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CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGEE

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CRISIS IN NORTH AMERICA: PART II

Organizations Advocate Refugee Rights

Effective Advocacy: A Legacy

Noreen Nimmons

Canada has won a hard-earned reputation as a nation that is humanitarian in spirit and in practice. But the country's reputation is no more than the sum of its concerned peoples' efforts. There are many incidents in which a particular group of people were saved from persecution and possible death because the Canadian gov-

ernment agreed to accept large numbers of them: post World War II displaced persons; Hungarians from the 1956 Revolution, Czechoslovakians in the '60s, later the Poles, Ugandans, Tibetans, Chileans and in large numbers, the Indochinese 'Boat People.' But there are scars on Canada's immigration history, well-known by those who suffered as a direct result of discriminatory policies, less well-known but understood by many others who cared. And frequently in our history, these are the people who have engendered and organized effective advocacy for improvements in negative government policies. These are the individuals and organizations who have offered to work hand in hand with the government in direct sponsorship and in the implementation of programmes and services. Last year the people of Canada were awarded the Nansen medal for their humanitarian response to refugees, desperate people who flee their homeland in fear of their lives. But forced or involuntary

migration has become a crisis of global proportions today. Governments have been formulating legislation which denies refugees protection or safe haven. In Canada, advocates argue that in order not to recreate the inhumanitarianism of our past, the defense of others' human rights must be today's collective challenge.

In the early days of Canada's development as a nation, immigration was encouraged and controlled by the ascendant British founding nation. Control worked positively for those 'preferred' peoples who suited the British-Nordic ideology. It worked negatively against the 'non-preferred' peoples. Certain ethnocultural groups were not allowed to enter Canada. Others were imported in order to build railroads and shipyards, and some were selected to develop a thriving agricultural and industrial country. Many Chinese or

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Salvadoran refugee children in Honduran medical clinic. PHOTO: UNHCR

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