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# news release

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## UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES TO VISIT OTTAWA

External Affairs Minister Barbara McDougall and Minister for Employment and Immigration Bernard Valcourt today announced that Her Excellency Sadako Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, will visit Ottawa from May 18 to May 21, 1993.

Mrs. Ogata, who is a national of Japan, was elected to the post of High Commissioner for Refugees by the UN General Assembly in December 1990 and took office for a three-year period beginning in January, 1991.

While in Ottawa, Mrs. Ogata will meet with Minister Valcourt, as well as with members of Parliament and senior officials of External Affairs, Employment and Immigration Canada, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). She will also hold discussions with several government and non-governmental organizations involved in refugee and human rights issues.

In addition, Mrs. Ogata will participate in several public events, including a ceremony at Canada's Peacekeeping Monument, where she will pay tribute to Canada's 45-year history of peacekeeping contributions. She will also deliver the inaugural lecture for the Sylvia Ostry Foundation on May 20, 1993, in which she will discuss refugee challenges for the 1990s.

Mrs. Ogata's visit is particularly timely given the UN High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) complex role in the crises in the former Yugoslavia, as well as in Somalia. Discussions will focus on exploring ways in which Canada can co-operate with the UNHCR toward ensuring the protection of refugees in these and other international crises.

This is Mrs. Ogata's first visit to Ottawa since becoming High Commissioner for Refugees.

- 30 -

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## Backgrounder

### CANADA AND THE UNHCR

The Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1951 with the mandate to provide refugees with international protection and to seek permanent solutions to refugee problems, including resettlement and repatriation.

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person outside the country of his or her nationality who is unable to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution by reason of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Since the Convention's implementation, persons of concern to the UNHCR have come to include those who are outside their countries of origin in refugee-like situations, for example neutral victims of war.

In the past year, through the Canadian International Development Agency, Canada has helped the UNHCR cope with the tragic human legacies of civil unrest and war around the world. For example, it has contributed toward the UNHCR's efforts to provide care and maintenance to refugees from Ethiopia, Sudan and Myanmar, as well as Mozambican refugees living in camps in Malawi. Other contributions have gone toward the UNHCR's efforts in the repatriation of refugees returning home to Guatemala, Cambodia and Afghanistan.

At the request of the UN Secretary-General, the UNHCR is providing humanitarian aid to people affected by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia: refugees, displaced persons and local residents in need. The UNHCR has assumed the lead for the entire UN relief operation in the former Yugoslavia. Canadian peacekeeping efforts there, in co-operation with the UNHCR, have been instrumental in making humanitarian relief possible. Since July 1992, Canadian Forces have airlifted more than 6,000 metric tons of food and medical supplies into Sarajevo, where Canadian peacekeepers successfully opened and secured the airport. Canada's total contribution in humanitarian assistance for the victims of the conflict since July 1991 exceeds \$36 million, including \$1.75 million for the victims of sexual violence. A large portion of this funding was provided through the UNHCR, with some of it being channelled through other UN agencies as well as various Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Canada is one of the principal refugee resettlement countries in the world. In close co-operation with the Office of the UNHCR, Canada provides assistance to refugees through resettlement

opportunities for those who cannot return home or settle permanently in their countries of asylum. Since the end of World War II, Canada has been instrumental in providing resettlement opportunities for more than 650,000 refugees and displaced persons from around the world. Protection for genuine refugees is reinforced in Canadian legislation through the inland determination system.

In November 1992, in response to an urgent appeal made by the UNHCR for protection of detainees in the former Yugoslavia, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, the Honourable Bernard Valcourt, announced that Canada would accept a number of civilians who had been detained in war-zone detention centres. Some 520 people have now arrived in Canada as a result of these provisions.

Canada has actively supported the UNHCR in its relief efforts for refugees from Somalia as well. As a result of the Somali crisis, approximately one million refugees are in neighbouring countries, mainly Kenya, Djibouti, Yemen and Ethiopia. So far, Canada has provided almost \$19 million in emergency aid to support international relief organizations in these countries, including the UNHCR, which are trying to meet the people's basic needs for food, shelter and medical attention. Canada has furthermore provided refuge to over 15,000 Somali refugees over the past few years and is working with the UNHCR to identify "women at risk" and persons with disabilities.

Canada's role in international efforts on behalf of refugees was recognized in 1986, when the UNHCR awarded the Nansen Medal to the people of Canada in recognition of outstanding contributions in providing protection and assistance to refugees. For example, during the Indochinese refugee movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Canada pioneered the concept of partnership between government and non-governmental organizations in the resettlement of refugees.

The UNHCR receives funding from member states through voluntary contributions rather than through annual assessments. In addition to regular funding of the UNHCR, Canada contributes to UNHCR special appeals. In 1992, with contributions totalling \$50 million, Canada ranked eighth among approximately 22 principal donor countries. Overall, in 1992, the UNHCR dispersed \$1.4 billion in attempts to provide relief to the world's refugee population, which is now estimated to number 18.5 million persons.

In supporting the UNHCR, Canada goes a long way toward meeting its objectives of strengthening multilateral co-operation and retaining a strong and active commitment to humanitarian assistance, along with the resolution of refugee problems worldwide.