

BROADCAST BY THE PRIME MINISTER (MR. MENZIES)
for the
OPENING OF WORLD REFUGEE YEAR IN AUSTRALIA

1959 has been named World Refugee Year by the United Nations. In the resolution carried in November of last year, it was decided to focus interest in the refugee problem and to encourage additional financial contributions from Governments, voluntary agencies and the general public.

An Appeal was made to all Member States to promote World Refugee Year. This humane resolution was carried against the votes of the Soviet Bloc. Australia has fully accepted and is participating in it.

Since the war the problem of refugee has been both melancholy and acute. There are many thousands of refugees in Europe and these are added to every day. In the Middle East there are a million Arab refugees. From China have come thousands of refugees of European origin. In Hong Kong there are at least a million Chinese refugees.

We, in Australia, have in earlier years brought over 200,000 refugees to our shores. Our country is, on a population basis, the leading country of refugee settlement. Living under good conditions and with complete freedom, we might have had little reason to understand the heart-breaking experience which has been undergone by so many people driven from their homes and occupations into strange countries, there to eke out a miserable and precarious living in completely unaccustomed circumstances. The refugee problem is in that sense one of social and economic resettlement. In another sense it is a moral problem.

It is to Australia's credit that she has, in fact, understood such matters very well. In one sense this, of course, is a problem for Governments; in another, a problem for the Churches; but in the major sense it is a problem for private citizens who desire to make some humane contribution to its solution.

The Commonwealth Government gives a lead. We have promised a cash contribution of £50,000. and also that public donations to this fund will be allowable deductions for income tax purposes. The matter is non-party. The Right Honourable the Leader of the Opposition is supporting it. But bearing in mind the splendid tradition of generous giving in Australia for good causes, I have no doubt that the public response will be immediate and great.

It has not been easy for organised world opinion in the United Nations or elsewhere to act directly in respect of some of the dreadful events which have driven so many people from their own homes and their own fatherland, but at least we can in the most practical fashion show our sympathy for those less fortunate than ourselves who have been the innocent victims of conflicts and upheavals of which in our own land we have been happy enough to know nothing.

It is a good thing that Australia should have earned a reputation for a sensitive understanding of the problems of people in other lands; that we should not come to be regarded as people who are detached from the miseries of the world. I know that we will not come to be so regarded, for I believe that there are no people anywhere with warmer hearts and more generous impulses. This appeal, therefore, is at one and the same time a challenge and an opportunity.

I am confident that we shall make a contribution which will serve as one more proof of our instinctive national and individual understanding and generosity.

CANBERRA
27th September, 1959.