

Spain holds ship that smuggled Tamils

Canada denies it pressed Honduras to demand seizure in Canary Islands

Gazette News Services

LAS PALMAS, Canary Islands — At the request of Honduras, Spain yesterday seized the *Aurigae*, the ship that smuggled 155 Sri Lankan refugees from West Germany to waters off Newfoundland.

Canada denied a claim by the *Aurigae*'s West German captain that it had pressed Honduras to demand the seizure. Honduras was able to make the demand because the 425-tonne ship is Honduran-registered.

After his ship was seized, Capt. Wolfgang Bindel finally reversed himself and confessed that he took the 155 to Canada.

"That is where they wanted to go," he told the *Toronto Star* in Las Palmas. "They made the choice."

"I get the feeling that the Canadian government is trying to press the Honduran government and now it is pressing the Spanish government," Bindel said.

He stayed on board the *Aurigae* last night, watched by a Spanish patrol boat and armed sailors on shore.

His lawyer said he has committed no crime and will return to West Germany in two or three weeks to answer charges that he received the equivalent of \$500,000 Canadian for illegally transporting the Tamils and treated them callously.

The *Aurigae* was traced to Las Palmas last Sunday, after the Canadian government said it could not find the ship. Since then, Ottawa has been under fire for not taking action against Bindel.

Spanish foreign ministry official Anunciada Fernandez de Cordova said the *Aurigae* was seized at the request of Honduran Ambassador Humberto Lopez Villamil.

Lopez Villamil said it can be proved that the *Aurigae* smuggled the Tamils out of West Germany on July 28 and later set them adrift in two lifeboats — "and we're not going to permit any ship sailing under our flag to break international law."

The Tamils were rescued Aug. 11 off St. Shott's, Nfld., and have received permission to stay in Canada for at least a year.

In Ottawa, Honduran Ambassador Alejan-

dro Flores said his government asked Spain to hold the *Aurigae* pending a "proper investigation."

External Affairs Department information officer Denis Tessier was asked last night whether Canada had pressed Honduras to get the ship seized.

"There were absolutely no formal or informal representations," he said.

"It was the other way around."

"The Honduran authorities contacted External Affairs to advise us that they asked the Spanish authorities to seize the ship on their behalf."

The refugees are part of Sri Lanka's Tamil minority, which claims discrimination by the majority Sinhalese. Tamil guerrillas are battling the government for an independent homeland.

In St. John's, Nfld., the last of the 155 Sri Lankans left to join the rest in Montreal or Toronto yesterday after successful treatment for a minor blood disorder.

CP, AP, Reuter, New York Times