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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATUS REPORT: REFUGEES FROM INDOCHINA

The President is transmitting to the appropriate congressional committees the second report required by Section 4.(c) of the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 (PL 94-23). The report describes the logistical problems and progress made by the President's Special Inter-Agency Task Force which is charged with coordinating refugee resettlement activities. The report also describes the reception center guidelines and the resettlement process, including the work of the voluntary agencies and the States and local governments. A refugee profile is provided as well as an indication of where the refugees are being resettled within the United States and third countries. Budgeting data and details of Federal support provided by five government agencies are included plus a chronological review of U. S. policy and efforts concerning Vietnamese and Cambodian repatriates.

BACKGROUND

On April 18, 1975, the President established a Special Inter-Agency Task Force "to coordinate...all U. S. Government activities concerning the evacuation of U. S. citizens, Vietnamese citizens, and third country nationals from Vietnam and refugee and resettlement problems relating to the Vietnam conflict." Twelve Federal agencies are represented on the Task Force; The Departments of: State; Health, Education and Welfare; Treasury; Defense; Justice; Interior; Labor; Housing and Urban Development; Transportation; Agency for International Development; Office of Management and Budget; and Central Intelligence Agency.

In less than two weeks, the first refugees started to arrive within the continental United States. With a pipeline extending back to Guam, Wake Island and Subic Bay, refugees continued to arrive around the clock. It was necessary to ready the installations in California, Arkansas, Florida and Pennsylvania to receive the newcomers within a very short time frame.

Responding to the President's request for legislative action, the Congress passed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 which the President signed into law on May 24, 1975.

In carrying out the mandate established for the Task Force and the provisions of the Refugee Act, the Task Force has continued to provide policy guidance and to operate the refugee reception centers, to negotiate agreements with the appropriate agencies that will result in sponsorships, to offer testimony before the appropriate Congressional Committees, to obtain program assistance from Federal agencies, to provide a toll-free number with staff to accept calls from potential sponsors and from refugees needing assistance, to provide a computerized locator service, liaison with other countries interested in accepting refugees, to develop programs and literature to assist the refugees in understanding the resettlement process and the customs of the United States as well as to provide information to the public to encourage sponsorship.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT

- Currently (September 15), two reception centers in the Pacific on Guam and at Utapao, Thailand, and three resettlement centers in the U. S. at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; and Camp Pendleton, California remain in operation. Based on current sponsorship rates, Pendleton should close by the end of October, Indiantown Gap by the end of November, and Fort Chaffee will house the last of the refugees until all are resettled hopefully

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by the end of the year. (Three reception centers have already closed: Subic Bay in the Philippines on July 6, Wake Island on August 1, and Eglin Air Force Base on September 15).

- 1,817 of the refugees who remain in the U. S. system have requested repatriation. 1,659 are Vietnamese, 1,577 of them are housed on Guam. 158 Cambodians are at Camp Pendleton along with about 30 Vietnamese requesting repatriation. In addition, there are about 150 persons already resettled in the United States who have registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) requesting to return to their home countries.
- The UNHCR, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, plans to visit Vietnam around September 20th to discuss the matter with the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) authorities. The United States Government hopes that he will be successful in gaining acceptance for the return of the repatriates.
- A number of Vietnamese and Cambodians who left those countries on their own resources are now stranded in a number of other countries in East Asia, primarily Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea. Consideration will be given to acceptance of former employees of the U. S. Government and their dependents, and certain relatives of persons already in the United States. In addition, certain other refugees in a "high risk" status will be considered for acceptance until about 130,000 Indochina refugees are resettled permanently in the United States.
- Nine voluntary resettlement agencies have been responsible for placing most of the 92,893 refugees resettled in the United States. State and local governments had contracted to resettle 4,250 refugees as of September 5.
- The Indochina Evacuation and Resettlement Program has a total budget of \$505,277,454. As of August 31, total obligations were \$283,437,643.
- Generally, most of the programs of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development applicable to American citizens are also available to the refugees. Under certain circumstances, refugees are eligible to receive food stamps funded by the Department of Agriculture.
- States and local governments which provide certain benefits to the refugees in the areas of social services, medical assistance, and public welfare are reimbursed 100% by the Federal government for their normal costs for such services. Special one-time grants for education are available for each school district enrolling Indochinese refugee children.
- On July 21, the principal operational responsibility for the Task Force was transferred from the Department of State to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW). Julia Vadala Taft was named Director of the Task Force.

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- The Task Force will cease operations and disband upon completion of its assigned task -- the resettlement of all the refugees. Preparations are underway for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to take over at that time. HEW will be concerned with follow-up on the success of the program, provision of services to the refugees, and the maintenance of a center for response to and referral of inquiries and problems related to the Indochina refugees.

DATE NEXT REPORT DUE

In accordance with the requirements of PL 94-23, the next report on the status of the refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam will be sent to the Congress in three months.

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