55 and Bill C-84. Bill C-55 will allow the Government to deal more quickly with refugee claims and thus reduce the incidents of people remaining in Canada while their claims are under review, sometimes for many months or years.

We recognize that this is a stressful time and a difficult time, but we must also remember that in reality these people are hopeful immigrants and not refugees. If we allow our system to be abused, those who are in genuine fear of their lives and need our protection will be at risk.

[Translation]

If these people leave voluntarily and respect our laws, once they are in Turkey they can go through regular channels and make a new application for entry into Canada.

As the Minister responsible, I will not hold the deportation order against them. If they satisfy the selection criteria for Canada and Quebec, they will be accepted.

As I said before, these people have had the benefit of due process. They have made use of the various provisions and guarantees available under our legislation. Their claims for refugee status were examined thoroughly and rejected by the Refugee Status Advisory Committee, by the Immigration Appeal Board, and, for those who decided to take their case even further, by the Federal Court of Canada. At each level, their claim for refugee status was denied.

[English]

Under Canada's immigration law, due process is a lengthy process. Complying with removal orders is the last step in the process for these people. I should also point out that some 400 of their compatriots have already chosen to return to Turkey of their own volition.

● (1520)

In considering the situation of these Turks, I am also mindful that today there are some 48,000 persons in Canada claiming refugee status, more people than live in a city in Canada such as Rimouski. Each of these persons also has a story to tell and they, too, must receive our attention and our fairness. Canada has a record of fairness. It has a record of compassion in the treatment of real refugees. It is important to examine this situation in the light of our broader efforts on behalf of refugees.

In 1987, 17,000 refugees were resettled from abroad, 12,000 came from government sponsorships and 5,000, I am pleased to say, were sponsored by private groups who are showing a growing interest in helping real refugees. In 1988, this Government has increased its sponsorship to 13,000 and we expect that private groups will continue to expand their sponsorship this year to some 6,000. It is interesting to note that in 1987, 8,165 of the sponsored refugees were women. Canada contributes millions of dollars annually, in addition, to refugee assistance abroad.

[Translation]

Canada provides every protection for genuine refugees arriving at its borders. Despite its record, the Government realized that its current method of processing refugee claims was inefficient.

Bill C-55 was introduced to provide for a more efficient, entirely equitable and faster process for refugee status recognition.

Madam Speaker, the issue today is those people who were ordered to leave Canada on the weekend and who decided not to obey that order. I stand behind this commitment. I wrote to the Turks to ask for their co-operation and compliance with the laws of Canada.