

1961

A Brief Statement

Immigration Sunday

26th February

*Federal Catholic Immigration Committee
For Reading in All Churches*

26 February 1961

Today, once again, in conformity with a practice approved by the Hierarchy eleven years ago, there is commemorated MIGRATION DAY. Its purpose, as explained on numbers of previous occasions, is to remind people of a deeply human world problem, to direct them to the forming of a right conscience on this problem and then to lend inducement to their practical acceptance of inherent responsibilities. [2763]

Not unreasonably someone might question the continuance of a world migration and refugee problem when, in the past year, so much was undertaken as a special endeavour of WORLD REFUGEE YEAR. [2764]

Successful and all as World Refugee Year may have been, there could be hardly a worse error than to assume that it solved the refugee or migration problem. It did, indeed, serve to reveal and bring to the light of public view, some of the darkest areas of human need and misery; it moved the consciences of many to provide alleviation for some of these needs; it gathered in, by voluntary effort mainly, and Government contribution, financial aid, exceeding, by some eighty million dollars, the amount annually expended in normal years; it brought about the lowering of immigration barriers so that handicapped people, condemned to waste their lives, idle and purposeless, in drab refugee camps, suddenly discovered, to their joy and delight, that they were "emigrable"; it secured, in consequence of such liberalising of immigration laws, the clearance and closure of many camps, enabling the former inmates to resume a normal life, whether by resettlement abroad or by becoming permanently housed in their community; it, in fine, demonstrated, practically and most assuringly, that the dignity and the freedom of the individual remain still an ideal of the non-totalitarian world. [2765]

Nevertheless, with all this credited as a result of World Refugee Year, now ended, there remains still a refugee and migration problem embracing millions of human souls who look to the international community for understanding and care. [2766]

To the problem of a million Chinese refugees and almost a million Arabs may be added also those of the refugees of Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco as well as Pakistan, India, North orea and Tibet, totalling in all, some eleven and a half million people for the Middle and Far East; whilst in Europe, there are the many, who night after night, escape, at great personal risk, from Yugoslavia into Austria and Italy; similarly, the thousands, who, month upon month, flee to West Berlin from the [2767]

Soviet Zone of Germany, all victims of intolerance and oppression and living symbols of the failure of Communism to satisfy human nature's basic demands.

World Refugee Year neither solved the refugee problem nor terminated the requirements and needs of migrating peoples. It was not expected to do so. One year of special effort could scarcely suffice to remove the effects of two decades of war, upheaval and mass displacement. Refugee Year has ended but not the Refugee problem; it remains, wide flung in its dimensions and irresistible in its plea to the human family for understanding, goodwill and practical help. And in considering the refugee and his plight it calls for little imagination to appreciate that his present condition of homelessness is a tragedy which, in the present world order, might encompass any number of people and countries. Has it not to be admitted that scarcely any country anywhere today may claim for its people that they are living in complete security, that they will continue undisturbed and that finally they will be laid to rest in their homeland? This, homelessness of the refugee is a chapter in the history of mechanization and eularisation of human life; its origin is in man's perversion of God's order and defiance of God's way of life for him; its growth may be retarded only by a wider recognition of God's order and man's moral responsibility towards God and, consequently, towards God's creatures. Thus, is it that the condition of the refugee provides for all, an impressive lesson. [2768]

Eleven years ago, when issuing the first Statement on Migration, the Bishops referred to the Government's migration programme for Australia as presenting a challenge to patriotism, charity and catholicity, with, as objectives, the future of our country, the plight of the world's homeless peoples and the needs and aspirations of our kinsfolk abroad. It may, in the event, be agreed that the challenge has been will met. Witness only the national results of Refugee Year with financial contributions from the public, of whom Catholics formed a worthy part, of some £600,000; the contributions of Church and Voluntary Organizations amounting to £100,000 of which some £30,000 was the Catholic portion; the assistance of the Government by money, of £50,000 to the national appeal and, indirectly and in kind, considerably more together with the admission of 3,000 additional refugees and, rather especially, 500 handicapped families. [2769]

In the preparation abroad and the settlement here of such people and thousands more, whose reunion with long separated family members is being achieved by the Government's most praiseworthy "operation reunion", our Catholic Committees participate actively and extensively. Interest free travel loans provided in the past year alone, amounted to £200,000. Particularly effective and gratifying work, which is part of the continuing activity of the Catholic Migration Committees, is the resettlement of unaccompanied mothers and their children, single young women and minors. To these who number many hundreds are to be added, rather especially, several groups of aged White Russians from China, for whose lifetime care the Committees assume full liability. [2770]

But having provided such statistical evidence of interest and practical sympathy, let us not forget for a moment, that within our country with its 1 million 6 hundred post-war immigrants, but especially abroad, there are many members of the human family to whom by the dictates of charity and conscience we should extend help, [2771]

commensurate with our position and resources.

Today, in particular, with its special commemoration, let us pray for all immigrants [\[2772\]](#) that they may be comforted and aided in their spiritual, economic and social needs. Let us think upon the distress, poverty, injustice and oppression, mercifully spared to us, which as a crushing weight, bears upon so many of our fellow human beings, extinguishing within them almost all hope and Divine Faith Itself. Being mindful of all this, let us be generous in aiding them where ever and in whatever way possible. To those, in particular who have settled amongst us and others who will join them, let us extend a warm welcome and ready assistance. Let us give of our best, being mindful that what is done worthily in migration's cause is a strengthening of the bonds that are between men, drawing them closer in a brotherhood that leads to the Peace, desired of all men.

FEDERAL CATHOLIC IMMIGRATION COMMITTEE

- * P.M. O'Donnell, Coadjutor Archbishop of Brisbane.
- * Guildford Young, Archbishop of Hobart.
- * Thomas McCabe, Bishop of Wollongong.
- * Bernard Stewart, Bishop of Sand Hurst.
- * James Carroll, Auxiliary to His Eminence, Cardinal Gilroy.
- * Ivan Prasko, Apostolic Exarch fo Ukrainians.

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