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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I am saddened and disappointed by the action of the House of Representatives today in rejecting assistance to the refugees from South Vietnam.

This action does not reflect the values we cherish as a nation of immigrants. It is not worthy of a people which has lived by the philosophy symbolized in the Statue of Liberty. It reflects fear and misunderstanding, rather than charity and compassion.

Despite the House vote, I believe that in this tragic situation the American people want their country to be guided by the inscription on the Statue of Liberty:

"Give me your tired, your poor
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

After World War II, the United States offered a new life to 1,400,000 displaced persons. The generosity of the American people showed again following the Hungarian uprising of 1956 when more than 50,000 Hungarian refugees fled here for sanctuary. And we welcomed more than a half million Cubans fleeing tyranny in their country.

Now, other refugees have fled from the Communist take-over in Vietnam. These refugees chose freedom. They do not ask that we be their keepers but only, for a time, that we be their helpers.

Some members of the House of Representatives apparently voted against the legislation to assist the refugees because of a section relating to evacuation from South Vietnam. The evacuation is complete.

I urge the members of the House of Representatives and of the Senate to approve quickly new legislation providing humanitarian assistance to the South Vietnamese refugees. To do otherwise would be a repudiation of the finest principles and traditions of America.

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