
NEWS IN BRIEF

Thailand: Relatives Continue to be Processed

The Canadian Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand, reports that they are having problems obtaining permission to interview refugees in all the Kampuchean camps in Thailand. However there have been some improvements since December when it was feared that an absolute moratorium on processing would be established. In spite of certain restrictions and difficulties in locating people who have moved between camps, the embassy hopes to deal with all family reunification cases.

Polish Sponsorship Agreement

The Canadian Polish Congress and Employment and Immigration Minister Lloyd Axworthy have signed a refugee sponsorship agreement. The agreement makes it easier for Congress branches or member organizations in Canada to sponsor convention refugees and self-exiled people from Eastern Europe by eliminating much of the time and paperwork involved at the local level. Under the 1981 refugee plan, 4,000 refugees from Eastern Europe are expected to resettle in Canada. 3,700 arrived in 1980.

Longuepointe Closes

In August 1979 central reception facilities for Indochinese refugees arriving in Canada were established at Longuepointe in Montreal and Griesbach in Edmonton.

As the numbers of Indochinese refugees have diminished the need for comprehensive services at the reception area has decreased. Therefore, in August 1980 operations at Griesbach were phased out; and as the charter flights planned for the 1981 programme came to an end with the ninth flight on March 25, 1981 the Longuepointe operation is also closing down at the end of March. As of the beginning of April, all Indochinese will arrive in small groups of up to fifty people aboard regular commercial aircraft. All flights will be destined to land either at Vancouver International Airport or at Mirabel Airport near Montreal.

For the rest of 1981 reception services will be available at these ports of entry. Most refugees will remain there only one night, in a hotel contracted by the government. Agricultural and customs checks will be carried out, a final medical review will be conducted, clothing will be distributed, and applications for social insurance numbers will be filled out. All refugees will arrive with complete documentation and a knowledge of their final destination. Whenever possible, they will be assisted in proceeding on to their final destination the day after their arrival at the port of entry.

MEDIA WATCH

THE BOAT PEOPLE: "NIGHTMARE" OR ADJUSTMENT?

*By Gerald Utting,
The Toronto Star.*

The role of media coverage in bringing the plight of the boat people to the attention of the Canadian public illustrated dramatically the influence the media can have on public response. So REFUGE asked journalists who had covered the Indochinese refugee movement to comment on how they perceived their role in the events.

In March, a task force came up with a report on the plight of the 12,000 boat people now living in Toronto. As my own newspaper, *The Toronto Star*, reported it, the Boat People are in dreadful shape, battered helplessly by the buffeting hurricanes of life in Toronto. They're living in overcrowded homes, getting low wages and experiencing culture shock, quite apart from having difficulty in coping with the strains brought on by "the horrors they experienced on the seas and in Asian refugee camps." I have not read the report. But whatever it said, it was presented in the press as Bright Dreams Turned to Nightmare, and that's what I find silly.

For, in the context of the ordeals of the boat people and the other refugees from tyranny, murder and starvation in Southeast Asia, the idea that these men, their enduring wives and pretty kids find Toronto a nightmare is a joke.

I have talked to literally hundreds of boat people in their squalid refugee camps. I have been on a Malaysian beach as wretched folk in black pyjamas were forced into a pathetic group by soldiers wielding automatic rifles, clubs and shields. I have actually helped pull dying people off a tiny cockleshell in the sea off the Vietnamese coast.

I have never heard any one of these refugees, in conditions that could surely be described as real nightmare, complaining about conditions. Yes, they wanted to get off those awful island refugee camps. Yes, they were terrified of being surrounded by men with guns in a strange land where they hoped to find refuge. Yes, they were so weak from thirst and hunger on their tossing boat that they could do little but moan. But they were so happy that they had escaped from the conditions in their homeland — conditions they were willing to risk death to escape from.

These are courageous people, resourceful people. What they face now in Toronto and other

parts of Canada, of course, is not a nightmare but simply readjustment to a normality that is life in a foreign land. Certainly they need help in the form of financial support, educational reinforcement, medical treatment, even psychiatric counselling. That is hardly surprising for people who have endured so much. Above all they now need understanding and friendship, just as all other Canadians do in their ordinary lives.

This is perhaps a little harder for the Canadian media to handle than it was to report the obviously more dramatic and emotional events of the boat people's flight across the South China Sea. In a way, the news media are geared more to handle drama and turmoil than to report on the blending of a large group of Southeast Asians into our society. Surely all this talk of nightmare shows a lack of sophistication in the Canadian media.

But it also shows that the media have a conscience, and that they believe the public at large has a conscience, too. There's no nightmare for the boat people in Canada. But the use of that term does show that a lot of people here are still worried about the fate of the boat people who have come into our midst, and that there's a lot of frustration among those who try to lend a helping hand to our newest Canadians.

More importantly, though, I think we mustn't lose sight of where the real priorities lie. Canada has been able to save tens of thousands from the seas and from the rigors of refugee camps and transport

them to this fortunate land. And we should not forget that these Southeast Asians fled not just away from oppression, but toward freedom. And they believed that freedom was what we stood for.

There is something about freedom I have learned in years of knocking around the world. Freedom is not something you can enjoy yourself and deny to others. The very essence of freedom is that it is something you must share with others who seek it. The true nightmare the boat people would face in Canada would be if they discovered Canadians believed freedom was something that only certain people should be allowed to enjoy. But I know they have not found that. I know, because I have a few Vietnamese acquaintances here, that they have come to cherish our freedom very much, and that if they feel any anguish it is because their loved ones who stayed behind are not free.

That, I think, is the real lesson of the boat people for Canadians. Through them we have been able to expand our idea of freedom. It is not so many years ago that we locked up our Japanese. Today such a thing would be unthinkable in Canada. As I walk down Yonge Street, I see slight Vietnamese youths rugged up against the cold. They have problems, of course, about language and jobs and dental work, and we older Canadians should help them with these things. But I know they do not dread the loss of their liberty. It is the most precious of our possessions and we have been able to share it with them.

RESOURCE EXCHANGE

International Social Services

A teenage Vietnamese refugee in Canada became separated from the rest of her family, who went to Australia. The family members in Australia requested the assistance of ISS in trying to have their sister, who was terribly lonely, united with them. At the request of ISS the Manitoba welfare authorities studied the situation and recommended that Australia consider allowing the girl to join her family.

Many refugees who have settled in Canada may have personal or family difficulties, the solution of which requires coordinated actions in two or more countries. ISS is a voluntary, non-sectarian, non-political organization which tries to solve these kinds of problems by working with government departments and voluntary organizations around the world.

ISS Canada is funded largely by a grant from Health and Welfare Canada.

International Social Services
55 Parkdale Avenue
P.O.Box 3505, Station C
Ottawa, Ont. K1Y 4G1

Funding Sources

Assistance Directory for Ethnocultural Communities in Canada published by the Multiculturalism Directorate of the Department of the Secretary of State lists programmes of foundations, corporations, municipalities, provincial and federal governments, federal cultural agencies and labour groups which may be able to provide financial assistance. It summarizes:

- amounts available
- kinds of projects assisted
- criteria for eligibility
- whom to contact

Multicultural Directory
Secretary of State Dept.
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0M5

**THE STANDING CONFERENCE OF
CANADIAN ORGANIZATIONS CONCERNED
FOR REFUGEES**

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