

Mr. Chairman,

We are convened by tragedy. Though Canada welcomes this conference, indeed urged that it be held, we deplore the circumstances that have made it necessary.

I need not describe the plight of the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Southeast Asia who are suffering -- even dying -- at the very moment that we meet. Those facts are well known to everyone here. They are well known to the Canadian people as well, and Canadians have responded.

My country, Mr. Chairman, has a tradition of welcoming refugees to its shores. Since World War II Canada has resettled more than 350,000 refugees from various parts of the world -- a significant number for a country with our size of population.

And Canadians continue to respond to the call of people in distress, specifically in regard to the Indochinese. From 1975 to the end of 1978, 9,000 refugees from that area came to Canada. Last December the Canadian Government announced that it would resettle 5,000 Indochinese in 1979. Recognizing the growing seriousness of the situation we increased that figure to 12,000 in June. At the Tokyo Summit my Prime Minister confirmed that we are prepared to do even more.

Mr. Chairman, my government recognizes that countries of first asylum must be encouraged to continue to accept refugees fleeing the brutality in their own lands. Asylum countries must be assured that resettlement places are available in other parts of the world. Recognizing that such assurance is necessary, two days ago my government announced that it will accept up to 50,000 Indochinese from this year to the end of 1980. This means, in effect, that the countries of first asylum can count on Canada to accept up to 3,000 refugees a month. With this commitment we are trebling the rate of acceptance of these unfortunate people. We challenge other countries to follow this lead.

Delegates might be interested to know that the programme we have introduced to fulfil this commitment is one of partnership between the Canadian Government and private citizens and organizations. The Government of Canada will sponsor one refugee for each refugee receiving private sponsorship. The response of our people has been immediate, and it has been strong. I have no doubt that we shall reach our objective.

The role of our provincial governments cannot be overlooked. It is they who provide many of the services on which refugees must rely during the resettlement period. We have consulted with them closely, and they have greeted our proposals with encouragement and support.