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Office of the White House Press Secretary
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THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Eight months ago, I initiated a program designed to open America's doors to refugees from Indochina seeking a new life. To facilitate their entry, I ordered the establishment of four reception centers in the United States to house the refugees temporarily until sponsors came forward to assist them.

The last remaining refugees departed the reception center at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, on Saturday, December 20. The closing of that reception center marks the successful conclusion of our organized resettlement program. Since its inception in April, over 130,000 refugees passed through these camps before settling in communities in every state of the Union.

The success of this massive undertaking was due mainly to the open-hearted generosity of the American people, who both individually and through their churches and civic groups came forward to sponsor these newest members of our society. But the program could not have succeeded without the efforts of those who worked long hours in this humanitarian cause.

The Nation owes a special tribute to the Interagency Task Force for Indochina Refugees which I set up on April 18 to coordinate refugee evacuation, reception, and resettlement and to the voluntary agencies which handled the sponsorship of the refugees in American society. To those thousands of military and civilians, volunteers, and resettlement agency personnel who dedicated these past months to the refugees, we owe heartfelt thanks. Their work reflects the truly humanitarian achievement of public agencies and the private sector working in harmony. This demonstration of strength will continually reinforce the refugees as they begin their journey toward becoming fully self-sufficient and contributing members of our Nation's communities.

Initial fears that the refugees would become an ongoing problem are now allayed. The refugees have proven themselves to be hard working and industrious people with a thirst for education and a deep-seated desire to improve themselves. I am confident that they will follow the example of former immigrants who have so richly contributed to the character and strength of the American system. The warmth and generosity that have characterized the welcome that Americans have given to the refugees serve as a reaffirmation of American awareness of the roots and the ideals of our society.

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