

CANADIAN STATEMENT
UNHCR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
JANUARY 31, 1986
BY AMBASSADOR J.A.BEESLEY

At the outset I would like to join other speakers in expressing our satisfaction at the High Commissioner's appointment and wish him well as he assumes his heavy new responsibilities. We are convinced that his extensive experience and impressive record of humanitarian achievement will serve him well in this new post. We join other speakers in welcoming our new Secretary, Mr. Vieira de Mello, and in paying tribute to his distinguished predecessor, Mr. Luke who has served us so well for many years.

My delegation particularly welcomes the frankness with which the High Commissioner has outlined his concerns and preliminary thinking on many of the fundamental issues affecting his office and mandate in a succinct, thoughtful and provocative presentation. We thus welcome the importance he attaches to establishing a meaningful and candid dialogue with the Committee on these and other issues. Although it will obviously not be possible nor indeed appropriate

to reach definitive conclusions on these issues at this informal meeting, I would like to try to respond in kind to the High Commissioner and share our preliminary thoughts and reactions with him and other delegations.

In his statement the High Commissioner rightly pointed out that protection remains the fundamental task of UNHCR. He also emphasized the importance of the continuing search for durable solutions to refugee problems, and the need for a dynamic, flexible and coordinated global process which takes due account of the particularity and diversity of - and the possibilities offered by - each situation. As the High Commissioner noted, we can no longer apply a set of pre-existing conclusions to situations which differ from each other. The irregular movement of large numbers of refugees and economic migrants, of grave concern to both asylum and resettlement countries in many parts of the world, is one such issue which in our view presupposes such a flexible, pragmatic and co-ordinated approach. Following a Canadian initiative at the 35th EXCOM, a study of irregular movements was made

by the UNHCR on the basis of which a representative working group proposed a set of basic principles at the 36th session. While regrettably these conclusions could not be adopted by EXCOM last autumn, we would urge the High Commissioner to continue his efforts to reach agreement on such principles. We believe this to be an area where the active leadership of the High Commissioner is needed in facilitating practical solutions involving a large number of countries while preserving the traditional framework for protecting genuine refugees. No issue better illustrates the need for a concerted and coordinated approach by the international community, both governments and international humanitarian agencies, in the face of the complexity and universality of the refugee problem.

We are also grateful to the High Commissioner for his frank assessment of UNHCR's financial situation. It is clear that this remains difficult, if not critical, and thus must be at the forefront of concerns of both contributors and recipients alike. In the short run, it appears that an even more intensive burden sharing effort is needed than in the past to ensure that the office

has the resources required to implement its 1986 programs. In this context I am happy to confirm Canada's unearmarked pledge of \$6 million (Canadian) which represents an increase of \$500,000 over 1985. Canada intends to pay this as early as possible in our new financial year beginning April 1. In addition, we are actively considering the level of our earmarked contributions for special programs. I can assure the High Commissioner that these will be as generous as possible, within the limits of available resources.

In recent communications the High Commissioner has indicated that for a variety of structural and budgetary reasons, the long term prospects for growth in UNHCR funding levels are not encouraging. For this reason we welcome the High Commissioner's interest in reviewing the relationship between concrete program action and the legal concepts which underlie it, as these have evolved over the years since the office was established. We support the High Commissioner's view that states should resist the temptation to entrench themselves

behind existing texts. In this regard Canada will continue to respond with flexibility to refugee problems - both in supporting the HCR's assistance programs, and in the implementation of Canada's refugee resettlement program. However, it is evident that there is some feeling that there is a need to consider and perhaps better define the role of the UNHCR, particularly in relation to the African emergency situation and the OEOA.

It is for this reason that Canada has, with the support of other like-minded countries, suggested a greater participation by the Executive Committee in the planning of assistance programs. We welcomed in October the proposal of the Director of Assistance to organize informal consultations in which members of our Committee could have the opportunity to discuss ways and means to ensure a better understanding of HCR assistance programs and how these relate to the objectives of the Office in furthering the different interdependent responses to refugee problems, i.e. first basic protection - and emergency aid - and leading to the durable solutions of repatriation and resettlement, as a basis for development. We very much hope that the High

Commissioner will give his full support to these consultations and that they can be arranged at an appropriately early opportunity in 1986 so that any preliminary conclusions which might be reached could be considered by the Committee at its October session.

Mr. Chairman, Canada has for some time expressed the view, together with Australia and the United States, that resettlement of refugees should not be regarded as the sole responsibility of the traditional immigration countries. We have consequently suggested that UNHCR establish a planning process which would encourage increased burden-sharing in meeting resettlement needs. In our view a useful start has been made in the RASRO and Disero programs for refugees rescued at sea. We hope that the new High Commissioner will recognize the need for improved planning of the resettlement process, and the need to involve a large proportion of the international community.

Mr. Chairman, we have taken careful note of the High Commissioner's support for efforts to reorient the focus of the office towards its field operations and

to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of UNHCR. It is in this area where action and law are interdependent that the UNHCR will succeed or fail in its task. We welcome the significant reduction of administrative costs in 1985, both in absolute terms and as a porportion of program expenditure. However, my delegation continues to be concerned at the under-representation of women professionals in UNHCR and hopes this imbalance can gradually be corrected. Canada also took a strong position at the October session in relation to refugee women and has encouraged the UNHCR to strengthen the focal point within the Office for co-ordinating women's programs.

Canada will continue to play its full part in assisting the High Commissioner in the vigorous and imaginative pursuit of his high humanitarian mission of which his first statement today provides both clear evidence and much food for thought. Canadians take no little pride that this support takes many forms - financial, moral and resettlement, and I can assure him that it will continue to be both generous and understanding. Indeed, I would recall that in a period when my country, like many others, is facing a significantly increased influx of

spontaneous asylum seekers, the Canadian government has increased its planned refugee resettlement program in 1986 by 1,000 places over 1985, with the result that we expect to resettle over 16,000 refugees this year.

In closing, I would like to thank HCR's staff for its continuing efforts on behalf of refugees and look forward to a continuation of the profitable dialogue begun today on so many important issues on other occasions throughout the year.