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D'ÉTAT AUX  
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EXTÉRIEURES.

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS  
BY THE  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,  
THE HONOURABLE MARK MACGUIGAN,  
TO THE  
NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON  
REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION,  
TORONTO,  
FEBRUARY 21, 1982

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CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL ROLE  
WITH RESPECT TO  
REFUGEE SITUATIONS

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In 1981, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in recognition of its outstanding humanitarian work for refugees. We all applauded this decision and the worthiness of the recipient. However, the fact that this is the second time in thirty years the UNHCR has been awarded this prize points to a disturbing fact. Not only has the refugee problem remained all this time, but it has in recent years worsened significantly. We are faced with a daily human tragedy of ten million refugees around the globe. Refugee situations, diverse and complex in nature, afflict every continent. The common denominator to this appalling situation is the misery of the women, men and children. They are the unfortunate victims of invasion, civil war, human rights violations and natural disaster.

Apart from the refugees' plight -- alone sufficient to cause great concern -- the situation has seriously undermined the social, economic and political stability of many developing countries and regions to which the refugees have fled. That these countries can ill-afford this, is evident to all. It is a bleak and discouraging picture that, frankly, shows every sign of continuing into the future.

In the face of this complex and serious international humanitarian problem, concerned Canadians may well ask: What is the response of the Government of Canada to this problem? I should like, therefore, to address this question in the light of the international ramifications of this problem for Canada's foreign policy. In doing so, I should like to indicate the active and comprehensive nature of Canada's response and the mechanics of its formulation. More specifically, I wish to deal with such questions as humanitarian aid, and the causes of refugee situations, particularly human rights violations. I do not propose to deal with the refugee determination process or re-settlement, as these are already being discussed in depth at this conference.

The refugee problem is of major interest to Canada for two reasons, both of which form a fundamental part of our foreign policy: first, our traditional humanitarian policy towards disadvantaged people; and secondly, our interest in an international order that is stable and just. These two policies are buttressed by the moral support of Canadians generally.

Canada's response to the refugee situation covers wide-ranging government activities which deal with all aspects of the refugee issue. We play an active and leading role internationally through resettlement, humanitarian assistance, support for multilateral institutions and initiatives in United Nations fora. Within Canada, the Immigration Act of 1976 forms the basis of our obligation, under the 1951 UN Convention, to protect bona fide refugees.

Canada's overall refugee policy and response is developed through an ongoing process of consultation within and outside government. This process ensures an openness of the decision-making process to a wide range of views on these very complex questions. At the most basic level, Canadian diplomatic missions abroad report on and monitor refugee situations on a continual basis; and the Canadian Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva is in close and daily contact with the UNHCR on all refugee issues. Further, Canada, as a member of the Executive Board of the UNHCR, is deeply involved in the protection and assistance role of the UNHCR. Within the Government, External Affairs, CIDA\*, and Employment and Immigration consult closely and regularly, in order to ensure an overall approach consistent with our foreign policy. In addition to consultations with United Nations and other international agencies, Canada liaises with other like-minded countries on refugee issues. Last, but not least, the Government has frequent contacts with the Canadian public, chiefly through non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

I should like to digress briefly to pay tribute to the fine work done for refugees by many concerned Canadians, whether as individuals or as members of NGOs. They have not only worked tirelessly within Canada, but have assisted refugees abroad in many ways. The views and perceptions of Government and the NGOs may not always coincide, but I can assure you that we value their dialogue and input.

There is no hard and fast rule that determines Canada's approach to a given refugee situation. We generally follow internationally-accepted guidelines. These are endorsed by the UNHCR and other concerned nations, and are designed to provide durable solutions of benefit to the refugee.

The ideal situation for refugees is voluntary repatriation when conditions permit a safe return. In such cases, emergency relief and humanitarian assistance are usually the chief requirements. This is the situation, for example, of Afghan refugees, most Central American refugees, and the vast majority of African refugees. Should repatriation prove impossible, local integration is the next preferred solution. It is often followed in Africa, where there are close cultural and ethnic links among populations. Resettlement is usually considered an avenue of last resort. This is used when a group or number of individuals is threatened with expulsion, forcible repatriation or some other unacceptable option. For example, it was necessary for the "boat people" of Vietnam. I should underline that these guidelines are applied with flexibility. Each case or situation is examined on its own merits taking into account humanitarian aspects, traditional policies and any other special considerations.

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\* Canadian International Development Agency

The provision of humanitarian assistance to refugees is a major commitment for Canada. Such assistance is crucial in most refugee situations to supply basic necessities such as food, water, shelter, and medical aid. In fact, it is often a matter of life and death. Canada's financial expenditure in this respect totalled, in 1981, approximately \$52 million in assistance. Many millions more were contributed through our food aid programmes and support for NGOs.

I would not wish to characterize one refugee situation as worse than another, but the Government must establish priorities based on such an assessment in order to use effectively the finite financial resources at its disposal. In 1981, Africa, where there are presently 5 million refugees, was one of Canada's highest priorities. I attended the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa last April, a conference that brought the problems of African refugees to world attention and raised over \$550 million (US). Canada was a major contributor, announcing \$22.4 million in the form of contributions to UNHCR programmes and emergency food aid. These contributions covered refugee situations in Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, Uganda, Chad, Zaire and Angola. This list speaks for itself in indicating the vast refugee problem facing Africa.

In other regions, Canada also made major contributions: \$7.4 million to Palestinian refugees, \$10 million to Afghan refugees, \$0.5 million to Central American refugees and over \$6 million to relief operations in Indochina. The latter contribution brought to over \$23 million Canadian assistance to this area since 1979. Further contributions were made to other agencies and Canadian NGOs involved in refugee relief.

We have, in recent years, witnessed an alarming increase in mass refugee situations. One need only catalogue them -- Central America, Indochina, Afghanistan, Horn of Africa -- to realize their gravity and widespread nature. In these very serious cases of mass exodus, the refugee problem extends far beyond its humanitarian impact. Emergency aid is therefore not, in itself, enough. It is not enough to treat the symptom of a problem; if we wish to cure the disease, we must work towards preventing it.

What are the root causes of these refugee situations? How, if at all, can they be prevented? The origins of mass refugee situations are usually found in a variety of causes unique to each particular situation, and are often unpredictable or difficult to control. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods and droughts will very often tip a delicate balance between subsistence and starvation, thereby providing an impulse to a mass movement of population. The other main causes -- wars, civil disturbances and human rights violations -- which we categorize

as "man-made disasters", are only too well known. The depressing list of regional and national conflicts which have been in part responsible for refugee situations is long indeed. The mixture of natural and man-made disasters, which so often occurs, only compounds an already grim situation for refugees.

Some current examples will serve to illustrate these factors. In Indochina, for example, a complex mixture of factors has been at play. Years of regional instability and conflict, civil war, famine, the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Kampuchea and their expulsion of a large percentage of their own population have been responsible. In Afghanistan again, we see foreign invasion, in this case by the Soviets, as the chief cause. In the Horn of Africa, regional conflict in an already poor and arid land has been responsible for the terrible situation that exists there. In Central America, conflict and civil war have led to large numbers of refugees seeking shelter in neighbouring countries.

Apart from natural disasters, national and regional conflicts clearly play a major role. Increasingly -- especially in cases of mass movements of refugees -- we see a disturbing relationship between such situations and violations of human rights. Consideration of causes of these mass movements goes to the heart of some of the fundamental problems in the international arena today. Until now, the international community has failed to come to grips with this problem, and with each new refugee situation we have been doomed to react after the event.

The question of refugees and human rights violations is of particular concern to Canada. I believe we are well-placed to raise this matter internationally. Canada has a long and close involvement with the UNHCR; we are a major contributor to humanitarian assistance; our resettlement record in the last few years is, on a per capita basis, the best in the world. Concern for human rights has been an element of our foreign policy for decades. We have been a member of the UN Commission on Human Rights since 1976. In 1981, we were reelected for a third consecutive term, coming first in the balloting.

Over the years, either through humanitarian assistance or resettlement, Canada has responded emphatically to the persecutions of individuals and groups around the globe who have been forced to flee their homelands. The philosophical foundation of our refugee and human rights policies is identical: to bring relief to the victims and ensure their safety, security and basic human needs.

Canada's concerns led to our launching an international initiative three years ago in the Commission on Human Rights. This was at the time of the mass expulsions of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, which had created a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented proportions due to a flagrant and massive abuse of human rights by Vietnam. The initiative was designed to focus the attention of the international community on the relationship between human rights violations and massive exoduses of refugees. This initiative led last year to the appointment by the UN of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, a distinguished former High Commissioner for Refugees, to conduct a study into this question. This report has involved wide consultations with governments and international agencies. It could provide insights into how the UN and member states can together prevent refugee situations from reaching existing proportions by eliminating most causes. It is due to be tabled before the Commission on Human Rights this month and we hope will be a first step towards dealing with this difficult problem.

Simultaneously, at the UN General Assembly, a resolution of the Federal Republic of Germany, supported and co-sponsored by Canada, initiated a move to look at ways and means of improving the international community's ability to avert flows of refugees. As a result, a Group of Experts is being formed at the United Nations which will consider this question, and examine the feasibility of internationally-acceptable guidelines to accomplish this goal.

As the underlying causes of many refugee situations are political in nature, so must a realistic approach to dealing with them take account of political factors. The beneficial effects for refugees of successfully tackling such problems can be impressive. I am reminded, for example, of the negotiated settlement to the war in Zimbabwe, which was followed by the successful repatriation of virtually all Zimbabwean refugees.

Canada, in its response to refugee situations, has not ignored this important aspect. For example, as a member of the Contact Group of five Western powers, we have been intensively involved in negotiations to achieve independence for Namibia on internationally-acceptable principles. Such a settlement would, among other things, permit the many Namibian refugees to return to their homes. To take another example, I attended in 1981 the International Conference on Kampuchea, held under the auspices of the UN. This conference, which has an ongoing role under its President, is attempting to induce the parties in this conflict to negotiate a settlement. We have strongly supported this conference, which if successful, would bring a measure of stability to Kampuchea and thus permit a return of Kampuchean refugees.

I hope that I have been able to give you some idea of the comprehensive nature of Canada's response to the severe refugee problem around the world. As you have seen, Canada plays a major role and is deeply involved in all areas of refugee issues. Whether it be resettlement, humanitarian assistance, political initiatives at the UN or the institutional affairs of the international agencies concerned with refugee issues, our overall response can give Canadians reason to be proud. This response would not have been possible without the moral support of the Canadian people, especially those who have, through their active personal commitment to the cause of assisting refugees, set an example to be followed.

The refugee situation is not, however, one that should lead us to any sense of complacency. As I noted earlier, the prospects for the global refugee situation are not encouraging. Given the magnitude of the problem, there is always more that can be done. It is, first and foremost, a humanitarian challenge to the world, and it is the responsibility of the international community to provide adequate support in every sphere. In this respect, it is regrettable to note that only about one half of the members of the UN have ratified either or both the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol concerning the protection of refugees. This fact is not cause for pride. These legal instruments are among the most important the United Nations has elaborated in the humanitarian field.

At its most basic level, the refugee problem is a complex, difficult and often politically-charged issue. Canada certainly does not expect that solutions will easily be found, nor that refugee problems will disappear overnight. The various aspects of the whole question must be approached realistically if we are to make effective progress. If, however, we examine the human misery and misfortune and the socio-economic costs of the global refugee situation of the last few years, the importance of this issue and the imperative is clear. The Government of Canada remains committed to pursuing its traditional and active humanitarian role in refugee questions and will continue to search for solutions to this problem that afflicts so many millions of people around the globe.