

External Affairs
Supplementary Paper

No. 60/9

Aftermath of World Refugee Year

Text of the Prime Minister's letter of July 12, 1960, to the Canadian Welfare Council, tabled in the House of Commons on Friday, July 15, in reply to a brief on the subject of the extension of the programmes of World Refugee Year.

My colleagues and I have had an opportunity to complete our consideration of the brief on the subject of refugees which your Council submitted to us on March 17 last.

The results of our study and the decisions which have been reached with respect to the five recommendations contained in your presentation are enumerated below.

1. Your Council recommended that the Government should extend beyond the end of World Refugee Year the programme allowing for private sponsorship of refugee families. You will recall that I announced in the House of Commons on March 17 last that the sponsorship arrangements relating to refugee families would be extended beyond the end of June 1960, the month in which World Refugee Year comes to an official end.
2. Your Council recommended that the Government, in consultation with the provinces, should increase the number of refugee families admitted to Canada with one or more members suffering from tuberculosis, and that the programme connected with TB families should be extended beyond the end of World Refugee Year, if necessary, in order to carry out such arrangements. At the time your recommendation was presented to the Government, it had already been announced that Canada was ready to admit 100 TB cases from the refugee camps, together with any dependents they might have. Announcement has since been made of the decision to admit a further 100 TB cases with dependents, including in this second group some families which may have more than one member suffering from the disease. Arrangements have now been completed which will permit the first group of families under this extended arrangement to come forward to Canada on or about July 18, with a second group scheduled to come forward on July 25, and the remaining group in the first few days of August.
3. Your Committee suggested that the special programme developed in connection with World Refugee Year should be enlarged to include not only private sponsorship of refugee families in camps in Europe, but also private sponsorship of European refugee families not in camps, as well as refugee families in other parts of the world. European refugee families not in refugee camps are already covered under existing provisions for private sponsorship.

Financial assistance is already being given through a special contribution to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to assist refugee families in other parts of the world but, since the main objective of the High Commissioner during World Refugee Year has been to clear the camps in Europe, it is considered that, apart from the special financial contribution already referred to, the Canadian offer to assist the High Commissioner should be directed principally to the primary objective which he has set for his programme.

4. I should like to comment now on the suggestion contained in your brief that the Federal Government should permit the admission to Canada in connection with World Refugee Year of numbers of refugee children, regardless of their origin, under a plan which would contemplate their legal adoption by families in Canada. This is, as you will readily appreciate, a complicated problem, primarily because the exclusive jurisdiction with respect to legal adoption rests with the provincial governments. The child-welfare departments of the provinces and the child-welfare agencies throughout Canada have at the present time large numbers of children in their care and, while not all of them by any means can be considered eligible for adoption under the standards set by the provincial authorities and adoption agencies in Canada, there are, none the less, substantial numbers of Canadian-born children who might be considered for adoption in Canadian homes if standards comparable to those which would have to be considered for refugee children were to be applied in connection with our own Canadian children.

The department concerned has been in touch with the various provincial child-welfare authorities in this matter and has sought their reaction to your proposal. While yet to hear from a number of the provincial governments as to their views, the conclusion has been arrived at that, in individual cases, prospective adoptive parents in Canada may apply for the admission of an individual orphan refugee child, to be brought to Canada for purposes of legal adoption subject to two provisos, namely: (a) in such cases the provincial child-welfare authority concerned shall have approved the application and confirmed that suitable Canadian children are not available, and (b) shall have undertaken to give continuing supervision to the proposed adoption during the probationary period required by provincial laws -- when these provisos have been complied with, arrangements will be made by the federal authorities which will permit the admission of such a child to Canada.

5. I come finally to your recommendation that the Federal Government, in consultation with the provinces, should accept responsibility for providing established public-health and welfare services for privately-sponsored refugee families admitted to Canada under the special programme which has been in effect during World Refugee Year. You will have noted in this connection the results of recent negotiations with the Province of Ontario, which have resulted in an announcement by the government of that province that, while they are not in a position to assist in the provision of transportation costs or the maintenance and care of privately-sponsored refugee families during the first six months of their stay in Ontario, the Ontario government, at the expiration of six months, will provide necessary welfare assistance to these privately-sponsored refugee families, if they should find themselves in need of it.

The assistance being provided by the Ontario government in accordance with this announcement will be that normally provided to persons in need throughout the province under the provincial general welfare assistance act, or other appropriate legislative enactments. In most of these arrangements the Federal Government, under existing legislation, shares the cost of assistance provided.

I am sure you will agree that the announcement made by the Ontario government in this matter will do much to facilitate the working out of arrangements for the private sponsorship of refugee families and, if other provincial governments agree to similar arrangements, it will do much to meet the objectives which your Council had in mind in presenting the recommendation concerning the acceptance of public responsibility in this matter.

In most provinces it would appear that, even without any special arrangements such as those which have not been developed in Ontario, the extent of the responsibility of the private sponsors of refugee families, once they have been landed in Canada, does not normally go beyond a year or two at the most. The Federal Government will continue to work with the provincial governments to the end that refugee families entering Canada will be enabled to come under the protection of existing health and welfare legislation as soon as they are eligible to benefit therefrom, and in this way, with the active interest and support of voluntary organizations, together with the joint efforts of governments at all levels, my colleagues and I are satisfied that we shall continue, even after the end of World Refugee Year, to contribute in an important measure to the solution of this compelling human problem.

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