

1981  
May  
EMMANUEL

No. 1



MAY, 1981

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSLETTER ON REFUGEES

# REFUGE

ISSN0229-5113

## EDITOR'S NOTE

"Refuge" is a term meaning a shelter or protection from danger, a place of safety. Among the Israelites, there were cities of refuge. Merchant mariners over the centuries sought harbours of refuge where their vessels found safety in stormy weather. So it is not surprising that Webster's Dictionary defines a refugee as, "one who flees to a shelter or place of safety". The French who left France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in the 17th century and settled in Flanders and America were called refugees because, in the midst of political and religious persecution, they found safety in a foreign power.

But this is not contemporary usage. A refugee is one who because of fear flees the traditional country in which he lives and does *not* have a home. Whether the reasons for leaving include war, natural disaster or persecution, the contemporary connotation of the term in English refers to someone who is without a refuge, without a place of safety, without a home.

The development of this connotation in the word "refugee" is a frightening reflection of the enormity of the global refugee problem today. For over 13 million people from diverse cultures in a troubled world, refuge is not easily found.

Canada, however, is a country of refuge. In the past 5 years it has led the world in per capita acceptance of refugees for resettlement. That involvement has brought the experience of the refugee vividly before us and has proved our commitment to work toward the provision of refuge.

But since resettlement in Canada is an

appropriate solution only for a small number of refugees, our efforts to provide refuge must include a wider range of activities; for example, supplying emergency food, water and medicine to refugees abroad, or perhaps making temporary asylum in Canada more accessible.

In addition, we face pressing problems in trying to make the refuge we have provided here not simply a place of safety but a new home, where one can speak the language of his community, hold a job commensurate with his talents and training, and enjoy the freedom to hope for the future.

Canada has proved itself willing and able to address these issues. *REFUGE* is intended to help this process by providing information on refugee developments around the world, on Canadian policy, and most important, on the local efforts that can become models to the rest of us in our work.

This sharing of information can only be accomplished if you who work with refugees are forthcoming with your own experiences, knowledge, opinions, and discoveries in the form of articles, letters, announcements and suggestions.

*REFUGE* itself will endeavour to maintain the non-partisan stance so essential to encouraging cooperation. It will publish a variety of points of view. It will have a diverse funding base, including the financial support of its readership. Most important, it has a diverse Editorial Board committed to helping refugees.

I hope that *REFUGE* will be stimulating and helpful. I know it will be if it has the active participation of all Canadians concerned for refugees.

**REFUGE** is dedicated to encouraging Canadian citizen participation in helping refugees, by providing a forum for sharing information and opinion on domestic and international issues pertaining to refugees.



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## BEST WISHES FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

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Canada's special programme for welcoming 60,000 Indochinese refugees in just over a year and a half would have been impossible without the participation of thousands of people from coast to coast.

While the special Indochinese movement was endorsed by the former and the present federal governments, as well as the provinces, its success was assured by the full and compassionate participation of many thousands of Canadians from all walks of life.

This newsletter — initiated by the Canadian Foundation for Refugees and Operation Lifeline — is another welcome effort. It will provide a forum for sharing information and ideas and for coordinating services among all the Canadian groups and organizations working on behalf of refugees; and it will no doubt encourage others to mobilize public support for refugee relief activities.

Canada will continue to accept its fair share of refugees from all regions of our troubled planet. I am sure that this newsletter will be an important communication link for both governments and private sponsoring groups, and I gladly extend my congratulations and best wishes to the Canadian Foundation for Refugees and to Operation Lifeline on the occasion of this first edition.

PIERRE ELLIOTT TRUDEAU

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### A HUMAN TRAGEDY

*By Linda Durno, Manager of Relief and Development, World Vision of Canada.*

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While Canadians were rallying as a nation and individually in response to the plight of the Southeast Asian Boat People, another human tragedy was quietly being played out in the Horn of Africa, where Ethiopia and Somalia have been warring over an area known as the Ogaden. Although geographically located inside Ethiopia's border, the Nomadic Somali tribes have for centuries roamed the Ogaden in search of pasture land for their cattle, the main-stay of their existence.

As a result of this war, as well as a severe drought and famine, Somali nomads started pouring out of the Ogaden into neighboring Somalia by the thousands. Classed as refugees in order to qualify for assistance from the UNHCR, they now number 1.7 million. One out of every four persons in Somalia is a refugee. Crowded into 37 refugee camps, they make up the largest refugee population in the world.

I have just returned from a visit to Las Dhure camp located in northwest Somalia. The reality of the suffering and hopelessness of its people will long remain with me. This camp of 76,000 is the largest in Somalia. Conditions are almost beyond description. Situated beside a dry river bed, the small rounded attels (huts of cardboard, animal skins and straw mats) spread out over the parched ground. Broken, jagged rocks litter the ground and make driving and walking difficult. The wind continually whips the dust into your eyes, ears and mouth. Although the camp is sprayed to control the flies, there is no relief as they swarm around your eyes and mouth.

Ninety percent of the camp population is made up

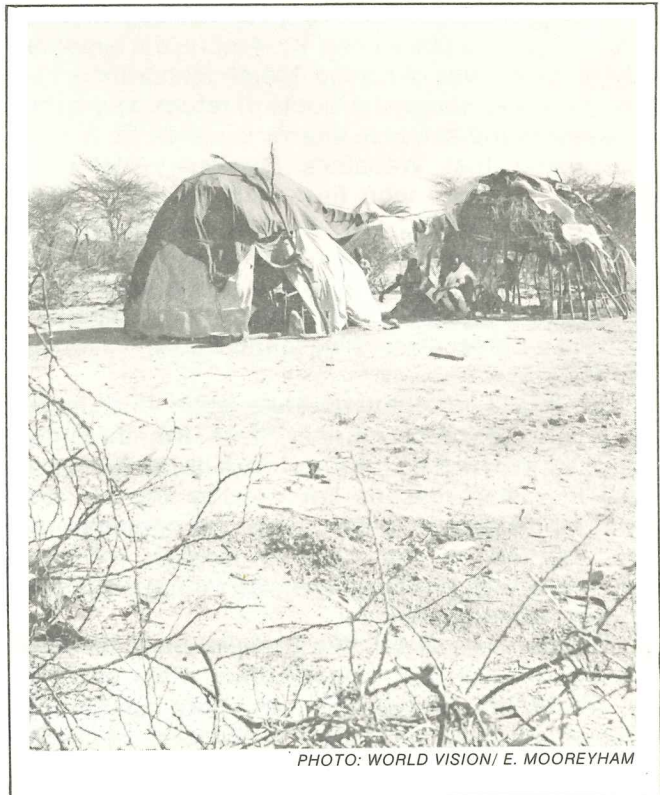


PHOTO: WORLD VISION/ E. MOOREYHAM

of women, children, the sick and the aged. Many walked for days, even weeks, over the cruel desert with little or no food. They watched helplessly as many of their children died along the way. The men have been killed or remained in the Ogaden to fight or protect the few remaining cattle.

The plight of the women is depressing and discouraging. Already in a malnourished state themselves, they must build huts with their bare hands. To gather firewood they are forced to walk further and further as the land surrounding the



camps has been stripped of its squat thorn bushes. Water, what little there is, must be scraped from holes dug by hand in the riverbed, or obtained from one of the eight holding tanks where women line up waiting their turn. I watched again as these same women bent under the 100 pound sacks of maize they received at ration distribution. The maize is so hard it must be pounded, a small portion at a time, in a hollowed out stump. A 3' to 4' hardwood log weighing at least 10 lbs. is used to pound the maize into a cookable powder. But the work does not end there. The meal must still be prepared, and those mothers with severely malnourished children must spend extra hours at special feeding clinics assisting with the extra feedings.

While it is always tragic to see sick children, I will never forget the look of despair on one mother's face as she lay quietly on the ground in her attel. She had hepatitis and was unable to care for herself or her children. The sadness and despair she communicated were apparent enough in spite of the language barrier.

Our World Vision medical team is working long hours in oppressive heat with little relief. As I assisted in a clinic one afternoon I experienced first hand the burden of responsibility these nurses carry. A young woman, beautiful and tall, brought her eight day old baby to us. Is it unkind to say that a tiny baby looks like a scrawny old man? Perhaps, but that is the truth. Anne, our nurse, looked at me and said, "She won't make it." I didn't want to hear that but that too was likely the truth. Then Anne had to decide whether or not to administer an injection

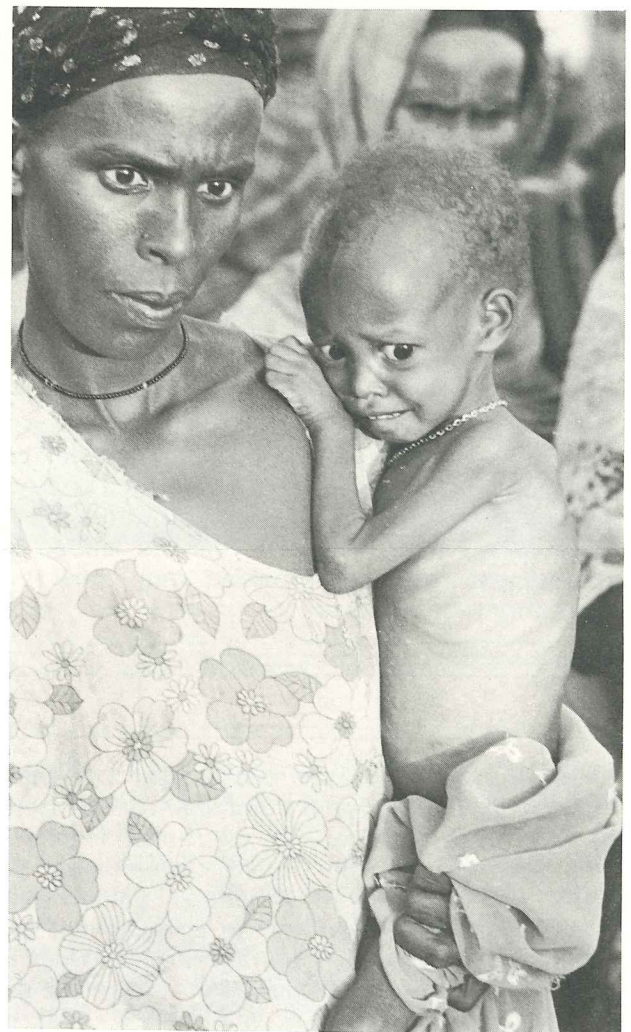
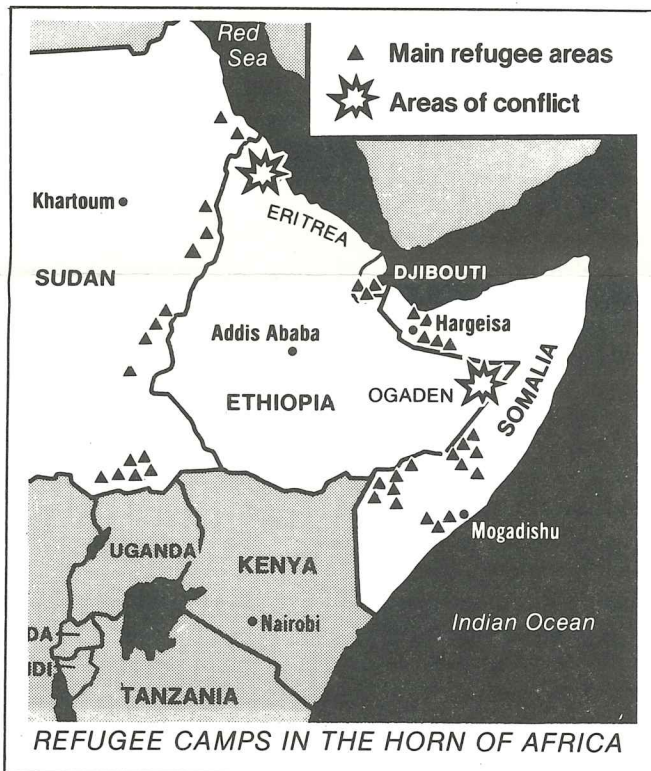


PHOTO: WORLD VISION/ E. MOOREYHAM



of precious penicillin. "Should she use it on a dying child or might it just be enough to save her?" But there were so many with a better chance who desperately needed this medicine too.

Anne looked into the mother's eyes. Her only hope was that Anne could do something. I held the baby while Anne found a place in her shrivelled little leg to put the needle. And together we prayed that God would heal this little one.

This scene is played many times over in the camps in Somalia. Often, the mothers themselves have been forced into the position of choosing to save one child at the expense of another. Life is hard for the Somali refugees. For most, their memories are crowded with acts of violence, bloodshed, hunger and death. I was too embarrassed to ask about their hopes for the future. And yet as I move among them, amid the stench and the filth and the dust and the flies, their greetings was always the same: Nabat — Peace be with you.



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## REFUGEES FROM EL SALVADOR ADMITTED

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Special measures to assist persons in Canada affected by the present strife in El Salvador were announced on March 19 by Canadian Employment and Immigration Minister Lloyd Axworthy.

- Salvadorans who are legal visitors in Canada and have relatives here able to sponsor them as immigrants will be given the opportunity to be landed as permanent residents provided they meet health and security requirements.
- Legal visitors from El Salvador without relatives here, who wish to stay in Canada permanently, will be issued Minister's Permits and authorization to obtain employment. After six months these cases will be reviewed; if it appears the applicants can become successfully established here, they will then be landed as permanent residents provided they meet the statutory requirements.

- Canadians and permanent residents of this country with relatives who have been forced to flee El Salvador will be able to assist their family members to come to Canada under relaxed criteria, provided the individuals living in Canada are able to provide satisfactory settlement arrangements.
- Salvadorans legally in Canada as visitors who wish to stay until the situation in their country is resolved can do so by applying at a Canadian Immigration Centre to have their visitor status extended. Those needing to work during this extended period will be provided with the legal authority to do so.

Mr Axworthy said that these steps are in keeping with the recognized need to closely monitor the situation in El Salvador and to continue to respond to the humanitarian aspects of the problem in an

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## PROPOSAL FOR A SPECIAL CENTRA

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*Following an evaluation team's visit to Central America, the Inter-Church Committee for Refugees, the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America and the Comité Crétien pour les Droits de l'Homme en Amérique Latine have submitted to the Department of Employment and Immigration a proposal for further measures to assist refugees from El Salvador. Following are excerpts from this report.*

### BACKGROUND

The situation of violence and repression in Central America, particularly acute over the past year, has forced over one hundred thousand refugees to cross borders and seek protection in neighbouring countries. These refugees are principally from El Salvador and to a lesser extent from Guatemala, and are found in relatively large numbers in Mexico, Belize, Honduras and Costa Rica. Smaller numbers are found in the other countries of the region.

In Belize and Honduras the majority of the refugees are of peasant "campesino" origin, and are being sustained through a system of support by UNHCR and voluntary agencies. For these refugees, all persons involved agree that resettlement outside the area would be inappropriate. Life is difficult for these refugees, and continuing emergency assistance and small economic self-help development projects are an appropriate and very necessary response from the world community.

In Costa Rica and Mexico, however, the situation is different. Here, there are among the refugees many educated and semi-skilled workers, students, teachers (who have been particularly singled out as a class) and others who need to be helped to establish themselves in productive ways. In Costa Rica, the refugees are permitted to enter and are given U.N. recognition and protection from deportation. They are, however, prohibited from working or taking professional training courses and are forced to survive on the limited U.N. allowance or accept illegal employment which could jeopardize their refugee status. Until March 3, 1981 when the U.S. signed a covenant agreement with the Mexico government, things were even worse in Mexico. Refugees were neither recognized nor permitted to work, although limited assistance was provided by the U.N. working through the Red Cross. Happily, the new agreement will remedy the recognition problem and regularize the emergency assistance programmes, but it is generally expected that the final position of the refugee in Mexico will be similar to the present situation in Costa Rica.

In Canada, there is a relatively small Central American population. Most of these have relatives, family, close friends or former work associates who are suffering persecution at present and need to leave their countries. Some have links to people already in the refugee population of Mexico and Costa Rica. Those with family who qualify for "family class" sponsorships now receive priority processing from the Mexican Office of Canada Immigration. Many others, however, do not qualify

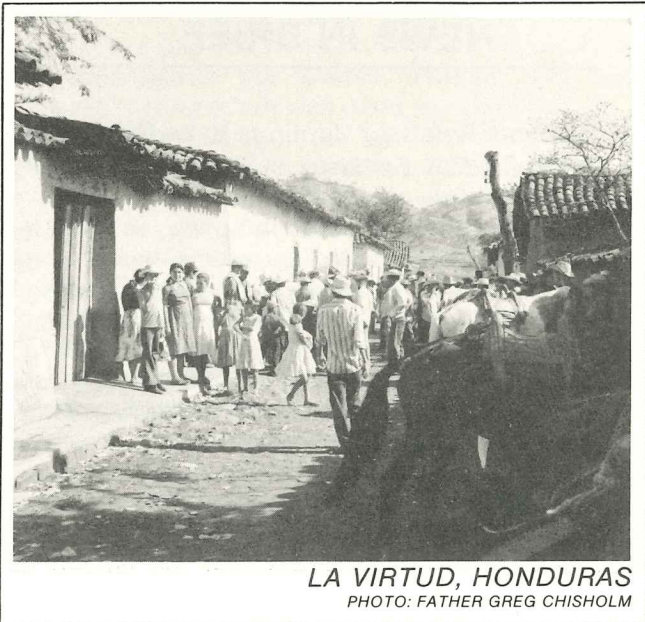


## TO CANADA

appropriate way.

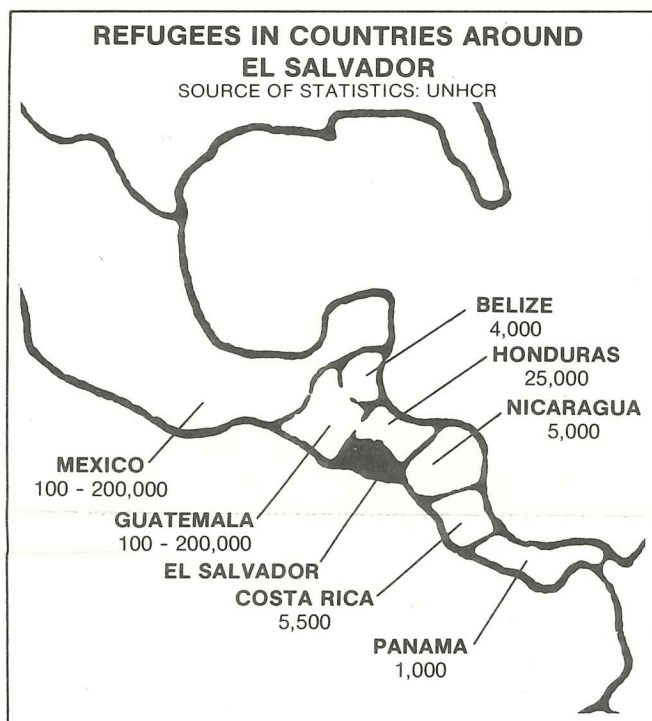
"The UNHCR is of the view that it will be possible to repatriate most of the people who have fled El Salvador once the fighting there can be stopped," Mr Axworthy said. "Therefore, the UNHCR is advising all countries that special refugee resettlement programmes are not needed at this time. We accept this view. However, there are some individuals who may not be able to return to their country because they have specific reasons to fear persecution. We are willing to receive refugee applications from individuals in this situation at our offices in the area."

Under existing immigration law, private groups also have the right to sponsor individual refugees from any part of the world.



LA VIRTUD, HONDURAS  
PHOTO: FATHER GREG CHISHOLM

## L AMERICAN REFUGEE PROGRAMME



for that programme nor for the assisted relative programme, since often the Central American relative or friend in Canada does not have sufficient economic strength to qualify or the link is not a sufficiently close relationship. These latter are very concerned and anxious to offer whatever support they can to their friends and relatives from Central America.

Also in Canada there are people who are prepared

to assist Central American refugees. Many of these are from the Christian community where the open persecution of the Church in Central America has evoked a strong desire to respond in whatever ways possible. Most of the churches are involved through their emergency service and development programmes with assistance in the area — but there are parishes that are prepared to make use of the refugee sponsorship programme if an adequate mechanism can be found.

### THE PROPOSAL

That a modest special programme of refugee resettlement take place from the Central American region consisting of resettlement opportunities for at least five hundred government-sponsored refugees from Guatemala and El Salvador. This figure would be over and above the existing Latin American programme for 1,000 in 1981.

That entrance into the government programme be through the existence of a Canadian link. A Canadian link would be either a Canadian resident with a pre-identified relationship to a refugee relative or a friend who is willing to act in a "friendship family" support relationship to the refugee for resettlement purposes.

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That a modest special programme of refugee resettlement take place from the Central American region consisting of resettlement opportunities for at least 500 privately sponsored refugees from Guatemala and El Salvador . . . . . specifically identified by church agencies in the Central American region.

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

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### **Thailand: Relatives Continue to be Processed**

The Canadian Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand, reports that they are having problems obtaining permission to interview refugees in all the Kampuchean camps in Thailand. However there have been some improvements since December when it was feared that an absolute moratorium on processing would be established. In spite of certain restrictions and difficulties in locating people who have moved between camps, the embassy hopes to deal with all family reunification cases.

### **Polish Sponsorship Agreement**

The Canadian Polish Congress and Employment and Immigration Minister Lloyd Axworthy have signed a refugee sponsorship agreement. The agreement makes it easier for Congress branches or member organizations in Canada to sponsor convention refugees and self-exiled people from Eastern Europe by eliminating much of the time and paperwork involved at the local level. Under the 1981 refugee plan, 4,000 refugees from Eastern Europe are expected to resettle in Canada. 3,700 arrived in 1980.

### **Longuepointe Closes**

In August 1979 central reception facilities for Indochinese refugees arriving in Canada were established at Longuepointe in Montreal and Griesbach in Edmonton.

As the numbers of Indochinese refugees have diminished the need for comprehensive services at the reception area has decreased. Therefore, in August 1980 operations at Griesbach were phased out; and as the charter flights planned for the 1981 programme came to an end with the ninth flight on March 25, 1981 the Longuepointe operation is also closing down at the end of March. As of the beginning of April, all Indochinese will arrive in small groups of up to fifty people aboard regular commercial aircraft. All flights will be destined to land either at Vancouver International Airport or at Mirabel Airport near Montreal.

For the rest of 1981 reception services will be available at these ports of entry. Most refugees will remain there only one night, in a hotel contracted by the government. Agricultural and customs checks will be carried out, a final medical review will be conducted, clothing will be distributed, and applications for social insurance numbers will be filled out. All refugees will arrive with complete documentation and a knowledge of their final destination. Whenever possible, they will be assisted in proceeding on to their final destination the day after their arrival at the port of entry.

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## MEDIA WATCH

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### **THE BOAT PEOPLE: "NIGHTMARE" OR ADJUSTMENT?**

*By Gerald Utting,  
The Toronto Star.*

*The role of media coverage in bringing the plight of the boat people to the attention of the Canadian public illustrated dramatically the influence the media can have on public response. So REFUGE asked journalists who had covered the Indochinese refugee movement to comment on how they perceived their role in the events.*

In March, a task force came up with a report on the plight of the 12,000 boat people now living in Toronto. As my own newspaper, *The Toronto Star*, reported it, the Boat People are in dreadful shape, battered helplessly by the buffeting hurricanes of life in Toronto. They're living in overcrowded homes, getting low wages and experiencing culture shock, quite apart from having difficulty in coping with the strains brought on by "the horrors they experienced on the seas and in Asian refugee camps." I have not read the report. But whatever it said, it was presented in the press as Bright Dreams Turned to Nightmare, and that's what I find silly.

For, in the context of the ordeals of the boat people and the other refugees from tyranny, murder and starvation in Southeast Asia, the idea that these men, their enduring wives and pretty kids find Toronto a nightmare is a joke.

I have talked to literally hundreds of boat people in their squalid refugee camps. I have been on a Malaysian beach as wretched folk in black pyjamas were forced into a pathetic group by soldiers wielding automatic rifles, clubs and shields. I have actually helped pull dying people off a tiny cockleshell in the sea off the Vietnamese coast.

I have never heard any one of these refugees, in conditions that could surely be described as real nightmare, complaining about conditions. Yes, they wanted to get off those awful island refugee camps. Yes, they were terrified of being surrounded by men with guns in a strange land where they hoped to find refuge. Yes, they were so weak from thirst and hunger on their tossing boat that they could do little but moan. But they were so happy that they had escaped from the conditions in their homeland — conditions they were willing to risk death to escape from.

These are courageous people, resourceful people. What they face now in Toronto and other



parts of Canada, of course, is not a nightmare but simply readjustment to a normality that is life in a foreign land. Certainly they need help in the form of financial support, educational reinforcement, medical treatment, even psychiatric counselling. That is hardly surprising for people who have endured so much. Above all they now need understanding and friendship, just as all other Canadians do in their ordinary lives.

This is perhaps a little harder for the Canadian media to handle than it was to report the obviously more dramatic and emotional events of the boat people's flight across the South China Sea. In a way, the news media are geared more to handle drama and turmoil than to report on the blending of a large group of Southeast Asians into our society. Surely all this talk of nightmare shows a lack of sophistication in the Canadian media.

But it also shows that the media have a conscience, and that they believe the public at large has a conscience, too. There's no nightmare for the boat people in Canada. But the use of that term does show that a lot of people here are still worried about the fate of the boat people who have come into our midst, and that there's a lot of frustration among those who try to lend a helping hand to our newest Canadians.

More importantly, though, I think we mustn't lose sight of where the real priorities lie. Canada has been able to save tens of thousands from the seas and from the rigors of refugee camps and transport

them to this fortunate land. And we should not forget that these Southeast Asians fled not just away from oppression, but toward freedom. And they believed that freedom was what we stood for.

There is something about freedom I have learned in years of knocking around the world. Freedom is not something you can enjoy yourself and deny to others. The very essence of freedom is that it is something you must share with others who seek it. The true nightmare the boat people would face in Canada would be if they discovered Canadians believed freedom was something that only certain people should be allowed to enjoy. But I know they have not found that. I know, because I have a few Vietnamese acquaintances here, that they have come to cherish our freedom very much, and that if they feel any anguish it is because their loved ones who stayed behind are not free.

That, I think, is the real lesson of the boat people for Canadians. Through them we have been able to expand our idea of freedom. It is not so many years ago that we locked up our Japanese. Today such a thing would be unthinkable in Canada. As I walk down Yonge Street, I see slight Vietnamese youths rugged up against the cold. They have problems, of course, about language and jobs and dental work, and we older Canadians should help them with these things. But I know they do not dread the loss of their liberty. It is the most precious of our possessions and we have been able to share it with them.

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## RESOURCE EXCHANGE

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### International Social Services

A teenage Vietnamese refugee in Canada became separated from the rest of her family, who went to Australia. The family members in Australia requested the assistance of ISS in trying to have their sister, who was terribly lonely, united with them. At the request of ISS the Manitoba welfare authorities studied the situation and recommended that Australia consider allowing the girl to join her family.

Many refugees who have settled in Canada may have personal or family difficulties, the solution of which requires coordinated actions in two or more countries. ISS is a voluntary, non-sectarian, non-political organization which tries to solve these kinds of problems by working with government departments and voluntary organizations around the world.

ISS Canada is funded largely by a grant from Health and Welfare Canada.

International Social Services  
55 Parkdale Avenue  
P.O.Box 3505, Station C  
Ottawa, Ont. K1Y 4G1

### Funding Sources

*Assistance Directory for Ethnocultural Communities in Canada* published by the Multiculturalism Directorate of the Department of the Secretary of State lists programmes of foundations, corporations, municipalities, provincial and federal governments, federal cultural agencies and labour groups which may be able to provide financial assistance. It summarizes:

- amounts available
- kinds of projects assisted
- criteria for eligibility
- whom to contact

Multicultural Directory  
Secretary of State Dept.  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0M5

**THE STANDING CONFERENCE OF  
CANADIAN ORGANIZATIONS CONCERNED  
FOR REFUGEES**

**5, 6, 7 JUNE, 1981**

McMASTER UNIVERSITY,  
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## STATISTICAL SURVEY

### Estimates of refugees in regions of the world (1)

Africa .....	5,000,000
Middle East & North Africa .....	4,000,000
Asia .....	2,500,000
Latin America & the Caribbean .....	2,000,000
Eastern Europe .....	100,000
Total .....	13,600,000

### Canadian Government planned refugee intake, 1981 (2)

Africa .....	200
Indochina .....	8,000
Latin America & the Caribbean .....	1,000
Eastern Europe .....	4,000
Other World Areas .....	300
Contingency Reserve .....	2,500
Total Planned Intake .....	16,000

\* Privately Sponsored ..... 5,000

\* The projected number of 5,000 private sponsorships for 1981 is based on indications from sponsoring groups of their intentions. It is not a ceiling on the number of refugees that qualified private groups may sponsor. The federal government will continue to support and encourage private organizations in their humanitarian efforts to relieve refugees suffering throughout the world.

(1) Source: Inter-Church Committee for Refugees, "Who is my neighbour?" 1981.

(2) Source: L. Axworthy, Minister of Employment and Immigration, *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration Levels*, 1981.

*Many thanks to the artists of Dreadnaught Cooperative, Inc., Toronto for their donation of the logo design.*

**REFUGE** is a non-profit, independent monthly newsletter supported by grants from the Canadian Foundation for Refugees and Wintario, and by voluntary subscription payments. It is a forum for discussion and the views expressed in it do not necessarily reflect those of its funders, staff or Editorial Board.

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# REFUGE

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