

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 66 (2000)
Heft: [3]

Vorwort: Editorial
Autor: Rust, Rinaldo

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Editorial

A Refugee ; One who flees for refuge; one who in times of persecution, political commotion, or the like, flees to a foreign country for safety.....

According to my dictionary this is the description of a **legal** refugee, but how would you describe an **illegal refugee**?

Perhaps one who enters a foreign country under false pretences, one who enters a foreign country with falsified documents...., one who enters without any documents!

To prefer any one country over another is a somewhat dubious compliment paid by an illegal immigrant don't you think? Such compliments have been experienced by both 'our countries', New Zealand and

Switzerland! It is to be expected that such criminal practices will happen again and again, because the process of distinguishing between legal and illegal immigration is often not an easy one.

While our authorities here in New Zealand have just now uncovered an illegal immigration scam, the Swiss authorities have recently decided on the fate of some 13,000 legal refugees which had entered the country prior to 1993.

According to a news bulletin released recently, Swiss Justice Minister Ruth Metzler announced that the Federal Council had finally, and after years of uncertainty, granted these immigrants asylum for now.

It appears that this benevolent action was headlined "Humanitarian

Action 2000". Among the 13,000 refugees there are approx. 6,500 Tamils who cannot return to their homes because of the insecure situation in Sri Lanka.

The move is not expected to have any financial consequences for Switzerland, because the individuals concerned have already been in the country for a number of years and any family reunification that was appropriate has long since been implemented.

Apologizing for the delay in making the appropriate decision, Ruth Metzler pledged to do everything possible in the future to avoid having the asylum process drag out for too long. She explained that the delay happened mainly because of the implications of the recent Kosovo war.

Here are some statistical facts taking the Swiss refugee decision and the low birth rate of the Swiss population into account;

Switzerland's total resident population has grown in 1999 by some 36,900 to 7,160,400, as the Federal Bureau of Statistics revealed. Compared to the previous year, the rate of growth increased from 0.4 percent to 0.5 percent, with the chief factor being a slight increase in immigration from abroad. Because of the surplus of immigration over emigration, the number of resident non-Swiss rose last year by 20,800 (or 1.5 percent) to 1,404,400.

The main reason for the increased immigration was family reunification (i.e., the arrival of family members of refugees already in the country).

On the other hand, the number of Swiss citizens increased by only 16,100, or 0.3 percent. The increase was due exclusively to naturalization, without which the country's low birth rate, coupled with more emigration than immigration by Swiss citizens, would have resulted in a statistical decrease of the Swiss population. (Food for thought!)

SWISS SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

PATRON: Mr Walter Simmen, Chargé d' Affaires of Switzerland

PRESIDENT/TREASURER: Beatrice Leuenberger, 44 Montgomery Crescent, Hamilton, Ph.(07) 843-7971 Fax (07) 843-7941 bea.leun.rachel@xtra.co.nz

VICE PRESIDENT: Bert Flühler, 1 Bettina Rd. Hamilton, Ph. (07) 855-4308

SECRETARY: Ruth Waldvogel, 89 Crosby Rd. Hamilton, Ph. (07) 855-3417

RIFLEMASTER: Peter Rust, Bayley Rd. R.D.3. Te Awamutu, Ph. (07) 872-2636

DELEGATES TO THE SWISS ABROAD CONFERENCE IN SWITZERLAND

DELEGATE: Heinz Leuenberger, 33 Russell Terrace, Putaruru, Ph/Fax (07) 883-8537

DEPUTY DELEGATE: Marie-Therese Melville-Schöpfer, P.O Box 79-294, Royal Heights, Auckland 1230, Ph. (09) 833-4029

COORDINATOR IN NZ FOR THE SWISS ABROAD YOUTH EXCHANGE SCHEME

Mrs. Nicole Helsdon, 58 A Marellen Drive, Red Beach / Orewa, Ph. (09) 426-0927

EDITOR: Rinaldo Rust, 242 Te Pahu Rd. R.D.5.

Hamilton, Ph/Fax (07) 871-9946 E-Mail: rinaldorust@xtra.co.nz

CLUB REPRESENTATIVES

AUCKLAND

SECRETARY: Albert Ryter, 32 Sunrise Ave. Mairangi Bay, Auckland, Ph. (09) 478-8547

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Ernst Reinhard