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JULY 20, 1979

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OF STATE
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AFFAIRS.

SECRÉTAIRE
D'ÉTAT AUX
AFFAIRES
EXTÉRIEURES.



NOTES FOR A SPEECH BY THE
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
FLORA MACDONALD,
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
CONFERENCE ON REFUGEES,
GENEVA, JULY 20, 1979

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.

Mr. Chairman, it is through resettlement that Canada can make its major contribution to relief of the disaster in Southeast Asia. But we also recognize that contributions must be made to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Indochina programme.

At this point, Canada wants to pay tribute to the High Commissioner for Refugees and his staff for the compassionate assistance they have been giving to the victims. We have great admiration for the devotion his organization has shown while working in the most trying circumstances. Without the protection and care that his people have provided, and without the arrangements they have made to resettle refugees, the misery would be both greater and more prolonged. We assure him of Canada's full support for his efforts.

In the past, we have made substantial financial contributions to the High Commissioner's efforts. Last December Canada doubled its annual contribution to \$2 million. In April, a special \$700,000 contribution was made to the Indochina programme. I am pleased to be able to announce today that my government is making a further half million dollar contribution to this programme. We recognize the need; we know the programme; we are pleased the money will be so well spent.

By outlining the actions the Canadian Government and the Canadian people are taking, I hope, Mr. Chairman, that I have established the seriousness with which my country views the current situation. We are prepared, we are willing -- and indeed anxious -- to make our best effort to alleviate the suffering inflicted on so many people by the actions of their own governments. We urge other countries to find the humanity in the souls of their nations to make similar efforts.

But alleviating the suffering is not solving the problem. To lower the fever is not to eradicate the infection. It is the cause of the problem we must address. We must identify the reason for this crisis and deal with it.

It is agreed that we are here to treat the crisis from a humanitarian point of view. But let us be clear about the meaning of humanitarian. One cannot arbitrarily separate out aspects of the problem such as first asylum or resettlement and term them humanitarian, and then dismiss the root causes of the exodus as political. It is no less political to urge countries to maintain a generous first asylum policy, or to provide financing for the care of refugees, than it is to urge the countries of exodus to abandon the policies causing the outflow and the practices that abet it. It is no less humanitarian to demand, as Canada does, that they deal with their citizens without discrimination and in a humane manner. It is our humanity that cries out for an end to this flagrant, this continuing, this outrageous violation of human rights.

Mr. Chairman, we have examined with care the High Commissioner's Note of July 9 and find ourselves in broad agreement with his analysis of the situation and with his suggested plan of action. We believe it is particularly important to emphasize the inter-related nature of steps to be taken. One aspect of the solution cannot be separated from the other. The plan will be ineffectual if the countries of exodus: Viet-Nam, Kampuchea and Laos, do not accept their responsibilities. The international community holds them responsible for the fate of all their citizens. Certainly their citizens must be able to exercise the fundamental human right to leave their homeland if they so wish. Canada has repeatedly stressed the obligation of all countries to honour this basic right.

But the governments of the exodus have the paramount responsibility to ensure that departures of their citizens take place in a safe and orderly manner, and without threat or penalty of any kind. The international community rejects as an unconscionable violation of human rights the attempt to expel or otherwise eliminate any ethnic community or any socio-economic group. Only if the countries of origin respond to these humane and just demands will it be possible for the problem to be solved rather than the symptoms merely alleviated. This must be fully emphasized in the summing up of our meeting.

Mr. Chairman, Canada thanks you for calling this meeting. It is a tribute to your high office, and to yourself, that your call has had so large a response. Canada is doing what she can in these dreadful circumstances. May no country leave this hall unable to say the same.