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CANADIAN ADHERENCE TO REFUGEE AGREEMENTS

Canada today announced official acceptance of international standards for the protection of refugees and of the approved international and universal definition of the term "refugee".

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mitchell Sharp, and the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, the Honourable A. J. MacEachen, announced Canada's adherence to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, to the 1965 Protocol to that Convention, and to the Hague Agreement on Refugee Seamen.

The Convention, adopted by the United Nations in July 1951, is the major international instrument for the protection of refugees. It establishes a common definition of the term "refugee", lays down specific standards for the treatment of refugees in the country of sanctuary or residence and contains safeguards against their expulsion. It does not detract from a country's right to control admission.

The Protocol, adopted by the United Nations in 1967, recognizes the universal nature of the refugee problem and its indefinite duration. Originally the Convention mainly covered persons displaced as the result of the two world wars and in its definition limited its scope to persons made refugees "as a result of events occurring before January 1, 1951" - in effect to persons in Europe.

The Hague Agreement on Refugee Seamen, concluded in 1957 under the auspices of the International Labour Organization, deals with the problem of refugee seamen on merchant ships who, owing to lack of documents permitting them to return to any country, are sometimes unable to set

foot on shore legally. The Hague Agreement provides for the acquisition of legal status in countries which are parties to the Agreement, provided the refugee seaman has some connection with that country, such as service on its ships.

In announcing Canada's adherence, the Ministers noted that because Canada's treatment of refugees is already in accord with the letter and spirit of the Convention, accession does not add any rights to those already enjoyed by refugees in Canada.

Canada, as a major immigration country, has been deeply involved in the re-settlement of refugees. Since the end of World War II, more than 300,000 have been admitted, and these included many who were unskilled, sick or socially handicapped.

Because past policies have for the most part been designed to help solve the plight of persons displaced as a result of events arising out of World War II, almost all of the refugees admitted in the past twenty years have been of European origin. Coincident with accession to the Convention, greater attention will be given to the acceptance of refugees for settlement in Canada from other parts of the world.