

1971

Statement

**On the Position of
East Pakistani Refugees in India**

Catholic Bishops of Australia

September 1971

People all over the world have been distressed over the recent sad events in Pakistan. Nature struck late last year with a cruel cyclone which killed untold numbers and left many without shelter or food. A great humanitarian relief operation was mounted, but, before people could be resettled and rehabilitated, civil unrest broke out over the political situation. In the ensuing situation of martial law and repression in East Pakistan, a mass exodus began. [2823]

Six million people fled in the first three months - surely the greatest migration in the history of the world in such a short period. [2824]

India has shown great humanity in accepting these millions of people and offering them shelter, food and medicine, despite her own problems. It is costing the Indian Government at least 1 million dollars a day to feed these people. Individuals, governments of many countries and charity organisations have also responded to the needs of the refugees. Despite all that has been done however, the problem still seems beyond solution. [2825]

The Australian Government has made a contribution towards relief of the refugee situation. The additional gift of \$500,000 (for rice for refugees as announced by the Minister for Foreign Affairs this week is most praiseworthy. Private citizens through out Australia have responded generously to the appeal launched by Austcare. Other agencies and groups have participated in the relief campaign. None of this is enough however. The situation will continue to deteriorate unless the international conscience is roused and the Government of Pakistan is persuaded to make an effort to assist the return of the refugees to their former homes. Perhaps our consciences in Australia have not been sufficiently sensitive to this terrible human tragedy. [2826]

Reports from East Pakistan speak of genocide perhaps there is some exaggeration here. It is certain however that fear of the repressive measures being taken by the army in East Pakistan is driving the refugees into India, still at the rate of 40,000 to 50,000 each day. [2827]

We, the Catholic Bishops of Australia urge continued support for Austcare by Australians and ask the Australian Government to do more to provide relief. [2828]

Most of all, however, we feel that the time has come for the Government not only to work towards restoring normal distribution of relief in East Pakistan as indicated by [2829]

the Minister but also to work by all possible means, through the United Nations and other diplomatic channels, to bring about an end of the measures in East Pakistan which are causing this situation.

Source: Archives of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO), Canberra, Australia.
