

"If the Geneva Convention is interpreted broadly, there must be a billion refugees in the world, at least one billion individuals who do not agree with their governments... I believe we should get back to a more political concept of what a refugee is, and not confuse a charitable welcome, which is desirable when we can afford it, with the right to asylum or the status of refugee which implies an acknowledged duty of protection on the part of the state. This is a matter of fairness and, ultimately, of human rights." Gilles Rosset, OFPRA's Secretary-General. (French Office for Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons).

From *Refugees*, No. 9, Sept. 1982. (Published by the UNHCR).

ever, he argued the UNHCR could promote the adoption of principles to ensure the safety of refugees. He further suggested that refugee camps and settlements be granted special status under a distinctive sign, such as the Red Cross, as if principles and signs could protect refugees from soldiers with M6's, rockets, tanks and helicopters with gunships. How can the safety of refugees be guaranteed when armed guerillas sometimes use refugee camps as military bases

and armies then attack the camps believing, or with the pretext, that they are military bases?

Ambassador Schnyder was asked to survey camps and settlements of concern to the UNHCR and prepare a report on the problem to be ready no later than September 1983.

In the other "physical" protection issue, asylum seekers at sea, recent statistics indicate that fewer ships have been stopping to rescue refugees adrift in small boats on the open seas. The reasons are obvious. Rescue operations and disembarkation procedures can prove quite costly to ship-owners. The small maritime nations whose flags of convenience these ships fly are faced with increasing numbers of refugees. They are obliged to rescue but can ill afford to offer asylum. All that emerged from this discussion was a reiteration of the obligation to rescue asylum seekers in distress at sea.

Complex issues were raised at the 1982 Executive Committee meeting. The changing world economic situation and political unrest in developing nations guarantee an increase in already large numbers of asylum seekers fleeing both economic and political repression. Backlash and shrinking economic resources are causing resettlement countries to close their doors. No matter how great the pressure exerted from

without by the waiting refugees, it appears likely to be matched by mounting pressures from within and the prospect of the doors opening enough to relieve the present world refugee crisis is far from promising.

### Nansen Medal

This year's Nansen Medal was awarded to Crown Princess Sonja of Norway at a ceremony held on October 11 (the formal opening of the Executive Committee meeting) at the Palais des Nations. The medal is named after the famous Norwegian explorer, Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, who was the first League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The award is granted for outstanding services to the cause of refugees. Crown Princess Sonja has been working to help refugees both in Norway and outside for over ten years.

The funds for this year's prize (U.S.\$50,000) were donated by the Canadian government. The princess announced that the prize money would be used for the construction of schools for refugees at the Katumba settlement in Tanzania.

## Canadian News in Brief

Joe Stern, the former assistant to Lloyd Axworthy, has been appointed chairman of the Refugee Status Advisory Committee (RSAC).

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During the summer of 1982, an agreement was signed with the government of Newfoundland under which the federal government and the province work jointly with private groups to provide resettlement help for refugees with special needs. The agreement benefits handicapped refugees, those with tuberculosis, and unaccompanied minors who could not otherwise be admitted because of the difficulties they would face in becoming established in Canada. This agreement is similar to one concluded with the government of Manitoba in September, 1981. From *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration Levels, November 1982*.

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Early Notice: The Next Standing Conference of Organizations Concerned for Refugees will be held in Montreal, May 13, 14, and 15, 1983. The theme will be

"REFUGEES at OUR <sup>CLOSING</sup> DOORS."

At the Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees, December 3rd and 4th 1982, a resolution was passed to ask the Canadian government to give financial assistance to all people who have asked for refuge in Canada, are waiting for a response to their claim from the competent authorities and are presently out of resources and close to unacceptable misery.

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The conditions of group sponsorship are now under review to achieve a more equitable distribution of the costs undertaken by government and the private sector. *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration Levels, November 1982*.

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About 150 persons, including former detainees who belong to the Polish trade union Solidarity and their families, will soon arrive in Canada.

Oct. 26, 1982 - *Minister Employment and Immigration - Press Release*

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In July, Refugee-Aid of Victoria, B.C. integrated with Immigrant Services. Stuart Beaveridge terminated his posi-

tion as Refugee-Aid Coordinator on September 30, 1982.

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The Inter-Church Committee for Refugees issued a report in September to the UNHCR concerning the protection of refugees and the coordination of material assistance in Honduras. The High Commissioner and member governments of UNHCR were urged to persuade Honduras to sign the Refugee Convention and Protocol to ensure protection guarantees for refugees. Twelve UNHCR staff should be sent to Honduras for the sole purpose of providing protection. A task force should be set up to report on protection and relocation issues and a meeting called to coordinate effort. The brief suggested the need to delimit clearly the protection and assistance functions of UNHCR personnel.

The brief was well-received, particularly two suggestions: the need for UNHCR to coordinate the different NGOs in Honduras so there would be open lines of communication between them; and the need for UNHCR to talk directly to the refugees.

