

# STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



CANADA

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## WORLD REFUGEE YEAR

Statement by Mrs. H.H. Steen, Canadian Representative on the Third (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) Committee of the United Nations, on October 27, 1960.

At its thirteenth session in 1958, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution that brought into being World Refugee Year. That resolution, 1285 (XIII), sparked one of the most far-reaching co-operative efforts in the humanitarian field the world has ever seen. As originally conceived, World Refugee Year aimed at focussing world attention on the problem of refugees - all refugees and not simply those coming under the mandates of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. It was hoped that, by stimulating an interest in refugee problems, it would be possible to encourage not only additional financial contributions from governments, voluntary agencies and the general public but additional opportunities for permanent refugee solutions through voluntary repatriation, re-settlement or integration on a humanitarian basis.

### New Awareness of Refugee Plight

The Secretary-General's report on World Refugee Year, incomplete as it admittedly is, gives ample evidence that these objectives have, in a great measure, been achieved. Through their participation in national committees for World Refugee Year, local committees and other voluntary organizations concerned with refugee questions, millions of people round the world have become aware of the magnitude of the suffering and needs of refugees. This awareness has spurred them to remarkable heights of ingenuity in devising imaginative plans to help meet these needs. It has, of course, been impossible for the Secretary-General to report in any detail on these private efforts but, through our discussions of this report, I am sure that a more vivid picture will emerge.

As a result of the interest in refugees generated during World Refugee Year, the Secretary-General has been able to report so far a total of approximately \$80 million contributed, pledged or raised from all sources, in cash and kind, in addition to the sums normally contributed and raised each year for refugees. These contributions come from governments, national committees, local voluntary organizations and

international voluntary agencies that are members of the International Committee for World Refugee Year. Another \$1 million is expected from the Stamp Plan sponsored jointly by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. The major contributors to these impressive figures -- the United Kingdom, the United States and Austria, to name only the top three -- deserve our congratulations. At the same time, I think we owe a special debt of gratitude to others who, despite the hardships in their own countries, have willingly and eagerly made their contribution to the success of the Year. As the Secretary-General reported, "one of the outstanding characteristics of World Refugee Year is that even economically less privileged countries of Asia and Africa, sometimes burdened with refugee problems of their own, made their modest, but generous, contribution to reduce the burdens of others".

In the section of his report on voluntary repatriation, re-settlement and integration, the Secretary-General has noted as one of the most significant achievements of World Refugee Year the new opportunities made available by governments for settling physically and socially handicapped refugees. His generous reference to my government's contribution serves to emphasize our interest in making the most effective contribution possible, not only to programmes of material assistance through annual financial contributions, but to permanent solutions of refugee problems.

#### A Canadian Contribution

As I mentioned in my statement on the Report of the High Commissioner for Refugees, my government took a number of special measures to help achieve one of the High Commissioner's main objectives during World Refugee Year - the closing of the refugee camps in Europe. To mark the official end of World Refugee Year, it contributed \$1 million in wheat-flour to UNRWA over and above the \$2 million contribution in cash and kind it had been making annually to the Agency. This special gift has a twofold significance. In the first place, it will help feed the Arab refugees under the Agency's mandate. It will also permit UNRWA, with the money that would otherwise be spent by it on food purchases, to build, equip, staff and maintain for three years two vocational training centres for young Arab refugees. These two schools, which will provide technical training for perhaps 500 students each year, will add skilled workmen to the economies of the Middle Eastern countries, thereby making a considerable contribution to the prosperity and stability of that area.

In Canada, the federal government has actively promoted the idea of World Refugee Year. On many occasions both in the House of Commons and before various audiences across Canada, senior members of the government have made speeches to stimulate interest in the needs of the world's refugees. As patron of the Canadian Committee for World Refugee Year, the Governor General has spoken on television to encourage the people of Canada to participate wholeheartedly in the activities of their local committees.

Although Canada did not participate in the Stamp Plan, the Canadian Government authorized post offices throughout the country to use a special World Refugee Year postal cancellation during May and June of this year, which read "World Refugee Year - Remember and Give". It was hoped that this would provide in the final stages of World Refugee Year a reminder and an encouragement to the general public to contribute to their local World Refugee Year committee.

### Canadian Fund Campaign

For their part, the Canadian people responded to the United Nations appeal for support of World Refugee Year and carried on an intensive fund-raising campaign. This campaign was co-ordinated by the Canadian Committee for World Refugee Year set up by 43 major voluntary and religious organizations. Some 35 local committees were formed to carry on the campaign in their respective districts. The Canadian Committee carried out an intensive publicity campaign involving press releases, publicity brochures and radio and television spot announcements. During one four-month period, it was estimated that over 30,000 announcements had been made on radio and television in support of the World Refugee Year programme in Canada. In addition, mayors and reeves of municipalities across Canada proclaimed the last week of April to be National Austerity Week. During that week Canadians were requested to deny themselves some luxury or pleasure on which they would ordinarily spend money and to send the money so saved to their local World Refugee Year committee. During that week tag days and other methods of fund-raising were employed in aid of World Refugee Year.

The sum collected by these private groups, which has not yet been finally calculated, will be used in assisting programmes carried on by the High Commissioner for Refugees and UNRWA. Thirteen European camps have been adopted by name and will be closed by various local committees across Canada, using part of the "pledged" funds. The Canadian Committee also hopes to allocate a substantial sum towards building and maintaining for several years a vocational training centre for young Arab refugees in Syria. Part of the funds will also be used to assist Chinese refugees in Hong Kong.

Canadian schoolchildren, through the Junior Red Cross, have also been active during World Refugee Year and, as the Secretary-General mentioned in his report, they have been able to collect \$150,000 to help refugee children. Part of this money is to be used to provide two physiotherapists and a school teacher to serve in Hong Kong for the next two years. A part will be used to provide drugs and clothing to children in Greece and Indonesia and a part will help provide milk and protein supplements to refugee children in Tunisia and Morocco.

In carrying on the World Refugee Year campaign, Canadian committees and voluntary organizations received invaluable assistance and encouragement from the High Commissioner's Special Representative for World Refugee Year, who did much to create an awareness in Canada of the refugee problem. Because of his experience, he was also able to help organize the committees to get maximum effect from their efforts.

I have dwelt on the role played by the voluntary groups of private citizens not merely because, in financial terms, they have contributed the most to World Refugee Year but because I think the part they have played represents a major advance for the United Nations and the high purpose of international co-operation which animates this organization. As a result of the general public's direct participation in this United Nations initiative, the lives of millions, both donors and beneficiaries, have been enriched by a closer sense of fellowship. I have no doubt that World Refugee Year has marked the beginning of a continuing and greater interest on the part of the general public in the humanitarian activities of the United Nations.

In concluding, I should like on behalf of the Canadian delegation to commend the Secretary-General for the report which he has submitted on World Refugee Year. We appreciate that World Refugee Year has added to the already heavy burden of his office. His report leads me to believe that he has gladly taken on these additional activities in the great humanitarian spirit which has always animated him in the past. For this we warmly thank him.

s/c

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Page 2, para. 3, sentence beginning "To mark the official end of World Refugee Year...", amend to read as follows:

"To mark the official end of World Refugee Year, it contributed \$1 million in wheat-flour to UNRWA over and above the \$500,000 contribution in cash that it had been making annually and the earlier special contribution of \$1.5-million in wheat-flour."