

The government recently announced a package of reforms to the refugee determination process as well as plans to clear up the present backlog of applicants. The committee has not reviewed or evaluated these measures. We would only reaffirm Canada's traditional commitment to providing immediate sanctuary for those fleeing persecution while the refugee determination process is completed. We think it particularly important that Canada remain generous in providing sanctuary to Central American refugees that are the victims of repression and violence. We strongly support the government's decision to extend an oral hearing on questions of merit to all claimants.

In addition to its domestic refugee policy, Canada has been among the strongest supporters of international agencies helping refugees, such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross. We commend this policy and strongly urge its further development. Despite its strong support for the UNHCR, Canada has no representation in the senior ranks of the organization. The government should press for Canadians to be appointed as senior officials of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. With adequate representation, Canada should support the UNHCR in updating international refugee programs and coming to grips with outstanding policy questions, such as the definition of 'refugee' under international agreements and the rights and responsibilities of host countries.

Despite the best efforts of the international community, the provision of refugee assistance has occasionally stalled in a semi-permanent situation of international welfare dependency in huge refugee camps. These camps are, in turn, the breeding grounds for bitterness and resentment among the refugees and objects of intense hostility among the citizens of host countries. A promising initiative to avoid these dangers was brought to the committee's attention. CIDA has made a substantial contribution to a project of the UNHCR and the World Bank to generate income for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The project, involving reforestation and road reconstruction, was designed to benefit the refugees and the host country and to be sensitive to the people of Pakistan. Discussions are currently under way for a second phase of the project. We strongly urge Canadian support for refugee income generation projects, such as the one for Afghan refugees in Pakistan, to assist refugees to be as self-supporting and productive as possible while seeking their repatriation or permanent resettlement.

The primary role of this committee is to recommend general policy approaches and principles. It is obviously beyond the ability of any such investigation to consider the many individual circumstances to which those principles apply. But in the area of human rights three cases call out for attention and comment—Afghanistan, South Africa and Central America.

Afghanistan

In recommending generous Canadian humanitarian and development assistance to the Afghan refugees, we are moved by the extraordinary brutality that has caused their plight. The Helsinki Watch Committee, the United Nations Human Rights Commission and other highly reputable human rights organizations have documented the most extreme gross and massive violations of human rights arising directly from the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Commenting on the various reports that reach the international community, Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations has observed: