

area is to succeed. Secondly, Honduras has proven to be deeply concerned about Salvadoran refugees who, even out of fear for their well-being, have moved outside the zone 50-80 miles from the frontier. It is alleged that any such people are liable to be detained or may be summarily refouled to El Salvador. Canada could resettle some of those persons who will not be accepted by the Honduran government, provided, of course, the individuals concerned aren't statutorily prohibited from coming to Canada. Canadian support for the UNHCR assuming a coordinating role was expressed. In addition a standing offer was made to resettle any Salvadoran detainees who are not welcome in Honduras, provided we can obtain access to them while in detention and they are able to meet admission requirements.

### The Role of UNHCR

At the time of the team's arrival, international assistance programs to refugees in the border area with El Salvador had fallen below minimum requirements because of a split in the administration of the UNHCR's operating partner, CEDEN. The regional UNHCR representative was in Tegucigalpa to negotiate new arrangements and seek Honduran government agreement for the UNHCR to assume the operational role itself pending the development of other solutions. At the same time, the UNHCR reactivated recommendations to the Honduran authorities to agree to the development of agricultural resettlement projects for Salvadorans as a more humane alternative to Mesa Grande. In the long term these agricultural settlements would become available to poor Hondurans as development projects once the Salvadoran refugee problem is solved. Subsequently, the UNHCR regional representative who was in Honduras

to negotiate on the question of coordination reported that the Honduran authorities, both civilian and military, had agreed to the UNHCR taking over the coordinating role for refugee relief and in addition they would favourably consider the establishment of camps in more favourable areas for agriculture well removed from the frontier area. He indicated that the next problem would be that of obtaining the necessary staff to administer the UNHCR's expanded role in Honduras.<sup>2</sup>

### Mexico

#### Transit and Refuge

There are three, if not more, aspects to the current refugee situation in Mexico, some of which have implications for Canada. As the land bridge between Central America and the United States, Mexico is a transit country for individuals seeking entry to the U.S.A. Reliable sources estimate that up to 600 Salvadorans and Guatemalans are apprehended each week in Mexico and returned to the Guatemalan border. While many of these people are simply potential illegal entrants to the U.S.A., there are, at the same time, refugees among them. There is no official handover of these people to the Guatemalan authorities at the time of their expulsion from Mexico and no information as to what happens to them.

The second component involves Guatemalans who traditionally have migrated into the Chiappas area in Southern Mexico to harvest the coffee and cotton crops. Since the outbreak of widespread violence in Guatemala directed against the Indian population, the influx of Guatemalans into Chiappas has increased 5-fold and the

<sup>2</sup>As a postscript, it is noteworthy that the UNHCR did assume the co-ordination role in April. Further arrangements for a network of agricultural settlements are now underway.

normal return has not taken place. There may be as many as 200,000 Guatemalans now in the area. *Refoulement*, which took place on a mass scale last fall has now ceased and the establishment of de facto camps is going forward to facilitate assistance.

A third component is the Salvadoran group. Mexico grants de facto refugee status and documents to Salvadorans other than those using Mexico for purposes of entry to the United States. There are no official statistics obtainable on the numbers of documented and undocumented Salvadorans in Mexico but all estimates are well in excess of 100,000.

The group in most apparent need in Mexico consists of urban Salvadorans living illegally in Mexico City who are thought to number 40,000. Being out of status and unable by law to remain in Mexico City, these people cannot obtain legal protection. The UNHCR has unilaterally granted mandates to some 150.

#### The Canadian Embassy

The visa section at the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City has been active in implementing the special programs for Salvadorans which went into effect in March 1981. As of June 1982, 274 Salvadorans with a close Canadian connection had been visaed under relaxed criteria and a further 160 Salvadorans as Convention refugees. Individuals who are Convention refugees are accepted within the Latin American Refugee Programme if they meet the guidelines for our limited resettlement initiative.

The Officer in Charge reported that his office has and would continue to have more work than can be handled in extending a full range of services throughout Central America. Selection visits are infrequently

## Refugees in Central America and Mexico

Countries	Salvadorean Refugees		Other Refugees		Total	
	Assisted	Total	Assisted	Total	Assisted	Total
Belize	2,000	2,000	—	—	2,000	2,000
Costa Rica	8,000	10,000	1,500	5,000	9,500	15,000
Cuba	—	—	—	2,000	—	2,000
Dominican Rep.	—	—	300	5,000	300	5,000
Guatemala	—	70,000	—	—	—	70,000
Honduras	14,910	16,000	12,197	13,000	27,107	29,000
Mexico	3,500	120,000	14,325	20,000	17,825	140,000
Nicaragua	5,326	22,000	50	500	5,376	22,500
Panama	1,000	1,000	200	500	1,200	1,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,736</b>	<b>241,000</b>	<b>28,572</b>	<b>46,000</b>	<b>63,308</b>	<b>287,000</b>

(Source) From UNHCR. Figures as of 15 August 1982.

There are a total of 287,000 refugees in Central America and Mexico, according to latest government estimates. Of this total, 63,308 are receiving assistance from UNHCR at the request of host governments. More than half the refugees receiving assistance are from El Salvador. There are also significant numbers of Guatemalans and Nicaraguans, as well as refugees from other Latin American countries. UNHCR provides legal protection, emergency assistance and promotes self-sufficiency projects.