



CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSLETTER ON REFUGEES

# REFUGEE

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## SOUTHEAST ASIA TODAY: VISIT TO VIETNAM, KAMPUCHEA AND THAILAND

By Nancy Pocock, Canadian Friends Service Committee

In April I returned from a trip to Southeast Asia on behalf of the Canadian Friends' Service Committee. In cooperation with other Quaker groups we send aid to projects in Vietnam, Kampuchea and Thailand. Also, being active with the Inter-Church Committee for Refugees, I was looking into the current refugee situation.

### Aid for Vietnam

Unless the West, led by the United Nations, has a change of heart and sends badly needed food, medicine and other aid to Vietnam, many more people will leave and we will again be faced with desperate people needing refuge. It would be better for them and cost us far less in the long run if we would help Vietnam and Kampuchea care for their own people at home.

Vietnam is desperately short of food. Typhoons and floods have wiped out most of the rice crops of the last two years. Combined with the destruction of the land by herbicides and bombs dropped by the United States during the war, this has created drastic food shortages and put Vietnam on the brink of disaster.

The United States has launched a world-wide campaign to cut off development assistance from international agencies to Vietnam. For several years the European Economic Community (EEC) has supplied milk powder, butter, oil, and a high-protein food supplement to the United Nations Children's Fund, which gave it as an emergency donation to the children of Vietnam. This year, because of pressure from the United States on the EEC, it was not sent.

We visited the Children's Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and saw the direct results of this deprivation on the children. Because the orphanages and hospitals were not able to give the children and babies milk, the children suffer from severe malnutrition, high susceptibility to

disease, mental retardation, loss of sight and hearing, and finally death. The excuse of the United States is Vietnam's intrusion into Kampuchea.

But among Kampuchean I talked to, both in Phnom Penh and in the refugee camps, there was a consensus of opinion that while some were not too happy with the presence of the Vietnamese army in their country, they preferred them to Pol Pot. Every Khmer I met had a tragic story to tell of the loss of mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives, husbands, and children; many had actually seen them killed by Pol Pot's soldiers. When we visited the schools, the drawings of the children were filled with black figures killing people amid masses of blood. This would surely convince anyone who doubted the truth of the stories.

### Discontent in Ho Chi Minh City

In Ho Chi Minh City I experienced the great differences between northern and southern Vietnam. The people there are restless, unhappy and uncooperative. They blame the new government for all their economic ills, shortages of food, medicine, etc. Unable to understand the affluence of the city under the Americans and unable to relate to the socialist ideas of the government, all they want to do is leave and go to America. The government, forced by its promise to the United Nations and neighbouring countries to keep the people from leaving and also by the necessity of strict rationing to feed all the people, is obliged to be repressive.

The government people I talked to admitted making mistakes, such as trying to socialize the economy too quickly. They tried three years ago to nationalize businesses and stamp out the black market, but it didn't work. Now they have returned many businesses to their original owners and the free market flourishes in both the North and the South. After so many years of fighting in the

**REFUGEE** is dedicated to encouraging Canadian citizen participation in helping refugees, by providing a forum for sharing information and opinion on domestic and international issues pertaining to refugees.





Kampuchean returning home with UNHCR resettlement kit. Photo: UNHCR

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### SIKHS STRAIN REFUGEE POLICY

In recent months there has been a dramatic increase in the number of East Indian Sikhs coming to Canada, many of whom claim to be refugees. Toronto International Airport at Malton, where most of the Sikhs first land, has had arrivals in excess of fifty per day.

Most frequently, the Sikhs claim that they are persecuted for their membership in the Janata party, the political party which ousted Indira Gandhi's government in 1977. But events at ports of entry have led Canadian immigration officials to believe that the claims may be false and that the Sikhs have received specific instruction on what to do and say once in Canada. In many cases, Sikhs who speak little or no English are arriving at the airport saying "refugee, refugee" to the first officials they encounter. In addition, waiting relatives frequently have \$2,000 to \$5,000 ready in cash to post the bond required to ensure that a refugee claimant does not disappear while his case is under review.

A good portion of this "coaching", it seems, has come from travel agents, primarily in Jullundur City, who give the Sikhs Canadian contacts and the information that Canada does not turn away refugees. For this service, the agents charge fees in excess of the \$1,200 one-way air fare to Canada.

This situation has put considerable pressure on Canada's immigration policy, which forbids visitors' applying for permanent residence but also forbids the turning away of anyone claiming to be a refugee. The process of determining the validity of a claim for refugee status is a lengthy one which may extend over a year and a half, given the size of the ever-growing caseload. Nevertheless, officials have no recourse but to consider all the claims.

During the intervening period, the claimant is permitted to live in Canada. This opportunity to live in Canada, even temporarily, seems in fact to be the prime factor behind making the request for refugee status. However some Sikhs who have not had bond posted for them or who immigration officials fear might disappear, must remain in hotels at the airport.

The situation has caused some controversy within the East Indian community in Canada. Mr. Ritendra Ray of the Tagore Lectureship Foundation expressed anger in an interview with the *Toronto Star* (June 4, 1981), saying that the claims are no more than a ruse and that "to say one is fleeing persecution from India is false" because "India inherited British common laws. It's a democracy." But others are not so much upset by what Ray called a "stunt to get into Canada" as by the fact that many of the Sikhs, who are largely uneducated tenant farmers, have been swindled out of everything they own by unscrupulous travel agents.

"So far the stories told by the Sikhs claiming refugee status don't qualify them and all have been refused," said Ken Brown, chairman of the Refugee Status Advisory Committee. As of June 25, 1981, there have been no deportations, but André Pilon, District Administrator for Immigration Canada at Malton, said that there had been a number of one-year exclusions.

- S.F.

jungle, they were ill-prepared to govern a large, corrupt city like Saigon, and with so many difficulties it has been almost impossible to win the hearts of the people. Also, the very real threat of another attack by China is always there. They felt it necessary to conscript the able young men into the army, losing the manpower they so desperately needed to grow food and reconstruct the country. After their high expectations for peace after the Americans left, both the young people and their families fear another war and resent the necessity of joining the army.

In spite of all the difficulties there are many devoted, dedicated people who are serving their fellow citizens and their country to the limit of their ability. I am convinced that if only enough aid were forthcoming, given the Vietnamese people's great courage and great capacity for reconciliation and creativity they would be able to build the good humane society that Ho Chi Minh and many of my friends have told me they dreamed of all through the long and bitter wars.

### Kampuchea slowly recovering

Phnom Penh is a strange city - much of it still empty or destroyed but other parts teeming with people. None of the utilities work well: the electricity comes and goes; the water has little pressure; the sewage system is wrecked and everyone fears a major epidemic.

The people are still fed by international agencies, but they are getting back to growing food. Kampuchea is a

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### Refugee Movements in Southeast Asia

	Arrivals in Countries of First Asylum		Departures for Permanent Settlement Elsewhere
	Land	Boat	
Jan.	4,101	5,579	10,140
Feb.	4,823	4,060	13,046
Mar.	17,989	5,154	16,830
Apr.	2,093	11,212	10,045
May	1,532	14,792	18,734
June	1,384	12,368	15,118

Refugees awaiting durable solutions (as of July 1981):

Boat: 63,310

Land: 105,906

**Total: 169,216 \***

\* This number does not include Kampuchean in Thai holding centres who are not designated refugees or refugees in Refugee Processing Centres who are scheduled to proceed to the United States after language and orientation programmes.

Source: UNHCR

Continued from page 2.

fertile country, and with luck it will soon become self-sufficient in food. The difficulty is getting over the next hurdle - restoring the society culturally and psychologically, and helping Kampuchians to stand on their own feet and again be able to produce the material things they need. This is made very difficult by the United States forbidding their non-governmental agencies to send anything but straight emergency aid and trying to influence the international agencies to do the same.

### Return from Thailand

In the refugee camps in Thailand, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Red Cross are trying very hard to get the Khmer people to return to their own country. Many of them are young men who are badly needed at home. Any who return receive goods and help to resettle in their former homes or wherever they wish.

One of the great difficulties is that Pol Pot still maintains an army on the border of Thailand and Kampuchea and is constantly attacking the people within Kampuchea. The Vietnamese army tries to control this but Pol Pot's army, the Khmer Rouge, retreat into the refugee camps in Thailand, rest and eat food contributed by the international agencies, are re-armed by China and return to kill and pillage. The refugee camps are all controlled by the Thai army and when the international agencies try not to feed the soldiers, the Thai army interferes.

At least 30,000 Khmers had agreed to go home, and a flight to Phnom Penh had been arranged as it is too dangerous to cross the border by land because of the many armed groups. However, the Thais refused to allow the flight as they felt it would imply recognition of the Vietnamese-supported Phnom Penh government. The UNHCR and the Red Cross have been looking into the feasibility of transferring the refugees to a third country, possibly Burma, and flying them home from there. But just before I left Thailand, the United States, after taking very few Khmers to date, suddenly started to take about a thousand a month. This destabilized all the camps - no one wants to go back to a poor, struggling country when they can come to the land of their dreams, the promised land, America.

### Canada must help

I came back from Southeast Asia very concerned, for it is a danger point where the United States, the Soviet Union and China are using other countries for their own purposes, and there is a great danger of a collision of those interests which could involve all of us.

With great generosity Canadians have welcomed thousands of refugees from Southeast Asia, and for those individuals who were helped it has been a wonderful thing. But for the overall problem in that part of the world it has only been a band-aid treatment. What is needed is an end to sending arms to the region, and massive development aid so the countries can live in peace and feed their own people.

Canada as a country could follow the example of her generous citizens and give the kind of aid these countries need to care for their people at home.

As Pierre Trudeau said in Parliament June 15, Canada has an obligation to help people from the Third World who are suffering the ravages of hunger and war. "If we say no, then they are doomed and so are we." □

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