



# Statements and Speeches

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## THE WORLD REFUGEE PROBLEM

Statement made October 9, 1979 by J.C. Best, Alternate Representative for Canada to the thirtieth session of the UNHCR Executive Committee, Geneva

At no time in the nearly 30-year history of the office of the High Commissioner can the necessity of his humanitarian mandate have been more evident. It is no exaggeration to say that, worldwide, the international community is confronted with refugee problems of immense proportions. It has been estimated that during the twelve months since our last Executive Committee sessions, as a global average, 2,000 new refugees arrived each day in a country of first asylum. The magnitude of this global refugee problem, both in terms of sheer numbers and of human distress, is staggering. It is important to stress that this is indeed a global problem. However serious and however intensive the concentration of the public media on any specific refugee situation, we must never forget that refugees and displaced persons are present in every region of the world and are therefore in need of the High Commissioner's attention.

The refugee question must be considered as one confronting the whole international community, not simply a handful of countries which have traditionally been concerned with refugee affairs. However distant we may be geographically from the regions of refugee outflows, we all share an interest, as responsible members of the international community, in promoting both humanitarian relief for the refugees and durable solutions which will ensure that regional political stability will not continue to be disturbed by refugee movements.

In light of these growing refugee problems, Canada has actively encouraged this past year a much broader base of international support for the High Commissioner's program. We have done so both in international forums and through bilateral discussions. These efforts and similar ones undertaken by the High Commissioner and other countries have had a measure of success. I think particularly of the new financial pledges and resettlement commitments made during the special international conference on the Indochina refugee crisis held in Geneva last July. Further evidence of a broadening international support for the High Commissioner's activities is seen here today in our newly expanded Executive Committee. I am pleased indeed to welcome for the first time to an Executive Committee session the new members who were elected last August during the summer ECOSOC sessions: Argentina, Finland, Japan, Lesotho, Morocco, Nicaragua, Sudan, Thailand and Zaire. It is Canada's expectation that our new colleagues, many of whom represent countries with serious refugee problems, will bring useful experience and an additional perspective to our discussions.

Over the past year, the High Commissioner has undertaken a number of useful and productive initiatives in his efforts to deal with various refugee situations. I believe we can be particularly proud of the UNHCR operation in Bangladesh and the suc-

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