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NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS
BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,
DR. MARK MACGUIGAN,
TO THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON ASSISTANCE
TO REFUGEES IN AFRICA (ICARA),
GENEVA, APRIL 9, 1981

Mr. Secretary-General,

We are gathered here to address yet another human tragedy. Nowhere in the world is the refugee crisis as severe as that which prevails today in Africa. Five million African refugees and many more displaced persons throughout the continent are locked in a grim daily struggle for survival. The dimension of the need is compelling: inadequate food, shelter, water and sanitation. The numbers of refugees are increasing daily. Where the largest concentrations are found, their plight is shared by the citizens of the countries which have given them asylum.

I wish to commend you, Mr. Secretary-General, for personally presiding over this important conference convened by the General Assembly in co-operation with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to address these grave problems.

The response of African nations in providing asylum and care for refugees stands as a glowing example of brotherhood and humanity. The Organization of African Unity has promoted and fostered this attitude through political consultations and through the adoption of comprehensive international legal instruments for the protection of refugees.

African countries of asylum have borne an immense burden and one that in some countries has grown far beyond their capacity. Indeed, in certain countries the refugee problem has become the greatest national problem. It overshadows and engulfs all others. In others countries, refugee problems make doubly difficult efforts to meet national development challenges. They compound staggering difficulties inherent in the present international economic situation -- difficulties often exacerbated by drought and other natural disasters.

Mr. Secretary-General, the OAU Conference on the Situation of African Refugees, held in Arusha, Tanzania, in 1979, directed international attention to the deteriorating conditions of ever-increasing numbers of African refugees. It is timely that this United Nations' conference has been called to focus international attention squarely on the gravity of the situation. It is unreasonable to expect African nations to bear the burden without additional assistance from the international community. This conference should at its outcome reflect an agreement that the burden must be more fairly shared.

A preliminary target of \$1.15 billion in assistance has been identified by African countries. The OAU, in consultation with the UNHCR and the other international agencies involved, are making serious efforts to establish priorities. We understand that they have identified as the highest priority providing for

the urgent humanitarian needs of the refugees and for the most pressing programmes for self-sufficiency and local integration. They have estimated the needs as amounting to \$500 - \$800 million over two years. We strongly support the pragmatism of this phased approach.

Mr. Secretary-General, important programmes are already in place to assist the refugees -- under the auspices of the UNHCR, World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and many international non-governmental organizations. These organizations and their personnel deserve our highest praise for the committed and devoted assistance they are rendering to millions of African refugees in co-operation with the countries of asylum. Their programmes are valid. However, they are insufficient so far because adequate resources have not yet been found to permit a full and adequate response. We believe priority should be given to resources to meet the needs identified within the programmes of the international agencies.

Mr. Secretary-General, Canada's association with Africa is close and longstanding. In the United Nations and elsewhere we have long identified with African aspirations for independence and justice. For example, in recent years Canada helped in the process of securing internationally acceptable independence for Zimbabwe, and we remain actively engaged in efforts to achieve similar independence for Namibia. Our strong opposition to apartheid in South Africa has been given practical effect in economic and other measures we have taken with regard to that country. Our concern for the needs of Africa has led, over the years, to a strong and continuing Canadian commitment to African development, as witnessed by Canadian developmental assistance in almost every country on the continent, amounting to over \$300 million, or 45 per cent of our total bilateral aid programme.

We believe that African concerns are world concerns, and therefore also Canadian concerns. Our commitment to the aspirations of the peoples of Africa is manifest. Thus we feel an obligation to respond meaningfully to the major and growing African problem which is the subject of this conference, the plight of African refugees.

We intend to play a full part in responding to the pressing humanitarian needs of the refugees and in seeking solutions for underlying problems.

Mr. Secretary-General, in the past year Canada has contributed \$8.5 million in emergency food aid to respond to this situation. We have recently provided a \$1 million contribution to the ICRC's All-Africa Programme for 1981; we have given grants totalling \$475,000 to two United Nations' institutions providing educational assistance to Southern African refugees, the Educational and Training Programme for Southern Africa, and the Institute for Namibia. I might note that we intend to continue to support these programmes. We have increased our contribution to the UNHCR's regular budget to \$4 million this year, in part to respond to increased requirements for African programmes. Most recently, at the Zimbabwe Conference on Reconstruction and Development, we announced a Canadian commitment of \$50 million over five years. Within this commitment, a sum of \$3.5 million has been identified to support the integration of refugees.

Turning to the immediate future, I am pleased to announce today, subject to parliamentary and Treasury Board approval, that in 1981 Canada will contribute over Canadian \$22.4 million to help meet the needs which have been identified by this conference. Of this amount, \$16 million will be provided in emergency food aid to countries where the refugee problem is most acute namely, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda, and \$6.4 million in grants to be directed to programmes of different international agencies designed to respond to the highest priority refugee needs.

Mr. Secretary-General, we recognize the important role which is being played by Canadian and international non-governmental organizations in assisting refugees in Africa. We wish to encourage their active participation and therefore plan to continue providing matching grants for their projects.

Mr. Secretary-General, I have made a major commitment by Canada to Africa; other countries will no doubt do the same. I am looking for an equally important commitment from African countries to the international community. We are responding to an African problem to which solutions can only be found in Africa, by Africans. We are responding to pressing humanitarian needs. It is for Africans to respond to the causes of those needs.

But if enormous sums must be devoted by African countries and by the international community to caring for increasing numbers of refugees, over time it will be to the profound detriment of important African development objectives. Moreover, to condemn millions of Africans to years or a lifetime of rootless deprivation as refugees is an intolerable human prospect. The root causes of the massive movements of

populations whether occurring in the Horn of Africa, the Sahara region, the central part of the continent, and elsewhere are known. These situations cannot be left unresolved. Fair solutions must be found to permit these areas to live in harmony and to allow the populations to re-establish themselves. The onus of finding solutions can rest primarily only on African shoulders; the international community must give its full support to the implementation of the agreed African solutions.

This conference is only the first step. It must be seized as an opportunity for nations to agree to work seriously toward resolving the refugee crisis that afflicts Africa and other regions of the world. We are here to say that we care, and to pledge ourselves and our resources to an alleviation of the refugee crisis in Africa.