

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON
TERRITORIAL ASYLUM

As a result of a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, the Secretary General, in co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, convened a Conference on Territorial Asylum that took place in Geneva from January 10 to February 4, 1977. The purpose of the Conference was to consider and adopt a convention which would set standards for the protection and admission of persons fleeing persecution who are not covered by the 1951 Convention on Refugees. The Conference, however, did not meet its objectives and at the end of four weeks had completed preliminary work on only five of a possible twelve to fifteen Articles of the Convention. The basic problem was a fundamental difference of opinion between the geographical groups at the Conference, roughly the Western and Latin American countries on the one hand and the Asian and Socialist countries on the other hand. The former group, including Canada, while desirous of maintaining the sovereign rights of the State, viewed the Convention as a means of ensuring that individuals fleeing persecution are accorded every possible protection from arbitrary rejection or return to countries of persecution. The latter group, however, was more concerned with reiterating the sovereign rights of the receiving States rather than those of the individual.

At the end of the session, the Conference adopted the following recommendation:

"The United Nations Conference on Territorial Asylum

Having been unable to carry out its mandate within the allocated time,

1. Considers that efforts to draft a convention on territorial asylum should be continued;
2. Requests the Secretary General of the United Nations to transmit the report of this Conference to States;
3. Recommends that the General Assembly of the United Nations at its thirty-second session consider the question of convening at an appropriate time a further session of the Conference."