

CONFERENCE NOTES

NGO/UNHCR Consultation

Nine Canadian delegates attended an NGO/UNHCR consultation in Geneva, from 20 to 22 May 1981. The consultation stressed the need to achieve a balance between coordination of refugee relief activities on the one hand and the advantages of the diversity and independence of NGOs on the other. For instance, NGOs have the flexibility to assist people in refugee-like situations who do not qualify for formal refugee status; to act quickly and pragmatically, since they often already have connections within the relevant country, and to deal with refugees in an informal, person-to-person manner. At the same time, UNHCR can often act where difficulties arise between governments and foreign or local NGOs, and can facilitate cooperation and coordination in planning and implementation.

The UNHCR's principal interest in the consultation, evidenced by the lack of representation of NGOs from first-asylum countries, seems to have been extending its cooperation with NGOs to include Public Relations/Fundraising campaigns in donor countries. This proposition received a mixed reaction from the NGOs.

Many of the NGOs, who had paid their own way to the conference, felt that little was produced relative to the amount spent.

- K.H.

The Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees - 1981 Refugee Consultation

The Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees met in Hamilton, Ontario on June 5, 6 and 7, 1981. Information was presented on topics including:

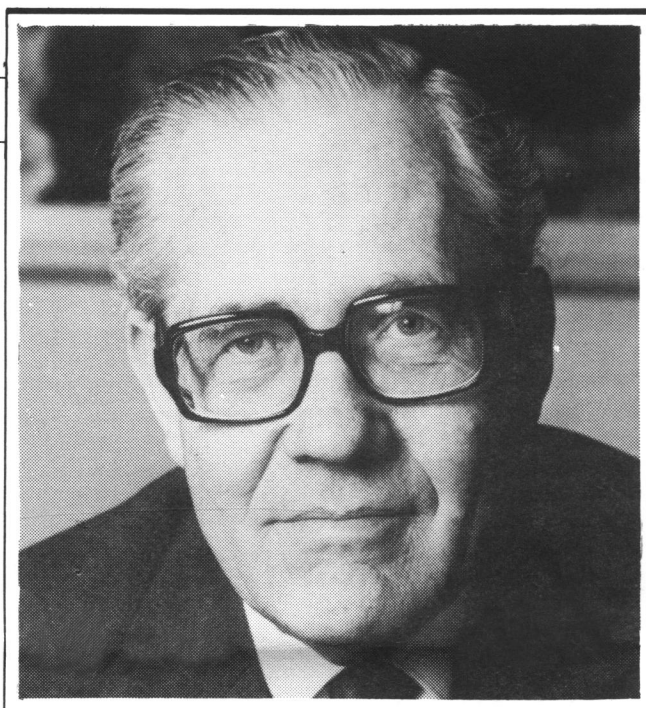
- resettlement concerns across the country, including vocational training and retraining and secondary migration
- the Canadian Foundation for Refugees
- the UN International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa
- the history and protection role of the UNHCR in Canada
- the federal refugee programme for 1982
- a visit to El Salvador.

Recommendations were adopted on topics including:

- larger refugee quotas for Africa and Central America
- improved federal government funding of voluntary resettlement services in Canada
- improvements in the refugee status process in Canada such as better quality interpreters, greater speed, ensuring that a claimant have access to any material contributing to a negative decision on his case
- facilitation of family reunification through flexible sponsorship arrangements such as having Canadians act as guarantors
- access of all organizations who participated in consultations regarding the future of the Canadian Foundation for Refugees to the draft report on the consultations.

Minutes of the meeting are being prepared.

- K.H.



International Roundtable

On the occasion of the official visit to Canada of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Poul Hartling, the Canadian Foundation for Refugees and the UNHCR hosted an international round table discussion on the subject of integration of refugees. Ten delegates from across Canada and delegates representing Denmark, France, Greece, Hong Kong, Norway, Spain, Sudan, the U.K., and the U.S. shared their experiences regarding initial reception, language acquisition, and cultural and emotional problems of refugees.

The European and North American countries all shared several of the same concerns:

- selection priorities that ensure less fortunate and less resourceful refugees access to resettlement
- settlement of refugees in sufficiently large communities of their own ethnic groups that they can retain their cultures and be involved in refugee policy and decision-making
- an international clearing house for information
- language training and orientation programmes for refugees in countries of first asylum in preparation for resettlement
- family reunification, family stress, and lack of guidance for young people separated from their families.

These concerns were, however, in sharp contrast to those of Sudan and Hong Kong, which in addition to being countries of resettlement are also countries of first asylum. The delegate from Sudan, where refugees walk across the border and go to friends or relations, did not think of integration in terms of permanent settlement, but of long-term but temporary asylum. The delegate from Hong Kong, which with its 5½ million people had given 14,300 Southeast Asian refugees permanent resettlement and still harbours 15,000 awaiting durable solutions, emphasized that problems of integration were not urgent compared to the need to find places for resettlement.

- K.H.