



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 71/27

RELIEF FOR PAKISTANI REFUGEES IN INDIA

A Statement in the House of Commons on November 17, 1971,
by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, the
Honourable Mitchell Sharp.

Canada has shown its deep concern for the plight of the Pakistani refugees in India by the contributions made by the Federal Government, provincial governments and voluntary agencies for their relief in the last few months. We have been concerned not only for the refugees themselves but for the Government of India, upon whom the burden of responsibility for relief falls. It is difficult for anyone to come to grips with the dimensions and complexity of the problems caused by the greatest mass movement of mankind in modern history. These problems have both human and political aspects; it is to the human aspect that I am now addressing myself.

The response of the Indian Government and the people has been magnificent and their efforts to ensure that relief supplies and materials are provided and effectively distributed are beyond praise. India has had to bear a disproportionate share of the burden. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, through whom all United Nations assistance is being co-ordinated, has appealed for further contributions from the international community to meet this great humanitarian need.

To date, the nations of the world have provided approximately \$240 million through multilateral and bilateral channels for refugee relief in India. Some \$125 million of this amount has been pledged through the United Nations system. This amount has proved inadequate to support the massive relief program that is required and to mitigate its adverse effects on the development program of India. Without additional assistance, many of the significant developmental achievements which have been made over the past two and a half decades will be jeopardized and, unless renewed efforts to share the burden are undertaken by the international community, the presence of large numbers of refugees will continue to aggravate political tensions in the subcontinent.

In response to the High Commissioner for Refugees' new appeal and following the recent visit to the subcontinent of a team led by Mr. Gérin-Lajoie, the President of the Canadian International Development Agency, the Government has decided that substantial additional contributions must be made available.

To date, the Canadian contribution from governmental and non-governmental sources for refugees in India amounts to \$6.6 million. Of this sum, \$4.3 million has been provided by the Federal Government, \$370,000 by the provinces, and \$1.9 million by voluntary agencies and the Combined Appeal for Pakistani Relief. It is the Government's intention to supplement these contributions by an amount of \$18 million, seeking the authority and funds from Parliament. This will bring the Canadian Government's total contribution for the relief of refugees in India to \$22 million, coincidentally representing approximately one dollar for every Canadian. Members of the House will be interested to know that Mr. Gérin-Lajoie will be making a statement to this effect on behalf of Canada at the United Nations tomorrow.

In addition to the funds provided for refugees in India, Canada has contributed \$7 million food aid through the World Food Program for the relief of suffering in East Pakistan and provided to the United Nations \$500,000 to help defray the cost of United Nations relief operations there.

The new funds to be provided will be applied in accordance with the needs and priorities as seen by the Government of India, the United Nations, and the CIDA fact-finding team. A part of the funds will be devoted to direct humanitarian relief through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Part will be directed through Canadian voluntary agencies' contributions to relief operations in India. Part will be provided to the Government of India in the form of goods and services.

Different forms of assistance are required. In our view, and that of the Government of India, one appropriate kind of assistance would be debt relief to ease the burden on the Indian economy. The Aid to India Consortium, meeting on October 26, discussed this particular form of aid. To be effective, such relief requires the concerted efforts and co-operation of other major donors, and Canada is ready to meet other donors to discuss this question.

Continued, increased and effective aid is a question of the greatest urgency. It will help to alleviate the suffering of those caught up in this human tragedy. Dealing with this aspect of the problem can also help to reduce tension. But it does not offer any solution to the underlying problem. A political solution must be found which will allow the refugees to return to a secure and democratic society in East Pakistan. I regret that at the moment I see little hope of an early resolution of the problem. Canada once again joins with other nations in urging upon the Governments of India and Pakistan restraint and forbearance in the face of the grave difficulties that must be overcome before a lasting settlement can be achieved.

S/C