



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGEE

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Central American Refugees: Resettlement Needs and Solutions

In the last decade, more than 1,600,000 Central Americans have become refugees. Most of them are Salvadoreans and Guatemalans fleeing military repression. What is their destination? Most Guatemalans cross the border over to Mexico. Some of them "make it" to the United States, where they join the army of "illegals". Salvadoreans move in various directions: Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Belize, Honduras, Mexico and the United States. Some of these countries (Honduras and Mexico) place refugees in camps. Other countries (Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama and Belize) offer so-called "durable solutions" projects designed to make refugees self-sufficient. Guatemala does not recognize refugees. Mexico, in addition to maintaining camps, implements some agricultural projects for Guatemalans. Many of these refugees, with or without legal status, in camps or integrated into projects, apply for third country resettlement in Canada or Australia. Why do so many refugees prefer settlement in distant countries in spite of the language barrier and problems of cultural adaptation they will have to face? What are the problems with "regional resettlement"?

Sandra Pentland and Denis Racicot discuss violation of human rights of Salvadorean refugees in Honduran camps: intimidation, rape, murder and arrests are practised by the Honduran army. Pentland and Racicot analyse abuse of refugee rights from the point of view of the geo-political interests of the United States. Refugee camps at the border of Honduras and El Salvador interfere with U.S. plans for military operations

in the area. This explains the constant pressure placed on refugees to move to other camps. Resistance by the refugee population to relocation plans provokes attacks and arrests of some Salvadoreans who are accused of supporting Salvadorean guerrillas. The article focuses on the August 29, 1985, attack on the Colomoncagua camp and consequent events.

The situation in Costa Rica does not look as bleak. By and large, lives of Salvadorean refugees are not in danger. They are allowed freedom of movement inside the country and a chance to become self-sufficient through "durable solutions" projects. However, Tanya Basok argues that these projects have not been viable. Some of the reasons for the failure are due to administrative errors which could be corrected. However, without the UNHCR emergency aid (which was discontinued in December 1985), only a small number of projects can be implemented, leaving most of the Salvadorean refugees with no means of economic survival.

How does Canada respond to this refugee crisis? There is no Canadian Embassy in Honduras and no Canadian immigration officers in the camps. Thus, it is extremely

difficult for Salvadoreans in Honduras to migrate to Canada. In Costa Rica the situation is somewhat better: at least, there is a possibility to apply. However, last year the quota for the region served by the Canadian Embassy in San Jose (which includes El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica) was 1,025 people. Some 200-250 refugees were from Costa Rica and they included not only Salvadoreans, but also Nicaraguans, Cubans and Guatemalans.

Another way of immigrating to Canada is through an in-land status determination procedure which, according to Charles Smith, is inefficient and, in many cases, unfair. He criticizes this procedure through which four out of five claimants get rejected because they are perceived as "economic immigrants". Smith argues that most of the Central Americans in Montreal are not "economic immigrants" but have a valid claim for refugee status.

What are the solutions, then? Improved security and protection measures in Honduran camps, more development funds directed towards "durable solutions" projects, increased immigration levels and a fair and more efficient refugee status determination procedure.

Tanya Basok

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A Date with McLean

On Thursday, May 29, the Honourable Walter McLean, Minister of State (Immigration) will represent the Government of Canada as keynote speaker during the Symposium *Refugee or Asylum: A Choice for Canada?* His topic will be the refugee claims process in Canada. As Minister of State for Immigration, Mr. McLean has responsibility for policy formulation and operations. Refugee determination has been a particular concern in recent months.

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REFUGE

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About the Main Estimates 1986-87 The Government's Expenditure Plan

Dan Heap, M.P., Spadina
(edited version)

The Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration will be discussing the 1986-87 Budget at a meeting in May 1986. The total budget for the Employment and Immigration Department will be \$4,729 million; \$130 million will be allocated to the Immigration Programme. The amount represents a decrease of 5.4% over the 1985-86 budget forecast of \$138,001 million.

The government intends to reduce the Adjustment Assistance Programme which provides living expenses to indigent refugees and their dependants. The Programme will receive \$29.7 million, a decrease of \$7.6 million (25.6%) over 1985.

The Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Programme's budget will remain unchanged at \$3.64 million. Funding for the Government's Host Programme for Refugee Resettlement, which is still a pilot project,

will remain at \$500,000. The budget for the Refugee Status Advisory Committee will also be reduced from \$1.745 million for 1985-86 to \$1.6 million for 1986-87.

The Immigration Appeal Board will receive \$4.667 million, an increase of 6.4% over 1985-86. Because of increased personnel costs, the government is saying the IAB needs a bigger budget, particularly as the Board will have to deal now with re-determination of refugee claims.

I feel that the over-all decrease in the Immigration Programme's budget shows a rejection of Canada's commitment to the refugee movement and the plight of those refugee claimants now living in Canada. It also seems that the government is bent on implementing the recommendations of the Neilson Task Force Report to admit only those refugees capable of being supported by private sponsors.

About the Fifth and Sixth Report

Dan Heap, M.P., Spadina
(edited version)

Last Friday, April 18, 1986, the Minister of State for Immigration, the Honourable Walter McLean, should have tabled the Government's Response to the Standing Committee on Employment & Immigration's Reports on Refugee Determination in Canada and the Backlog.

Instead of doing so, the Minister gave a letter to the Clerk of the House of Commons which said that the Government needed more time to consider various alternatives before making a final decision on the reports. This is the second time the Minister has breached Standing Order 99 (2) which states that "a comprehensive report" must be submitted to Parliament within 120 days.

I have asked Mr. Bosley, the Speaker of the House, to review Mr. McLean's breach of parliamentary procedure through the Committee on Elections, Privileges and

Procedure and am now awaiting a response from the Speaker.

I fear that the Government may be deliberately creating delay again, and then just prior to Parliament's summer recess submit a legislative package; if the opposition immigration critics do not immediately agree, we will then be accused of preventing the government from helping refugee claimants.

For example, if the Government proposes a determination system with a completely unsatisfactory appeal, we would wish, with many members of the public, to support an amendment. However a debate would eat up time, and the Government would argue that we must hurry up before Parliament rises at the end of June.

It is important that refugee claimants and their supporters are aware of what is happening.



Salvadorean Refugees in Honduras

By Sandra Pentland and Denis Racicot

Since the very beginning of their saga, when thousands of Salvadoreans fleeing the brutal repression of the Salvadorean military and paramilitary sought refuge in Honduras, the key issue has been one of protection. Both the religious and lay people of the diocese of Santa Rosa were quick to respond and the church played a very important role in assisting and protecting the refugees pouring into its area. Many Honduran peasants living near the border opened their hearts and their homes, sharing the little they had with their Salvadorean brothers and sisters. In stark contrast to the impressive human solidarity of many of the Honduran people, the Honduran military entered into complicity with the Salvadorean military.

In May 1980, the Salvadorean army, along with members of the infamous paramilitary group, ORDEN, carried out a vast operation in Chalatenango, in one of the northern provinces of El Salvador. On May 14, more than 4,000 Salvadorean peasants (mainly women, children and elderly people) tried to flee across the Sumpul River into Honduras. Met by the Honduran army, they were forced to return to the Salvadorean side of the river where they were mercilessly hunted down by the Salvadorean army. In the ensuing massacre, more than 600 Salvadoreans were killed. (Only three days before, the heads of the Salvadorean and Honduran armies had met in El Poy, a town on the border of the two countries.)

This joint operation with the Salvadorean military was the first concrete manifestation of the attitude of the Honduran authorities towards the refugees. The authorities consider the refugees subversive because they fled from government and government-linked paramilitary forces. (Given that these people saw family members brutally assassinated, and their homes, crops and personal belongings destroyed by government forces, it is not surprising that they have little regard for the Salvadorean government.) This overt hostility on the part of the Honduran authorities has led to very serious security problems for the refugees over the years.

Throughout 1980, Salvadoreans continued to pour into Honduras. At first, the

Honduran government refused to recognize them as refugees, but as the flow continued, the government created the National Commission on Refugees (CONARE) in order to control the growing Salvadorean population. Had the Honduran authorities been completely free to do what they wanted, very likely they would have forced all the Salvadoreans back across the border. But fortunately other factors had to be taken into consideration. Honduras, in the process of returning to a civilian government after years of military rule, was very concerned about its international image. Refoulement of thousands of Salvadoreans would certainly detract from the new democratic image that Honduras was seeking to create.

During this period, the UNHCR tried to work out some kind of arrangement with Honduras. This was complicated by the fact that Honduras had not signed either the 1951 Convention on Refugees or the 1967 Protocol. Nevertheless, it agreed to allow the UNHCR to operate within the country. In January 1981, the Honduran government and the UNHCR came to an agreement on the following four basic principles:

1. That Honduras would accept refugees seeking asylum;
2. That Honduras would respect the principle of non-refoulement;
3. That Salvadorean refugees would stay in zones designated to them by the Honduran authorities; and
4. That Salvadorean refugees would not be allowed to work.

Only two months after the agreement was reached, the Honduran military violated the first two points. In March 1981, when the Salvadorean National Guard entered the department of Cabañas, burning crops and houses and killing everyone it encountered, more than 7,000 peasants fled towards the Lempa River, which, like the Sumpul, forms the border between El Salvador and Honduras. As they tried to cross the river, they were shelled and shot at by both the Salvadorean and the Honduran military. Upon receiving word that a large number of Salvadoreans were being driven towards the Honduran border, humanitarian agency personnel, both Honduran and international, raced to the Lempa River. Because they arrived before the Hon-

duran military had positioned itself along the banks of the river, they were able to help approximately 4,000 Salvadoreans reach the Honduran village of Los Hernández. Some 60 refugees were killed after their arrival in Honduras; the number that died in Salvadorean territory while trying to flee is unknown. In response to this situation, the UNHCR sent representatives to the border to negotiate minimum security conditions for the refugees with the civilian and military authorities. In early April, the UNHCR supervised the relocation of 3,000 refugees from Los Hernández to a camp situated below the town of La Virtud, near the Gualgüis River.

In November 1981, after another Salvadorean military operation in Cabañas, Honduran troops again tried to close the border to refugees. Nevertheless, many refugees continued to arrive during November and December, most of them having spent 15-30 days hiding by day and moving by night. During this period, the pressure from the Honduran authorities to move the refugees out of the border region became very intense; both the Salvadorean and the Honduran military harassed and threatened the humanitarian agencies and the local Hondurans who were helping the refugees. In the period between November 1981 and April 1982, during the forced relocation of the Salvadorean refugees from the La Virtud/Guarita area to the camp of Mesa Grande near the town of San Marcos, 34 refugees and four Hondurans working with the refugees were killed, and a total of 45 Salvadoreans and Hondurans living in the border area disappeared. Many Honduran families were forced to flee to other parts of Honduras after receiving threats from Honduran soldiers for having helped the refugees.

The security of the Salvadorean refugees in Honduras has been of constant concern to the international community since that time. How can a refugee population be provided with protection when the most constant and serious threat to its security comes from the military of the host country? This concern became very concrete on August 29, 1985, when the Honduran military entered the Colomoncagua refugee camp in the province of Intibuca. This unprovoked



military attack against a defenceless refugee population left two dead, two women raped, ten refugees captured and over thirty refugees wounded. This and other attacks on refugee camps are linked to the issue of relocation.

Since 1982, threats of forced relocation and rumours of forced repatriation have provoked one crisis after another. Over the last four years, four different plans to relocate the refugees to different sites within Honduras have been proposed successively. One after another, these plans have been abandoned in the face of strong domestic and international pressure against them. Within Honduras, some of the pressure against relocation came from sectors of Honduran society who supported the position of the refugees that any move would likely lead to deteriorated security, while others, such as certain sectors of the Honduran military, wanted to get rid of the refugees and favoured forced repatriation rather than relocation further into Honduran territory.

The most recent of the four relocation plans proposed the relocation of the refugees in Colomoncagua and San Antonio (Intibuca) to Mesa Grande. This would have concentrated over 20,000 refugees in a camp originally intended for 2,000 people. Given that repatriation did not seem to be realistic in the short term, this plan appeared to be acceptable to the Honduran military who felt that it could better control the refugees if they were all in one camp.¹

The last several months have seen many important changes in Honduras that will likely influence the situation of the Salvadorean refugees. Two of the most important were the Honduran elections and the replacement of the Chief of Staff of the Honduran Armed Forces. Although the newly elected Liberal government has not announced an *official* position on the question of Salvadorean refugees, President Azcona has given a mixed message. He has stated that although his government will not move the refugees against their will, he is very worried that the Honduran government has little control over the camps. If these comments are indicative of the current thinking within the Honduran

government, it is likely that the refugees will be allowed to remain in their existing camps, but that the government will attempt to increase its involvement in the actual running of the camps.

This reading of the situation is backed by the fact that relocation, which was such a hot issue in the Honduran press in the last half of 1985, has not been mentioned at all since the beginning of 1986. In February, the UNHCR confirmed that the most recent in a series of plans to relocate refugees from the camps of Colomoncagua and San Antonio had indeed been cancelled. Although there no longer appears to be any threat of relocation in the foreseeable future, the battle is not over. There are signs that the military presence around the camps has been increased and that administrative changes which would give the Honduran government more control over the programme are in the works.

Sources close to the situation feel that cancellation of the plans to move the refugees is directly related to recommendations made by Robert Gersony of the Refugee Bureau of the U.S. State Department. The U.S. Embassy in Honduras has always had a keen interest in seeing the refugee camps moved in order to clear the border area for military operations. Until recently, the Embassy has been the major force in favour of relocation. Robert Gersony visited Honduras in October and November 1985 to study the situation of the Salvadorean refugees and to make recommendations to the State Department with regard to its future handling of the situation. Apparently Gersony concluded that relocation of the camps at this time would be too complicated.

The refugees have always been firm that they would never move willingly, therefore it was clear that any attempt to relocate the camps would involve the use of violence by the military. It is interesting to note that the State Department re-evaluation of the situation took place in the wake of strong international outcry concerning the August 29 military attack on the camp of Colomoncagua and the ensuing criticism of Honduras regarding this incident in the Executive Committee meetings of the UNHCR. (The Honduran government was surprised and dismayed by the international reaction to this incident.) Gersony's principal concern was to determine what measures could be taken to ensure that the Honduran military would be satisfied that there were no guerrillas in the camps. Apparently he sees the solution in

increased military control of the camps, in combination with increased administration of the refugee programme on the part of the Honduran government.

The second major event in recent months, the replacement of General Walter López Reyes by General Humberto Regalado Hernández as head of the Honduran military, is interpreted by most analysts as a move to a more hardline position by the Honduran military. If this analysis is correct, it is likely to have serious consequences for the security of the refugees. In recent months, the trend has been towards more military presence and control of the camps. This is reflected in the frequency with which the military enters the camps and harasses the refugees. In January and February 1986, there were numerous incidents of this type.

Of particular concern is an incident which took place on the afternoon of February 16 when 20 soldiers entered Colomoncagua and set up three small-caliber machine guns inside camp territory beside the UNHCR house on the hilltop halfway between the sub-camps of Copinol and Callejones. The guns were set up only 30 meters above the chapel where Mass was being held. Half an hour later, the soldiers moved down to the soccer field in the Las Vegas sub-camp where they installed machine guns at the four corners of the field and settled in for the night. At 8:30 in the evening, they sent up a "light rocket" which illuminated the camps and then fell into the ravine behind the health centre where it set the hill on fire. Such incidents, whereby the military harasses and intimidates, are terrifying for a refugee population which has already suffered so much direct repression at the hands of the Honduran military. "Psychological warfare" of this nature has substantially increased the tension and fear in the camps.

As is frequently the case when the military enters the camps, there was *no UNHCR protection officer present* in either the camp or the town of Colomoncagua at the time of the February 16 incident. The refugees contend that the UNHCR protection presence is not adequate. They feel that the military deliberately chooses times when there is no UNHCR presence in order to enter the camps. For this reason, it is important that there always be at least one UNHCR protection officer present in each camp. This analysis of security needs is supported both by the agencies working in the refugee programme and by many international agencies and human rights

¹ Editor's Note: For a more detailed criticism of the relocation plans, see Martin Barber and Meyer Brownstone, "Relocating Refugees in Honduras", *Refugee*, 3, No. 2 (December 1983), pp. 12-15.

organizations which have been monitoring the situation over the last five years (see the ICVA resolution on page 6).

The agencies working in the refugee programme under the co-ordination of the UNHCR have recently been informed by the UNHCR that the Honduran government is very interested in the "Mexican Model". (In Mexico, the government is directly responsible for the administration of the refugee programme through COMAR, the government refugee commission.) Over the last year and a half, the Honduran government has frequently complained in the Honduran press that it has no control over the camps. In November 1984, it raised the issue of a permanent Honduran government presence in the camps. When questioned with regard to what type of people CONARE would place in the camps, Colonel Turcios replied that they were considering using retired military personnel. To date, no concrete action has resulted from this, but now that relocation is no longer on the agenda, it appears that the Honduran government's interest in this proposal has been revived.

There are also other indications that the Honduran government is making a move to assert control over the situation. Three of the most recent indications are:

1. In mid-February, two articles in the Honduran press announced that MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières, the French medical agency whose international volunteers run the health programme in the camps) would be asked to leave the programme by May of this year and would be replaced by Honduran doctors. The incident that provoked the story, concerning a Honduran doctor who blamed MSF for losing his job, was blown out of proportion by the Ministry of Health which used the occasion to lobby against the presence of MSF in the refugee programme. Lengthy negotiations were necessary to ensure the continued participation of international medical personnel in the programme. (The presence of international agency personnel in the camps has always been extremely important in terms of the security of the refugees.)

2. On February 19, the immigration officials in San Marcos, near the camp of Mesa Grande, informed the UNHCR that no new male refugees between the ages of 18 and 50 would be allowed to enter the camps. Several men in this age bracket

had just arrived and Honduran immigration officials were threatening to deport them. These new refugees were kept in the UNHCR house in San Marcos until the UNHCR was able to negotiate their entrance into Mesa Grande. In the end the UNHCR also was able to have the new restriction rescinded. The successful resolution of this particular crisis through the immediate intervention of the UNHCR only serves to underline the importance of its presence in the camps at all times.

3. It appears that all requests for permission to enter the camps, both for visitors as well as for new staff persons, must now be addressed directly to Colonel Turcios. Previously, requests were made to Colonel Turcios via the UNHCR.

Of primary concern in this increasingly complex situation is how to guarantee security when the very authorities that have been responsible for threats to the security of the refugees are beginning to insist on more control over the camps. Although the Honduran government has a sovereign right to determine what happens within its territory, this does not relieve it of its international legal obligations to respect the human rights of the refugees within its borders. Since there are no international mechanisms which guarantee that these legal obligations are respected, the international community has a moral obligation to defend a refugee population whose human rights are being threatened.

Experience over the last few years has shown that international pressure with regard to this issue has been extremely effective. Although it appears that all plans to relocate Salvadorean refugees from Colomoncagua and San Antonio have been officially cancelled, the position of the refugees continues to be extremely precarious. In the context of escalating intimidation and harassment of the refugees by the Honduran military, the continued role of the UNHCR in the co-ordination of the programme, and the presence of sufficient numbers of qualified UNHCR protection officers and international agency staff in the camps continue to be essential for the security of the Salvadorean refugees.

Sandra Pentland is an associate of the Jesuit Centre for Social Justice. Denis Racicot is an immigration lawyer. Both work with the Comité de travail sur les réfugiés (COTRAC) in Montreal.

From Howard Adelman: Next Year on Sabbatical

I wish to thank all those graduate students at York University who have helped produce this year's *Refuge*. Alex Zisman and Tanya Basok, in fact, assumed full editorial responsibility for this excellent current issue on Central American refugees. Without the help of Leslie Rider, my research assistant and the Managing Editor, we would all be lost.

I also wish to thank our loyal readers whose continuing subscriptions and extra support have enabled us to continue to publish *Refuge*. I hope we have made a contribution to the understanding of the problem of refugees and the policy issues with which we all must grapple.

Next year I am away on sabbatical. In 1979, at the beginning of my last sabbatical, I got caught up in the refugee issues of the Boat People and Operation Lifeline. Since then I have sustained that involvement and helped develop the refugee research unit at York University and the publication *Refuge*. It is time to resume my concentration on my work in philosophy while I write the results of my research on refugees.

Michael Lanphier, Professor of Sociology at York University, succeeds me as Director of the Refugee Documentation Project and Editor of *Refuge*. Michael has a distinguished record as both a scholar dealing with refugee issues and as a committed individual. Alex Zisman will assist Michael by serving as Feature Editor of *Refuge* and Noreen Nimmons will take over as Managing Editor.

I am sure you all join me in wishing them and all the others associated with the Refugee Documentation Project at York University the best in their future work.

Howard Adelman

ICVA Consultation on Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central America

In late November 1985, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) convened a meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica, on Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central America. The consultation brought together approximately 70 people representing 40 agencies. The resolution adopted by the consultation concerning Salvadorean refugees in Honduras reflects a common analysis shared by the participants with regard to the nature of the problem. Although this resolution is not binding on ICVA or any of the agencies represented at the meeting, its intent was to provide useful guidelines for agencies or organizations with an interest in the issue. What follows is the text of the ICVA resolution:

The situation of the Salvadorean refugees in Honduras is a result of broad, complex and rapidly evolving political considerations relating to the Central American region. Voluntary agencies committed to serving the basic needs of the Salvadorean refugees must work within the context of the Honduran national political reality. The current situation has raised a number of issues, including:

1. Protection of the refugees;
2. The effects of Honduran governmental restrictions on NGO programmes;
3. The need to improve channels of communication among the parties involved;
4. Relocation of the refugees from Colomoncagua and San Antonio.

1. Protection

The attack on Colomoncagua in August 1985 is a further demonstration of the very insecure situation of the Salvadorean refugees. It also highlights the importance of significant international presence in the camps and the need to reinforce this presence. Protection is the primary task of the UNHCR. While the UNHCR increased the number of its

protection officers following the attack, the current situation requires a greater presence. The voluntary agencies are willing to increase their staff in the camps and urge the UNHCR to do likewise. The UNHCR should develop mechanisms through which international agencies and governments could support the UNHCR's expressed need for more protection officers in the camps.

2. Programmes

In view of the unlikely possibility that any durable solution will be found in the foreseeable future, and because of the specific needs which result from the demographic composition of the Salvadorean refugee population in Honduras, it is of the utmost importance that support for activities in the fields of education, human development, training and production be maintained if not developed. In concrete terms, this implies that such activities should not be sacrificed because of budget cuts, and that efforts must be redoubled to minimize the effects of any such financial restrictions through appeals to the international community. Efforts must be made to persuade the Honduran authorities to lift the restrictions with regard to free movement of the refugees between the sub-camps of Colomoncagua. Efforts must also be made to permit freer access to the camps for agency personnel, visitors and press.

3. Communication

Recognizing that the UNHCR has a different mandate and hence works under different restrictions than the agencies, we welcome the improved dialogue that has developed between the agencies and the UNHCR.

We also feel that this dialogue must become yet more meaningful out of mutual

concern for the fundamental human rights of the refugees. An important aspect of this is respect for the views of the refugees themselves. Interested parties (refugees, the UNHCR and NGOs) must establish effective channels of communication at all levels -- camp, domestic and international -- based on mutual respect for each other's independence.

4. Relocation

In the relocation issue, the Honduran Government should exercise its sovereignty within the context of its national and international obligations. The fundamental concern of the agencies is with the human rights of the refugees in Honduras. Present conditions in Honduras, including the demonstrated hostility of the Honduran armed forces to the refugees, make a peaceful relocation of refugees from Colomoncagua and San Antonio highly unlikely. Indeed, the agencies are seriously concerned that a relocation could result in loss of life. At the same time, we recognize that it is not the task of the agencies to persuade or dissuade the refugees to relocate.

We recognize that the best solution for refugees is peace in El Salvador, permitting voluntary repatriation, and that the present situation of the refugees in Colomoncagua is a difficult one. In the meantime, we feel that the refugees should be allowed to stay where they are with improved protection and greater opportunities for self-sufficiency. The present situation calls for an on-going dialogue on the part of refugees, the Honduran Government, the UNHCR and the voluntary agencies. Given the present situation in Honduras, we do not foresee that adequate and appropriate conditions for relocation can be established in Honduras. However, agencies reaffirm their commitment to uphold the basic human rights of refugees to live in safety and dignity.

How Durable Are the "Durable Solutions" Projects for Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica?

by Tanya Basok

Resettlement of refugees in developing countries is a complex matter. Can Third World countries provide a viable solution to refugee problems? From the point of view of moral responsibilities, Third World countries' governments face a dilemma. On the one hand, these governments are responsible for their own unemployed and under-employed. Offering economic support to refugees may mean denying it to needy nationals. Jobs taken up by refugees may mean more unemployment among the local population. On the other hand, by accepting refugees, governments thus assume responsibilities for the refugees' well-being. This sense of moral duty is also backed by the international law which receiving countries subscribe to once they sign the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol on refugees.

The "durable solutions" approach was adopted as an answer to this dilemma. "Durable solutions" are measures taken towards the systematic and organized creation of productive activities which ensure that the refugees become economically self-sufficient, whether individually or collectively. More specifically, they are small businesses, artisanal or industrial shops and medium-size farming projects. A UNHCR document outlines the advantages of the approach:

- Self-sufficiency projects are the ultimate aim of UNHCR as they allow the refugees to become independent of emergency assistance and be productively integrated in the receiving community.
- In the under-developed countries with serious unemployment problems, self-sufficiency projects offer the best alternative for the refugees' work problem.
- For the receiving country, these durable solutions are a contribution to the national economy, particularly the projects which include both nationals and refugees.
- Every durable solution is at the same time a very fruitful experience for the refugee which will become an asset when the conditions in his country of origin permit his return.

The "durable solutions" approach was applied to Salvadorean refugees in Costa Rica.

Projects for Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica: A Background

The influx of Salvadorean refugees to Costa Rica started in 1980 with 200 peasants occupying the Costa Rican Embassy in San Salvador. These refugees were originally settled on El Murciélago farm, in the north of Costa Rica, and then moved to what became known as the Los Angeles project. Refugee movement was a response to conditions of civil war and associated political repression and violence aimed especially at the civilian population. Between April 1980 and January 1982 (the worst years of the civil war), over 30,000 deaths were reported. It was estimated that 500,000 refugees had left El Salvador before 1982 to go to other Central American countries, Mexico and the United States.

Between 1980 and 1983, an average of 9,000 Salvadoreans per year arrived in Costa Rica through legal and illegal channels; 30,000 of them stayed there. Only 10,000, however, had legal status and as such were attended by the UNHCR. In 1983, the influx of Salvadorean refugees to Costa Rica stopped as a result of the government's imposition of strict requirements on those wishing to come to Costa Rica as tourists (this is a usual avenue for refugee claimants).

Although by 1977 Costa Rica had signed the 1951 UN Convention and the 1967 Protocol on refugees, it was not until October 1980 that a law, defining criteria for refugee status, was produced and put into practice. According to this law, a refugee claimant had to demonstrate proof of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or belonging to a certain political or social group. Prior to 1980, refugees recognized by the UNHCR had been subject to labour legislation for foreigners in general which allowed them to work as long as they did not replace national labour. In 1980, when refugees became legally recognized, their participation in the labour market became limited to incorporation into projects financed by the UNHCR. A memorandum of the UNHCR states:

In principle Costa Rica established that a refugee has no right to work. This, however, has not been interpreted as an absolute prohibition on the part of national authorities, but rather as a protection measure for the national labour force.

Refugees were allowed to work only in self-sufficient businesses financed by the UNHCR and approved by the National Commission for Refugees. The Episcopalian Church of Costa Rica was the first national non-governmental agency to become involved in resettlement of Salvadorean refugees. Later, other voluntary agencies, such as the Costa Rican Red Cross, Caritas, YMCA and OARS (Office of Refugee Orientation and Social Assistance), started developing and implementing projects. In December 1980, CONAPARE (National Commission for Refugees) assumed the function of "establishing policies necessary for the development of programmes and projects related to refugees which would have to be followed by state institutions as well as non-government sectors participating in this field". All projects designed by voluntary agencies were required to get approval from CONAPARE for implementation.

A great number of Salvadoreans became integrated into these projects. In 1984, for instance, Caritas was administering 50 projects with 519 beneficiaries, 300 of whom were Salvadoreans. The YMCA was managing two urban projects with 20 members. The Episcopalian Church was in charge of 25, mainly agricultural and dairy, projects with 600 recipients, 550 of whom were Salvadoreans. And OARS was administering 43 projects which involved 4,000 refugees, 3,950 of whom were Salvadoreans. In 1984, the UNHCR provided \$1,579,000 in support of these projects. Apart from the UNHCR, other international agencies, such as Swedish Free Church Aid, Church World Service, Latin American Project Council and Bread for Peace, offered their assistance.

Why Do Most Projects Fail?

Although significant funds and efforts were employed for these so-called "durable



solutions" projects, most of them did not prove to be very "durable". A study undertaken by CONAPARE in 1983 demonstrated that out of 145 projects registered at this agency, 22 (15.17%) had failed, 22 (15.17%) were in "irregular" conditions, 30 (20.69%) were inactive¹ and 71 (48.57%) were active. Among the active projects only 17 (or 13.1% of all the projects) had become self-sufficient. The study also showed that the highest survival rate was found in agricultural activities: 17 of the 21 agricultural projects were active. The highest failure rate was found among mechanical, metallurgical, painting and other types of urban workshops: out of 12 workshops, 4 had failed, in comparison with 1 failure in agriculture. In 1983, Caritas of Costa Rica reported that out of 82 projects implemented by them 69% had failed. As can be seen, not too many projects had been successful. What then are the causes of their failure?

Three sets of causes can be identified. They relate to: 1) refugees; 2) implementing agencies; and/or 3) the Costa Rican government.

The refugees are often blamed by the implementing agencies' representatives and government officials for the failure of the projects. It is argued by them that the Salvadorean refugees in Costa Rica are of peasant origin, that they have worked only as wage-labourers and never have had business management experience, that they lack technical skills, that they are individualistic and therefore resist working in cooperative projects, that they do not get along with each other, that they are "irresponsible" and that they desert projects to go to third countries or back to El Salvador.

As indicated in a recent study by Luis Carballo, only 18.2% of a sample of Salvadorean refugees residing in Costa Rica used to work in agriculture, over one-quarter of the Salvadoreans in this sample had been self-employed, 5.8% had been employees, 8.4% worked in family businesses and 38% used to be salaried workers in their country of origin. In other words, almost one-third of the Salvadorean population in Costa Rica does have some skills necessary for managing

an enterprise. As far as technical skills are concerned, it is true that often refugees were forced into occupations in which they had no previous experience. Why this occurred is explained later in the article. A new approach taken by the agencies was to make training in both technical skills and administration an integral part of project implementation.

The individualistic attitude of Salvadorean refugees is questionable. It should be remembered that many refugees come from areas in El Salvador where "comunidades de base" or grass-root Christian communities organized into agricultural cooperatives were being formed since the early 1970s. One can also mention the success of Salvadorean rural cooperatives in Nicaragua.

The decision to migrate to a third country or to return to El Salvador can be regarded as a direct result of the near-impossibility for Salvadorean refugees of finding decent living conditions in Costa Rica. Thus it may be argued that refugees deserted the projects because they did not find them viable and not vice versa.

The high failure rate of refugee projects can also be explained by the mistakes committed by the implementing agencies. Two causal factors can be identified: first, mismanagement of the projects; and second, paternalistic treatment of the refugees by the implementing agencies. Projects were often implemented without prior analysis of the climatic, market, soil and other conditions. Out-dated technology contributing to low productivity was purchased. Technical expertise on hybrids, fertilizers and pesticides was not always available to project members. As for the problem of paternalistic treatment, refugees integrated into the projects often complained of being totally controlled by the representatives of the agencies. This led to a feeling of dependency and loss of motivation by the beneficiaries.

Finally, some of these failures can be attributed to policies adopted by the Costa Rican government. As it was mentioned earlier, CONAPARE is in charge of selecting projects to be implemented. The following criteria are used by the agency:

1. Projects are not to displace the national labour force, nor create immediate competition with established businesses;
2. Projects are to help bring foreign currency to the country;
3. Projects are to contribute to import substitution;

4. Projects are to employ national rather than imported primary resources;
5. Projects are to take advantage of manual, cultural and folkloric skills of the beneficiaries; and
6. Projects are to support the tendency of decentralization by being located outside the metropolitan area of San Jose.

Some of these criteria are problematic. Given the projects' low capital investment, they could only present competition to the local informal sector. It seems that in trying to protect the latter, the government authorized those projects which were in a disadvantageous position vis-a-vis the local large capitalist sector.

If one examines the lists of agricultural projects implemented by various agencies, one can see that most of them are cattle-raising. At the same time, cattle-raising is the most concentrated and competitive agricultural business in Costa Rica. In the last 25 years, cattle-raising experienced considerable growth. While in 1955, land under pasture constituted 39% of the agricultural area, in 1973 it was 50%. The number of cattle head grew 25 times in that period. In 1973 cattle-raising farms under 20 hectares constituted 51% of all agricultural farms and occupied 6% of the land, while farms of 1,000 hectares or more, which constituted 0.7% of the farms occupied 23% of the land. In the last several years land under cattle has been getting more and more concentrated. For small, newly formed projects it is extremely difficult to compete with large cattle-raising farms.

The last criterion is also unfavourable to refugees. Many of the implemented projects are non-agricultural. Marketing conditions for goods and services provided by them are much better in the Central Valley region where about three-quarters of the local population resides. Some projects, being located far away from markets, suffer high transportation costs.

And finally, the first criterion, which imposes strict selection procedures, often goes counter to the criterion which encourages use of the refugees' technical skills. Rather than allowing refugees to choose the occupations of their liking and in which they have had experience, CONAPARE forces them into those workshops which will present no danger to local labour.

One CONAPARE study states that many members preferred to abandon the projects just before they reached self-sufficiency-

¹ Projects in "irregular conditions" are those on which the agency has no information, and inactive projects are those which are in the process of implementation or restructuring and have not yet started or renewed activities.

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This occurred because the salaries they expected to receive from these projects were lower than the UNHCR assistance offered to them until the project reached self-sufficiency. It is this seemingly rational behaviour of refugees that the CONAPARE study coined "irresponsible" (see above). It is often argued that prolonged emergency assistance by the UNHCR creates a "dependent" population unwilling to work.

Presently, this "problem" no longer exists since UNHCR emergency assistance was discontinued to all Salvadorean refugees in Costa Rica in December 1985. There is a greater incentive for the refugees to stay in the projects. On the other hand, the burden of providing subsistence to the project beneficiaries has shifted entirely to implementing agencies. The latter are required to offer more financial assistance per project and this results in the decline in the number of businesses these agencies are capable of implementing. For instance, the number of projects administered by the Episcopalian Church has decreased from 18 to 7 in the last year.

While the UNHCR solved the problem of a "dependent population", the Costa Rican government is not absorbing those "independent" wage-labourers who are not integrated into projects. In September 1984, a law allowing Salvadorean refugees to work was passed. However, it does not mean that a refugee can apply for the job of his choice. Instead, he has to find a job, get a letter from his employer and then apply for a permit to PRIMAS (Programa para Refugiados del Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social). He then has to wait three to four months to get his application approved.

This procedure is in accordance with the Costa Rican policy of protecting the national labour force. According to the Labour Code of the country, a firm is to employ workers at least 90% of whom should be Costa Rican, who should receive at least 85% of the salaries. Thus, before granting a permit for work to an applicant, PRIMAS officials make sure that these conditions are observed. Of course, no employer is willing to wait for three or four months for a potential worker to get a permit. Given that a permit is often denied, a refugee loses three or four months awaiting a permit and not looking for any other job.

Why does the Costa Rican government fail to fulfil its responsibilities towards Salvadorean refugees? Certain justifications

can be provided. Starting in 1979, the economic crisis in Costa Rica became evident. Between the beginning of 1980 and March 1982, the number of openly unemployed people more than doubled: it rose from 35,000 to 79,000 people. While in 1980 only 5% of the population of the country was unemployed, by 1983 the unemployment rate had reached 8.9%. While in July 1979, 246,000 people faced employment problems, by 1982 the number had risen to 481,000. The crisis hit the urban labour force relatively harder. In July 1983, the open unemployment rate in rural areas was 8.3% and, in urban areas, 12.2%. Salaried workers were the major victims of unemployment as 51% of those who lost their jobs in 1980-82 were in that category. Given the growing unemployment in Costa Rica, it is clear that refugees are in direct competition for jobs with the local labour force.

In sum, most of the "durable solutions" projects for Salvadorean refugees in Costa Rica have failed. Some causes have to do with the refugees' lack of technical and administrative skills. These shortcomings can be overcome by offering training courses to project beneficiaries. Most errors committed by the agencies have by now been acknowledged by them and agencies are adopting a more rational research and planning approach to project implementation.

The Costa Rican government policy towards economic integration of the refugees presents more serious problems. The government cannot open doors to salaried jobs to refugees without endangering the national labour force. Therefore, while *de jure* refugees have a right to work, *de facto* their access to jobs is blocked by bureaucratic procedures. At the same time, without UNHCR emergency assistance, voluntary agencies can implement a limited number of projects.

What is to be done with those refugees who are neither incorporated into projects nor allowed to work for wages? There are two alternatives: directing more development funds into the projects for Salvadorean refugees in Costa Rica and/or increasing immigration to third countries. Canadian government and voluntary agencies can play an important role in both solutions.

Tanya Basok, a doctoral candidate in Sociology affiliated with the Refugee Documentation Project at York University, is presently in Costa Rica undertaking research on the resettlement of Salvadorean refugees.

- Historians, conflict researchers as well as specialists in public international law are involved in a major refugee research project launched by the Department of History, University of Lund, Sweden. The focus of the project is on the period 1943-1954. Although the problem of uprooted Europeans will be central to the study, the latter will not be limited to Europe and will analyse also U.S. refugee policy during this period. For further information please contact Professor Göran Rystad, Department of History, University of Lund, Magle Lilla Kyrkogata 9 A, S-223 51 Lund, Sweden.

- For ten years Connexions has acted as a nation-wide forum for the social change community in Canada. It has now launched the *Connexions Directory of Canadian Organizations for Social Justice*. The *Directory* includes address and telephone listings for over 1,500 groups working for social change. It will be updated annually. The *Connexions Directory* is available for \$17.95 from Connexions, 427 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1X7, Tel.: (416) 960-3903.

- The Center for Migration Studies is publishing a special Spring issue of the *International Migration Review* focusing on refugee assistance and policy issues. This special issue, with an introduction by Dennis Gallagher of the Refugee Policy Group, will contain an impressive collection of articles on the following topics: refugee movements, asylum and protection, refugee issues in developing countries, and adjustment and resettlement. To order copies contact CMS, 209 Flagg Place, Staten Island, New York 10304, U.S.A.

- An annual publication of the U.S. Committee for Refugees, the *World Refugee Survey* includes extensive country reports, statistics, a directory of agencies and organizations working to meet refugees' needs, and a bibliography. The 1985 *Survey* includes contrasting views on U.S. asylum policy, articles on the "land Vietnamese" in Thailand, the situation of refugees from Chad, the protection of undocumented Salvadoreans in the United States, a personal account of the refugee situation in the Sudan, a look at the role of black Americans in helping refugees, and updates on refugee women and Soviet Jews. Single copies of the *Survey* sell for U.S.\$6.00. All requests for surveys should be sent to Gary Young, U.S. Committee for Refugees, 815 15th St., N.W., Suite 610, Washington, D.C. 20005, U.S.A.

Trials and Errors: The Experience of Central American Refugees in Montreal

By Charles D. Smith

This article is based on the findings of a 1983-84 study of 40 Salvadorean and 35 Guatemalan exiles presently residing in Montreal. Besides culture shock and the cold, the biggest immediate problem faced by informants was coping with a plunge in economic status and living in a situation of poverty (by Canadian standards). Central Americans were happy to have escaped repression at home, but, once here, it was extremely difficult for most of them to find work. Those who did enter the labour force did mostly menial jobs, working as housekeepers, babysitters, cleaners, labourers or restaurant and factory workers. Since the majority of those interviewed came from the small, middle class portion of the Central American population, their lives here began at a much lower standard of living than they had enjoyed at home, at least before war and repression eroded their position.

A Few Facts and Figures

Quebec's Ministry of Cultural Communities and Immigration lists 3,670 arrivals to Quebec from El Salvador and Guatemala who were granted official landed immigrant status from 1980 through 1985. The largest single category was accepted as Convention refugees, but these are not a numerical majority. Convention refugees are those who meet the terms of the Geneva Convention -- are outside their country of origin and can demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution.

When speaking of Convention refugees it is necessary to distinguish whether they are 1) claimants, 2) former claimants granted "refugee" status, or 3) Convention refugees actually accepted as landed immigrants. Only the last category are allowed full legal rights in Canada.

Refugee status determination is a lengthy process, taking as long as 3 years and very rarely less than 1 year. Some 4,000 claimants are accepted as Convention refugees each year.

The complexity of this system can be illustrated by considering the data for 1983 as an example. In that year, a total of 88,846 landed immigrants were accepted in

Canada. In the same year, 4,059 Convention refugees were granted landed immigrant status (CEIC 1983 *Quarterly Statistics*). That year, 2,677 refugee claims were adjudicated. Of these, 62% did not qualify. Therefore, 1,017 persons were granted refugee status (*Ottawa Citizen*, June 15, 1985). Some of those selected as refugees would be granted landed immigrant status the same year, but most would have to wait another year or more to be accepted as landed immigrants. To confuse matters even more, there are about 20,000 refugee claimants in Canada who make up the backlog of those waiting for a decision on whether their claims for Convention refugee status will be accepted (*Le Devoir*, February 17, 1986).

The largest number of Convention refugees (among the 4,000) given landed immigrant status were the 745 Salvadoreans accepted throughout Canada. Of these, 676 chose Montreal as their "intended" new home.

For Montreal, incoming Convention refugees represented the following percentages of landed immigrants from Guatemala and El Salvador.

Convention Refugees in Montreal

GUATEMALA

Year	Convention %	Number of Total Landed Imm.
1980	.0	40
1981	.0	36
1982	4.8	21
1983	28.8	66

EL SALVADOR

Year	Convention %	Number of Total Landed Imm.
1980	23	62
1981	25	128
1982	35.7	333
1983	33.8	678

In Canada as a whole, in the 1980s approximately four in five refugee claimants were refused. Yet it seems that in some instances, the validity of the

rejected claims appears to have been as great as of those accepted.

This is illustrated in the case of Roberto (not his real name), a member of a popular political opposition group in El Salvador. He reports:

I was with a group of fellow university students. We had just finished taking part in a discussion of university politics. We were standing by the bus stop when a white truck parked in front of us stopped [sic] and we heard them say, "you and you", pointing to us, "get in". We started to run away, and they opened fire. One guy was shot in the leg; another was killed by a shot in the head. One girl was taken into the truck and was killed a few blocks away ... We went back (a few hours later) and found her body lying in the street ... I could give many more examples ... At the present moment, almost all the members of my family have been rejected (as Convention refugee claimants in Canada) ... even my brother, who has more than 14 stitches from an operation after being hit with the butt of a rifle, has not been believed. He has had no answer yet. It's been three years now.

His story may not be typical, but neither is it exaggerated or uncommon. The legalistic interpretation of Convention status, as well as the uncertainty of a Convention refugee being accepted as a landed immigrant, is an area in which concerned Canadians should voice their opinions.

Immigration Trends

Certain clear trends emerge from immigration statistics. Between 1970 and 1980 Quebec accepted small and approximately equal numbers of Guatemalan (507) and Salvadorean (660) landed immigrants. But since 1979 much larger numbers have arrived, primarily Salvadoreans. In the years 1981-83 inclusive, Quebec accepted 1,773 Salvadoreans and 212 Guatemalans -- more than seven times as many Salvadoreans. This is mainly because of the special programme (to relax selection criteria for Salvadoreans) in effect between March 1981 and May 1982. Since it often takes as long as three years to process immigration dossiers, many who entered at that time only now are being finally accepted.



The largest single group of Salvadoreans entering Canada, about one-third, chose Montreal as their home. Our research indicates that this is because of better governmental assistance in Quebec than in other provinces, prior residence of family members, and well-established Salvadorean political and community groups. For the Montreal group, during the peak immigration years, single people were the largest category; only some 30% were married. While 70% were single, less than 10% of those were separated, divorced or widowed. The sex ratios for Guatemalans and Salvadoreans were close to equal with a slight overrepresentation of males. The largest single age category of these landed immigrants was the prime working age group of 20 to 40 years old; 44.4% of Montreal's Guatemalans and 50.5% of the Salvadoreans fit into this age bracket.

A Study of Refugee Adaptation

Salvadorean immigration to Canada in the 1980s is a good example of a migrating social group which, to a large degree, resembles the ideal type of refugee. A total of 3,587 Salvadoreans entered Canada as landed immigrants in 1983. Of these, 1,842 were not officially accepted as refugees. Yet most of them left due to the chaos, violence and insecurity of war. The vast majority of these migrants were from the middle classes. Canada Employment and Immigration data do not include previous occupation, but questionnaires administered by this author to 40 Salvadoreans and 35 Guatemalans revealed that 37.5% of the Salvadoreans and 45.7% of the Guatemalans had job experience in the white collar category. Of these, 30% of the Salvadoreans and 37.1% of the Guatemalans had been managers, professionals or scientific technicians, while the remainder were secretaries, bank tellers, sales ladies, receptionists, etc.

Forty-one percent of the Guatemalan cohort and 32% of the Salvadoreans in Montreal had been students. It is possible that many of these young people could, in time, resume their former training and gain access to the labour market in various specialized occupations in demand in Canada.

In the short and medium-term, refugees experience a drastic decline in socio-economic status. It could be argued that perhaps they come here with unrealistic expectations of an improvement in status, and that these are not realized. Yet special

CEIC data made available to us indicated that only 11% of the Salvadorean landed immigrants in Montreal between 1980 and 1983 intended to work as professionals, managers or entrepreneurs. As noted, 30% of our sample population previously had been employed in these high-status categories. None of our sample actually was employed in Canada as a manager or professional. This indicates that most Salvadoreans -- especially those who may have waited three years for landed immigrant status -- have reasonably clear expectations of their prospects here.

In Central America, fewer than 1% of the total population attends university. Within our sample, 37.3% had attended university. Our study examined the family backgrounds of the respondents and we found that the overwhelming majority of the sample came from the small middle class fraction of the Central American population. On average, our respondents had either both parents working in the industrial sector or at least one working as a manager or professional. This index of class also considered the size of the family and whether or not parents were permanently together. Guatemalans scored slightly higher on this index. Both groups were predominantly Catholic (though not necessarily practising) and predominantly from urban areas.

Using discriminant analysis, we discovered that for our national samples (separate and pooled, except where otherwise indicated), seven important variables differentiated refugees from other exiles. (Refugees are defined as those who reported being members of families who were directly persecuted.) It was found that: 1) refugees were less attached to their own ethnic group; 2) refugees reported greater feelings of guilt over leaving their country and families behind; 3) refugees have to wait longer to receive their Certificat du Selection du Québec (this is corroborated by a correlation between persecution and immigration difficulty); 4) refugees were less likely to have received family assistance in immigrating to Canada; 5) the class and socio-economic status of refugees was slightly lower than that for other exiles; 6) the level of social and cultural adaptation, including proficiency in French and English, was higher for the refugee group; 7) the level of material adaptation, based on disposable income, was slightly higher overall for the refugee group, although for the Guatemalan sub-sample the reverse was true.

Other marked differences between the two groups were the time it took to plan their exit from the country (refugees took an average of two months and other exiles an average of six) and the length of time spent on the journey to Canada (the average for refugees was 11 months and for exiles about eight).

Our study results indicate that the refugee group seems more independent than the other exile group. Despite disadvantages, they seem highly motivated to improve their situation and overcome feelings of guilt. This should positively affect their ability to adapt culturally and socially as well as in the job market. It also seems true that refugees are vulnerable to exploitation as cheap labour because of their semi-legal status and fear of being sent back. This was the experience reported by many of our respondents.

Differentiation by Gender and Nationality

Discriminant analysis revealed some significant differences within the Central American group. In considering gender, it was clearly established that males experienced greater migration and immigration difficulties than females and came from a higher socio-economic background than females. Women felt a stronger sense of attachment to their own ethnic group. Salvadoreans experienced significantly more problems of migration and the Guatemalans tended to adapt better on a material level. The reason for this is probably the more stringent employability criteria that have been applied thus far to a smaller, more select group of incoming Guatemalans.

Persecution and Immigration

One disturbing trend uncovered in the study was the clear association between persecution at home and migration and immigration difficulties. Within our sample, 44% of our respondents or members of their immediate families had been threatened by persecutors such as paramilitary death squads or the army. Of this high persecution group, 57% travelled to Quebec overland at least part of the way. Males generally preceded their spouses on the journey. Forty-five and one-half percent took over one month to complete the trip from their home country to Montreal.

Once here, the high persecution group tended to have more immigration delays and problems. Of the 28.6% of Guatemalans and 37.4% of Salvadoreans in our sample who experienced immigration difficulties -- negative or late decisions, appeals -- 70% of the Guatemalans and 73.3% of the Salvadoreans were in the high persecution category. Four out of our 75 respondents were placed in preventive detention upon arrival.

Conclusion

The trials faced by Central American exiles entering Canada are considerable. But for many more of their countrymen the situation is even more grave. There are approximately two million Central American refugees. Between 1979 and 1983 more than 50,000 Guatemalans and 250,000 Salvadoreans fled their countries' U.S.-backed military regimes. According to Arthur Helton, Director of the political asylum project of the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, a further one million left their troubled countries in 1984 (*Macleans*, May 13, 1985). It is believed that one million Central Americans have entered the United States where most reside illegally trying to elude the immigration authorities.

The Reagan administration insists that most of the illegal immigrants from Central America are economic migrants seeking to escape poverty rather than political repression. The study of refugees in Montreal clearly demonstrates exactly the opposite.

The United States deported Salvadoreans and Guatemalans at the rate of 400 each month in 1984. Many would then face imprisonment or even death. The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) granted asylum to only 328 of 13,373 (3%) Salvadorean applicants in 1984.

We, as concerned Canadians, must apply pressure on our government to continue to avoid the double error made by the United States. We must not assume Central Americans are economic migrants. My data indicates a downward plunge in economic status. But the overriding issue is that Canada, unlike the United States, must honour its humanitarian obligations as signatory to the United Nations Convention and Protocol on refugees.

The words of two American Rabbis

speaking at a Tucson symposium should be taken to heart. Rabbi Marshall Meyer, who spent 25 years in Argentina, stated:

... what is happening to the Central American refugees parallels the beginnings of Nazism in Europe.

Rabbi Joseph Weiznbaum, whose father was an undocumented alien, adds:

These refugees are the Jews of today ... The good Lord has dealt out a new deck of cards, and we are the ones who must not be turning them away now.

[from *Reform Judaism*, Fall 1985]

Charles D. Smith is a post-doctoral fellow of the Centre for Developing Area Studies and a research project co-ordinator at McGill University's Anthropology of Development Project. This article is based on the findings of a 1983-84 study entitled "Les Réfugiés au Québec", funded by the Conseil Québécois de la recherche sociale (CQRS).

New Publications

- *Memorandum Presented to the Government of Guatemala Following a Mission to the Country in April 1985* (Ottawa: Amnesty International, 1986).
- *Nicaragua: The Human Rights Record* (Ottawa: Amnesty International, 1986).
- *Guatemala: The Group for Mutual Support 1984-1985* (New York: Americas Watch, 1985).
- *The Continuing Terror: Seventh Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador* (New York: Americas Watch, 1985).
- *Human Rights in Honduras After General Alvarez* (New York: Americas Watch, 1986)
- *Human Rights in Nicaragua: Reagan, Rhetoric and Reality* (New York: Americas Watch, 1985).
- Stephen Golub, *Looking for Phantoms: Flaws in the Khmer Rouge Screening Process* (Washington, D.C.: United States Committee for Refugees, 1986).
- Philippa Valder, *Refugees: A Dilemma for the World* (Richmond, Australia: CHOMI, 1985).
- Ken Wilson, Rachel Ayling, Alexander de Waal, JoAnn McGregor, Mary Myers, Alula Pankhurst, Jonathan Wright, *The Lutaya Expedition: A Report on Research in Yei River District, South Sudan* (Oxford: Refugee Studies Programme, Occasional Paper Number 1, 1985).

Book Reviews

Barbara E. Harrell-Bond
Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees
 Foreword by Robert Chambers
 Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986

by Dawn MacDonald

In the late 1970s, with the name Idi Amin the current synonym for madman-devil incarnate, the world's compassionate cheered the seven-month effort of Tanzanian troops to reach Kampala and topple the despot. And that, for most of us, was the end of that. If we thought about Uganda at all in the next few years, it was with complacency. Of course there would be a time of further displacement for innocent civilians but it would settle down. The international humanitarian agencies we had assigned to do our caring for us would clean up while we grappled with the news of horrors elsewhere in the world.

How wrong we were. In southern Sudan alone, the refugee count of 2,000 Ugandans at the time of Amin's exit from power grew to 300,000 in the next four years. Even more startling, only twenty percent of these numbers obtained -- correction: sought and obtained -- assistance from the UNHCR, the central agency co-ordinating the security and material needs of those in flight.

These and thousands of equally arresting facts have been presented in Dr. Barbara Harrell-Bond's new book *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*. But Dr. Harrell-Bond is concerned with a great deal more than the facts of this particular situation. From the outset her case study approach -- two years of observing and writing about the reality of the Ugandan refugees in the Yei River district of southern Sudan -- was planned to test all the assumptions underlying the behaviour and attitudes of those who interact with African refugees (there are currently five million fleeing terror, civil war and drought and the numbers have been predicted to go as high as fifty million by the year 2004). The intervenors include UNHCR policy makers and practitioners, the voluntary non-governmental organizations (NGOs) hired to implement UNHCR programmes, journalists, visiting delegates from donor governments, and hosts, both governmental and local, who are called upon to share their skimpy resources with the refugees.

Dr. Harrell-Bond, an anthropologist, has made sure that first and foremost we get beyond the simplistic impressions of just who the refugees are, as portrayed by their fund-raising marketers. The cliches paint the picture of helplessness -- people with their hands out with no chance for survival outside the beneficence of the donor world.

Through Dr. Harrell-Bond's meticulous portrayals of the people she worked with and encountered in survey interviews, we get to know real people coping with real events and situations. In the words of the refugees themselves we learn the particulars of terror as children turn into bandits and a friend's mother hides a bit of cooked pumpkin she no longer wants to share. We learn of people pushed out of their homes by marauding soldiers on a vengeance tour of areas and tribal peoples associated with Amin's regime. Civilians on the run made shelters in the countryside. Sometimes they were pushed further and they made second and third shelters. Sometimes they returned home only to be pushed out again. Finally they crossed the Sudan border to seek uneasy asylum. Ugandan soldiers raided their camps at the borders. As the refugees pushed further into Sudan territory they discovered the baleful eye of hosts who resented their occupation of lands donated by the Sudanese government and exploited them as cheap labour.

In the midst of all this, the intervention of international assistance is minimal, inappropriate, ultimately a waste of money. Even for those who do accept assistance, it is but one branch of the survival strategy. Refugees, except for those truly helpless or dependent, are above all resourceful. They worked for the bad wages. They found ways to trade. They kept their eyes on the Ugandan situation in case there was a chance of resuming normal life at home. All this unfolded in extreme hardship and fear -- and by and large without the assistance supposedly available to them.

We discover that the very term "refugee" is meaningless. To both the UNHCR and the Ugandan, it means settled in a UNHCR agricultural settlement. Eighty percent of the refugees resisted -- often at the point of starvation -- such assistance. For many, professionals and traders before their troubles started, learning the farm business -- often without so much as a hoe -- just wasn't the best bet. For others, the settlement option implied a stigma, too much loss of independence. According to the eighty percent, known as the self-settled by the UNHCR, a refugee is someone else -- the person who accepts assistance.

Even Dr. Harrell-Bond was astonished at the ratio between self-settled and settlement refugees. Her original intention was to study only the settlement populations since only they related to UNHCR policy and fund expenditure. She went to the field with a fundamentally linear problem to explore: the donor and the recipient and all the folks in between who happen to be on that straight line. She even neglected to include the host countrypersons in this model. Her travel arrangements and all other permissions of access were strictly through the UNHCR.

But insight and intellectual honesty directed Dr. Harrell-Bond to a *holistic* approach. The problem had to be seen in relation to all its parts and some relationships between the parts were suddenly more important than others. The refugees and their Sudanese hosts were more at the crux of things than the refugees and their UNHCR benefactors, for example. Astonishingly, even the Ugandans themselves had something to learn here: that for example their singing of hymns of praise to Geneva was only an irritant to their Sudanese neighbours.

Even the name of the problem changes with Harrell-Bond's thinking. No longer called "refugee", which describes but one part, the problem is about an entire geographical context in which upheaval is taking place. Not only do we have Ugandan refugees of the self-settled and settlement kind. We also have former Sudanese refugees returning from a prolonged stay in Uganda following earlier civil war in the Sudan. Then we have the other Sudanese in flight, the victims of drought and famine travelling from the north of the country. And finally there are the hapless normal inhabitants of the southern Sudan, who without warning or preparation are expected to adjust to all this.

The traditional UNHCR tactic has been categorically linear, focused primarily on the refugees as the target of material assistance; only secondarily on the host government, and then warily, as the provider of land accommodation and protection guarantees for the incomers.

Historically, the UNHCR has funded three solutions to the refugees' plight: repatriation, settlement in a third country, settlement in the host country. In Africa, the third option unfolds most frequently, and for a variety of reasons it most often takes the shape of agricultural settlements. With self-sufficiency as the ill-defined goal for the refugees -- it means the point where

the donor tap can be turned off -- agriculture holds the obvious promise of at least food self-sufficiency. But there are many other reasons for wanting to organize the refugees into settlements. For one thing, donors like their recipients to be visible. It makes the book-keeping of supplies (plastic dishes, blankets, hoes) easier. There are other debated arguments for settlements: the protection of the refugees against their raiding countrymen soldiers, the facilitation of Sudanese security concerns, the minimizing of crime.

But the settlements do not work. They produce neither agriculture nor self-sufficiency. The able refugees stay away from them and they become little welfare communities of the temporarily and permanently disabled -- set apart, yet the most visible indicator of the hardship shared by all. Looked down upon by the self-settled, envied by the Sudanese locals who see where all the foreign money is going, they have entered the black hole of relief aid. They are now undifferentiated statistics to whom are given the so-called essentials: the shelter, the food ration, maybe some tools and blankets. That there are endless problems which do not fit this response -- the need to bury one's dead, the need for transportation to a clinic, severe psychological trauma, suspicions that someone is practising witchcraft, to name a few -- has no play here. Neither does the proposition that among the settlement refugees there could be human resources to create new solutions, new ways out.

In a word, in this segmented and artificial approach, nobody is thinking about the whole problem -- least of all the representatives of donors. Their assumption of dominance in the situation belies the possibility of the most obvious partnership of all, between themselves and the Sudanese government. But African governments get the cold shoulder from humanitarians. Humanitarians cite incompetence, bad human rights records, even corruption as reasons. Apart from the massive arrogance these views represent, humanitarians have much to think about in terms of their own forms of corruption. Harrell-Bond found instances where relief workers sent spies to the homes of government officials to see if they could find evidence of unusual spending. Meanwhile, the do-gooders themselves blithely spend the dollars earmarked for compassion without even a modicum of accountability, moving from failure to failure, often hiring the unqualified just on the basis of their white skin. Problem-solving always means working with the

best-qualified available; in the Sudanese situation, Harrell-Bond found credentials and will among the Sudanese and Ugandans just waiting to be recruited.

Why not, asks Harrell-Bond, take the funding destined exclusively to settlements and make it a community affair? If the area as a whole could somehow benefit, refugees could be looked upon as an opportunity, rather than a burden. Why try to turn qualified Ugandan refugees into farmers when their arrival on the scene represents a positive infusion of training and skills?

But politics, rather than problem-solving, is the main act here. The settlement, far from being a safe haven, is a final theatre wherein the real power struggle between donors and recipients plays itself out. It does not sound like much of a struggle.

Dr. Harrell-Bond has opened a doorway onto immense, new territory. She wants all concerned not only to deal with the real facts but to fundamentally change the approach to those facts. In the process, she challenges every facet of the Western humanitarian philosophy. The idea, for example, that the act of "giving" -- forget for the moment that the actual givers are paid, often well-paid -- is a thing in itself, somehow beyond the usual standards of professionalism, beyond criticism, certainly on the part of the recipient. Or the idea that the humanitarian cause is apolitical, outside the ongoing dramas of local, national and international politics that is otherwise the context of the crises in need of aid intervention. Myth after myth explodes in Harrell-Bond's exploration. No one will read this book without twisting and turning upon their own preconceptions. Doing good, according to these new rigours, is not the easiest but the hardest thing in the world to do well. Not doing it well, worse, pretending to do it well, is a special form of evil.

Western humanitarianism surely rates in Dr. Harrell-Bond's system as one of the worst of political evils confronting the besieged refugee. Too often, the badge of compassion is used to disguise thoughtlessness, petty politics and sheer incompetence. While the donor world goes about its business, assuming that its conduits of international caring (the relief workers) are spending the money entrusted to them properly and solving the problems of the suffering, the job is simply not getting done and nobody -- at least not until Dr. Harrell-Bond arrived on the scene -- is asking the fundamental questions.

Why not, Harrell-Bond asked herself on

several occasions during previous years of field study in Africa, where nine times out of ten she discovered failure?

Harrell-Bond discovered that often behind the humanitarian piety is a pernicious will to keep critical observers out. In forty years of relief agency history, the practice of impregnability has become a fine art. Journalists are encouraged to cover situations that will enhance fund-raising, but the do-gooders generally avoid public analysis of their situations and activities and they go to great lengths to curtail journalistic access to information.

No doubt similar strictures apply to academic research, but, writes Robert Chambers in his foreword to *Imposing Aid*, academics have complied to the disinformation process by only belatedly seeing refugee studies as a proper area for serious research -- and then only with an urban, elite bias which does not apply to rural Africa where most of the refugee action is. African refugees remain stereotyped as an uneducated, undifferentiated mass. Far from being seen as a set of individuals with endless differences to be attended to, the African refugees are regarded as not quite human, especially in their threshold for suffering, which too many have assumed is much higher than that of non-Africans.

Harrell-Bond's breakthrough volume (in Chambers' view, it is the first of its kind) required two six-month-periods in the field each of the two years, first concentrating on the observation of all sorts of outside intervenors, the relief workers, the members of international donor delegations, and the journalists. She watched the interactions of the outsiders and ultimately the effect of all this on the plight of the refugees.

Even short visits from the outside can have major impact. UNHCR was under pressure to provide ambulances to one district after an advisor of President Reagan had watched patients being carried to the clinic in wheelbarrows. On the other hand, the stick handling applied to journalists keeps them from confronting their own stereotypical thinking and they end up writing the same old simplistic doggerel.

Harrell-Bond arrived in the Sudan with model criteria forged a few years previously as a result of a study she did for Oxfam on Sahrawi refugees in Algeria. According to her report published in 1981, Algeria had permitted the Sahrawi complete autonomy in the areas they had settled. The camps still relied on capital infusions from the

donor community but their success in mobilizing the personal resources of the refugees had much to do with the fact that no outsiders lived or worked in the refugee areas. The fundamental idea of participation at work in Algeria became the central core for this book: the critical search for *anti-participation* attitudes, the subtle and not so subtle ways the powerful employ to control the behaviour of the powerless. These attitudes thrive in the demi-worlds of refugee camps and according to Harrell-Bond, they are not only unfair but also expensive, ineffective and wasteful.

With anti-participation comes the imposition of aid, a one-way street which neglects the concerns of the hosts, the government officials and local folk who have been told to share their reality with strangers. In addition, the creative energies of the refugee are suppressed and far too often the end results provoke unnecessary hostilities in all directions.

One aches throughout Dr. Harrell-Bond's description of failure in the Sudan UNHCR operation for the mitigating character or instance that would have been a sign of hope, a direction for the future, a positive demonstration of how things could be. William Shawcross in his prize-winning *The Quality of Mercy*, a description of refugee operations on behalf of post-Pol Pot Cambodians, provided examples of competence and even heroism to soften his black picture of disorganized and deceitful humanitarians. But while Harrell-Bond graciously acknowledges UNHCR officials for their support of her independently funded study, adding that the field operation she visited in southern Sudan was among the best of all such programmes, the reader will find few further positives in Dr. Harrell-Bond's observations.

Dr. Harrell-Bond has offered so much in this effort -- with *Imposing Aid* she has pointed the way to new generations who will now hopefully take up the challenge of refugee research and studies -- it seems greedy to ask for more. But in future volumes, more about the institution of the UNHCR itself, its history, its leading personalities, particularly as pertaining to Africa, would be helpful. We should also know how much the Sudanese operation costs, as well as the operational costs of the other UNHCR activities in Africa.

And then there is the question of Dr. Harrell-Bond's writing style which has not quite kept up with the parts-whole method of examination she uses. In the end, the gestalt comes through, but since she is in the business of creating new rules, her

book writing style would be well served by an unacademic (dare we say journalistic?) narrative that openly uses the chronology of her time in the Sudan as a framework. And we could use a more visually descriptive sense of people and places.

The weaknesses of Harrell-Bond's study disappear in the awesomeness of her achievement. She has provided a point of beginning to all the players -- donors, private and governmental, administrators and, most of all, the recipients of policy, the refugees and their hosts -- to imagine a kind of help that is unimposed. Then the "giving" would look more like sharing and the "Haves" would concede to the "Havenots" some of that asset valued most: power.

Dawn MacDonald is a journalist who has recently returned from a fact-finding trip to the Ogaden desert region of Ethiopia where the UNHCR oversees a \$40 million recovery programme for returning Somali refugees. She wishes she had read Dr. Harrell-Bond's book prior to her journey.

Renato Camarda

Forced to Move

Introduction by Ronald V. Dellums
Edited by David Loeb and Susan Hansell
Translated by Susan Hansell
and Carmen Alegría
San Francisco: Solidarity
Publications, 1985

Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees From El Salvador and Guatemala

London: El Salvador Committee for Human Rights, Guatemala Committee for Human Rights, War on Want Campaign Ltd., 1985

by Tanya Basok

Forced to Move and *Out of the Ashes*, two recent books on Central American refugees, complement one another in several ways. *Forced to Move* focuses only on Salvadorean refugees, mainly in Honduras. *Out of the Ashes* describes the situation of Salvadoreans and Guatemalans who seek asylum in other Central American countries, Mexico and the United States.

Forced to Move is based on testimonies by refugees, volunteers, doctors, nurses, priests, Honduran solidarity workers, UNHCR representatives and others. Except for a short introduction, chronology of the crisis and the update at the end of the

book, there are no interventions by the author. The reader faces the task of reconstructing events and forming a picture of camp life from scattered bits of information revealed in testimonies. *Out of the Ashes*, on the other hand, offers a precise and succinct summary of the refugee situation through a more detached narrative. *Out of the Ashes* is informative, while the other book is very moving. The former appeals to reason, the latter to emotion.

One needs only compare the titles of these two books in order to understand the difference in their focuses. The title "Forced to Move" brings out images of repression, violence and coercion. There is a photo of a family (mother, father and two children) on the cover. Next to them stands a soldier holding a gun. *Forced to Move* is a collection of stories about why Salvadoreans had to abandon their homeland, why and how they were relocated against their will from La Virtud camp to Mesa Grande and why they were being forced to move from Colomoncagua and Mesa Grande to yet another area in 1983. It is a textbook of human suffering.

By comparison, *Out of the Ashes* is a statement of hope, of resurrection and of reconstruction of the lives of refugees. In contrast to the deadly image of the gun, the cover of *Out of the Ashes* presents symbols of life and hope: green trees, blooming flowers, women cooking food, people wearing brightly-coloured clothes. The book is an ode to human strength and resistance in the face of overwhelming problems. It portrays rebuilding of the society under the difficult conditions of camp life. Refugees do not give up but, instead, organize literacy classes, carpentry, hammock-making, pottery and other workshops. They cultivate land and form committees. Once a week they call a general assembly of all camp residents.

There are occasional references to these aspects of the refugee life in *Forced to Move*, but they are rare. There are photos of religious ceremonies, theatre performances and classes for children in the chapter on life in the camp. However, the text which accompanies these photos covers repression of refugees and solidarity workers by the Honduran army. A photo on page 43 depicts women during the elections for the refugee coordinating committees. Information on these committees is missing, however. While a few pages are devoted to the determination of the Salvadoreans to work, learn and produce in the camp, most of the book is a denunciation of violence aimed at innocent

people by the Salvadorean and Honduran armies.

Forced to Move raises anger which is necessary in order for people to react to this injustice. *Out of the Ashes* inspires faith and hope in the will to survive.

Cynthia Brown, editor
With Friends Like These:
The Americas Watch Report
on Human Rights &
U.S. Policy in Latin America
Preface by Jacobo Timerman
Introduction by Alfred Stepan
Toronto: Random House, 1985

by Alex Zisman

Since its inception in 1981 the Americas Watch has been monitoring and promoting the observance of human rights in Latin America. It has periodically published reports and supplements on individual countries in the region. Often enough -- as in the case of the publications dealing with Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras -- the exposure of human rights violations substantially relied on testimonies dealing with the plight of refugees. These reports and supplements were crisp, exceptionally informative and readily accessible to the general public. In *With Friends Like These* the collective effort of the Americas Watch contributors Cynthia Brown, Holly Burkhalter, Robert K. Goldman, Juan Méndez, Allan Nairn and Arye Neier not only follows but handily complements this previous body of work.

The massive flight of Central and South American refugees over the past decades responded -- and still responds -- to a coercive reality fostered by power groups which over the years have been refining and building on a legacy of social and economic inequalities and human rights abuses.

The United States may well have purported to act as a sort of godfather in the region, but, for all its democratic inclinations and sporadic attempts to encourage the improvement of standards of living and limit the disparity of wealth distribution, when forced to choose between social justice and the status quo, it almost invariably leaned towards the latter at the expense of the former. As a result, U.S. human rights guidelines in Latin America often proved contradictory. Despite some genuine concerns for human rights

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improvements, decision-making, particularly under the Reagan administration, has been all too often marred by policies of convenience, implemented with a penchant for double standards and even calculated chicanery.

While *With Friends Like These* provides a useful socio-political analysis and comprehensive background information on each of the nine countries it focuses on and discusses (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Colombia, and Peru), the main thrust of the volume is to examine and expose the fascinating but sorry implications of Reagan's policies in Latin America. What emerges amid a deceiving carnival of anti-communist frenzy is a spectre of misrepresented developments, of short-sighted tacit condonations of human rights abuses by oppressive and usually corrupt regimes, "friendly" allies with a tainted record. They should never have been so readily allowed by the U.S. to escape criticism for their unbecoming actions.

The book harbours the discussions about the various countries between a splendid introductory chapter by the editor and a concluding set of recommendations by Holly Burkhalter and Aryeh Neier. The latter open up with an ancient medical maxim: *Primum non nocere* (First do no harm). It is a measure of the frustration that Reagan's human rights policies in Latin America provoke, and a sensible indication of what his self-righteous administration should -- but is not likely to -- be doing. *With Friends Like These* may not alter much the course of the administration's policy-making, but at least it delivers a rotund moral lesson. It is first-rate and a must for all those interested in the monitoring of human rights. And also for those eager to get a better grasp of the causes behind the most blatant examples of the Latin American refugee exodus.

Alex Zisman is a doctoral candidate in *Social and Political Thought* at York University and the Media Co-ordinator at the Refugee Documentation Project.

Notice to Our Readers

Please note that since *Refuge* is only published during the academic year, the next issue (Volume 6, Number 1) will appear in October 1986.

Howard Adelman will be away on sabbatical next year, and Michael Lanphier will be taking over as Director of the Refugee Documentation Project and Editor of *Refuge* as of June 1, 1986.

Leslie Rider is also leaving us as Managing Editor, and will be replaced by Noreen Nimmons (see box on page 5). *Refuge* will continue to be published four times a year. Alex Zisman will continue as Feature Editor.

We would also like to remind our new friends that we welcome comments and suggestions about our publication from all our readers.

c/o Refugee Documentation Project, York University
4700 Keele Street, North York, Ontario M3J 1P3



I wish to become a friend of the Refugee Documentation Project for the 1986-1987 academic year. I understand that all friends receive *Refuge* as well as information on the research activities of the RDP. My cheque for \$20 (or) made payable to the Refugee Documentation Project is enclosed.

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