

Regional Surveys

Costa Rica

Refugee Demography

There are thought to be 8,000 Salvadorans and Guatemalan refugees in Costa Rica, of which 6,000 are registered with the UNHCR. Only 350 of these are in the camp at Los Angeles . . . which encourages collective participation toward agricultural self-sufficiency organized largely by refugee workers. This camp will hold 1,000 persons when it reaches its capacity later this year. The remainder of refugees in Costa Rica is dispersed in the towns and cities.

In 1981 there was a series of expulsions of Salvadorans caught working illegally. These expulsions were to Nicaragua, the country most refugees passed through on their way to Costa Rica.

Voluntary Agencies

The Episcopal Church has started referring small number of Salvadorans and Guatemalans in particular need of resettlement to the Canadian Embassy. Arrangements to supply selected Red Cross personnel (the only other assisting agency) with the guidelines and documents are in process. Discussions were held with ICM for coordination of refugee transportation from the zone to Canada.

Canadian Policy

Canada's resettlement role in Costa Rica should be expanded to a limited extent. Salvadoran intellectuals, professionals and others from the urban middle class having no access to assistance in Costa Rica and no hope of local integration, and who have a clear claim to Convention refugee status, could be assisted through resettlement to Canada rather than be exposed to the hardship of enforced idleness or re-migration to another area of first asylum.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua is becoming the most favoured destination of new refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala. This impoverished country, itself in the throes of reconstruction, can offer little more than effective reception facilities and a relatively tranquil environment. One small-scale agricultural resettlement project has been launched. Educated people who are not comfortable with Nicaragua as a destination of first asylum tend to try to make their way to Mexico. Immigration personnel do not currently visit Nicaragua and the need for Canadian assistance is probably more emphatic on the aid side rather than on the resettlement side.

Guatemala

There are thousands of Salvadorans in

Refugees in Ce

The Dawson Report in

by Meyer

Many involved in the refugee movement have advocated going beyond band-aid humanitarian approaches to an analysis of the political causes resulting in large outflows of refugees. Meyer Brownstone was invited to comment on the Dawson report. His analysis attacks alleged causes beyond the symptoms.
— editor.

The Dawson report represents a sympathetic and supportive Canadian position on the question of resettlement of Central American refugees. Its recommendations deserve support. But our understanding of the question and our actions need a far broader view unrestricted by, though including, the narrow mandate of the Department of Employment and Immigration.

"It should be noted that Canada is the only major resettlement country now accepting Salvadoran refugees for resettlement."
Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration Levels, November 1982, p.4.

Refugees in Central America are first and foremost created by long-lived, indigenous oppression by ruling oligarchies. The oppressed deny their oppression, ultimately with violence. Where they succeed in overcoming their oppression, as in Nicaragua, regional oligarchies engage in counter-revolutionary activities.

To compound the situation, external economic and political forces have historically reinforced the status quo. In Central America a pre-eminent external intervenor is the United States Government and the United States-based corporations. (Canada has done little to moderate this intervention.) The effect of this is to reinforce the indigenous, oligarchic economic political and military power. This, in turn, prolongs and escalates the indigenous struggle, raises the possibility of regional war, and shifts attention from particularly repressive national regimes in the name of regional objectives. This is the expanding foundation for the immense scale of refugee problems in Central America and their unbelievably brutal character. There are refugees inside and outside of El Salvador and

Guatemala. There are now limited but growing numbers of indigenous refugees in Honduras.

The scale is staggering and growing. There are over two million refugees from and in the region as a whole. Being a refugee is bad enough, but for these refugees there has been no end to horror. They were bombed and butchered in their homes and in their communities, attacked en route to escape to recipient countries (thousands died) and in Honduras, a recipient country, violations have not ceased. All refugees are subject to the prison-like quality of camps, to denial of basic normal activities such as work, to constant harassment by Honduran troops. Many have been forcibly relocated in the haste to clear a war zone in the border area. Many refugees and Honduran refugee-workers have been killed. This process has created Honduran refugees in their own country.

When the Dawson report refers to people in peril, then it is difficult to exclude any refugee — all are in peril of one form of extreme limitation of human rights or another, with death as a strong likelihood.

Clearly, the basic United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) objective of protection and security has not been met despite its international stature. It has been in part almost swept aside by the onrushing regional war, by oligarchic and United States policies and actions. No refugee program, outside of wholesale migration from the area, can effectively relieve suffering in the context of a regional war and the context of recipient countries who are themselves grossly under-developed and oligarchy-ridden. Salvadoran and Guatemalan

In the settlement of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees "of major importance, of course, if not the decisive factor, has been the cooperation and generosity of the Honduran government, without which thousands of people would no doubt have lost themselves."
From *Refugees*, No. 9, Sept./82. Published by UNHCR.

Central America

a Political Context

Brownstone

refugees have run from one oligarchy to another. There is limited human survival in either.

The regional refugee program must emphasize security and development in the areas in which refugees are located. The Salvadoran refugees themselves have petitioned the UNHCR to provide a refuge in Costa Rica, Panama and Nicaragua, and indeed, Canada. Their choice must be understood, respected and supported. The likelihood of achieving this petition is limited and every effort must be made to support refugees in Honduras, in Mexico, in El Salvador and in Guatemala. But first, there must be a rejection and denunciation of Ronald Reagan's obscene statements of democratic progress in Central America. He has pronounced this over the bodies of thousands and the bodies of thousands who will be murdered by his forces of democracy. The people and government of Canada cannot remain silent in the face of this grotesque lie.

The major viable, if very fragile, factor in the refugee situation is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It is essential to focus Canadian efforts on the UNHCR. Canada is a strong supporter of the UNHCR. It sits on the Executive Committee. The UNHCR must fulfill its protection mandate in Honduras, a task which it has not fulfilled in its work in this region partly because of elements of incompetence, of questionable judgments, of succumbing to United States pressure and partly because of its weak status in Honduras. These factors have on occasion resulted in the spectacle of UNHCR officials refusing food and medical supplies and basic protection to refugees who were resisting relocation, and has actually resulted in forced reversal of the flow of refugees back into active war zones. Promises of relocation in rural resettlement schemes in Honduras have a hollow ring. After all, these are the very Salvadorans who were sent back by Honduras to El Salvador in "the football war" of 1969 — conditions are if anything less receptive in Honduras than they were then. But despite the bleakness of this prospect, the UNHCR, together with indigenous and international agencies, can do much to make life more bearable

for the refugees if international influence can cause the Honduran regime to view refugees as refugees, not as security risks, and to abandon its war against them.

The number of refugees the U.S. is proposing to admit for the 1983 fiscal year totals 90,000. This figure includes 15,000 from Eastern Europe, 6,000 from the Near East and South Asia, 64,000 from Indochina, 3,000 from Africa and 2,000 from Latin America.
From *Refugees*, No. 9, Sept./82. Published by UNHCR.

The Dawson report is sympathetic but remains confined to "practical" questions of defining status of refugees, and behaviour of recipient countries (Mexico and the United States). It speaks to the support/rescue of a miniscule portion of the refugees. Canadian perspectives must go far wider in terms of: (1) Canadian resistance to the threat to world peace posed by the oligarchy's intolerable pressure nationally, the oligarchic regional entente, and United States support and intervention on behalf of these regimes and "regional considerations". A continuation of current tendencies can only mean a multiplication of refugees and a compounding of a refugee condition which almost defies amelioration through refugee policies; (2) Canadian direct and personal responses (opening homes to refugees, sponsorship, providing funds) to refugee petitions to be relocated in other countries; (3) material support of refugees inside El Salvador and Guatemala; (4) significant intervention in the UNHCR to increase its protection function capacity in Honduras; (5) rejection of relocation within Honduras without the active participation of the refugees themselves; (6) substantial increase of material support for refugees in Mexico and Honduras coupled with continued strong submissions to the Government of Honduras regarding human rights.

(Meyer Brownstone is a professor of Political Science and Associate Chairman of the department at the University of Toronto. He has made several recent visits to Central America.)

Guatemala because of its common border with Salvador. Canada has a limited role in Guatemala facilitating family reunification of both Salvadorans and Guatemalans with their dependents from Guatemala. Voluntary group contacts in Guatemala have been able to identify a very small number of refugees who could benefit from resettlement in Canada. A procedural framework has been established in conjunction with the resident Canadian mission to ensure that such cases are referred to the visa office in Mexico City on an ongoing basis.

Honduras

Numbers

The UNHCR and other official sources estimate that the number of refugees in Honduras ranges from 11,000 to 20,000 Salvadorans and 1,000 Guatemalans. The number of Salvadoran refugees entering into Honduras is decreasing.

Complicating the question of refugees from Salvador and Guatemala is a new influx of Mosquito Indians who have arrived recently from Nicaragua, bringing the total to an estimated 10,000.

The U.N. Convention

Honduras is not a signatory to the U.N. Convention. Government spokesmen indicated that they respect the Convention insofar as national security allows. There have been a number of independent reports of arrests, expulsions and even assassinations, the trend of which appears to be increasing.

Relocation

Although refugees were initially confined in border areas where camps had been developed and a significant amount of de facto local integration had taken place, the authorities did an abrupt turn about late last year and decreed that refugees would be restricted within a zone not less than 30 miles and not more than 50 miles from the frontier. This led to the forced removal of refugees to a rather arid and inhospitable interior plateau where local self-sufficiency cannot be achieved. The main camp at Mesa Grande . . . at best can only be a holding facility pending the development of alternative local integration projects. Rather than accept forced relocation to this area, some of the Salvadoran refugees have voluntarily repatriated themselves or have left for other countries of temporary asylum.

Canada's Role

Canada's refugee interests in Honduras are twofold. Firstly, as Honduras has an extensive border with El Salvador, it is essential that the border remain open and that refugees be effectively assisted and protected in Honduras if UNHCR policy for the