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# Global Refugee Policy: The Case for a Development Oriented Strategy

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Board. Since Swedish family reunification is based on the core nuclear family — parents and children — this factor alone cut down the number of eligible applicants. When nephews (and nieces) who had migrated as part of an extended family attempted to sponsor their own parents, they were not permitted to if they were 20 years of age or over. When the word "family" means one thing to the Swedish authorities and another to the Boat People, it is not surprising that a great deal of confusion, misunderstanding and bitterness would arise over the family reunification program, especially given the expectations of the refugees who opted to go to Sweden. Nevertheless, Sweden has, proportionately, been considerably more successful in its reunification program than other countries of resettlement.

One similarity between the Canadian and Swedish experiences should be noted — the extremely rapid and successful adaptation of the refugees to a new work milieu in which they frequently establish themselves as the most expert and productive workers. They are lauded for not "taking advantage" of the Swedish welfare system. Similarly in the schools, "The Indochinese are described by their Swedish teachers as the most ambitious, hard-working and respectful students they have ever encountered."

One unique experiment proved to be an enormous success — the employment of a home-language teacher from the Indochinese group in Gnosjö. On the other hand, the Swedish Red Cross "contact family" program (which paralleled the Canadians "friendship family" program) in which a local Swedish family hosted an Indochinese family, proved to be a failure. With very few exceptions the contacts rarely lasted past several visits. One also sees other advantages in Canada for the Indochinese refugees compared to the situation in Sweden. Our multilingual programming in radio and television is envied, for example, in contrast to the Indochinese in Sweden who live in a cultural vacuum. On the other hand, we have to envy their family pedagogue program, individuals assigned by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare to serve as links between the Indochinese refugees and Swedish society with an ideal ratio of one pedagogue to 50 refugees for 2-3 years after arrival.

"Global Refugee Policy: the Case for a Development Oriented Strategy", a public issues paper of The Population Council (a John D. Rockefeller III, independent non-profit organization instituted in 1952) prepared by Charles Keely with Patricia Elwell, proposes a shift in focus from relief and resettlement to development. The study is divided to four parts: (1) a discussion of the international definition of a refugee; (2) an overview of their numbers, location and origin; (3) a sketch of the international response to refugees; and (4) conclusions arising from these discussions. The central issue is dealt with in the first section, and the historical background is relegated to the third section.

The two issues raised about the 1967 Protocol definition are familiar — the meaning of persecution and the requirement that a refugee be outside the country of nationality; i.e., individuals fleeing areas of armed conflict are not refugees. (By contrast, the Organization of African Unity Convention on Refugees extended its definition to include victims of war or civil conflict who need only leave their place and not their country of habitual residence.) In addition to the problems of the narrowness of the definition, there were also problems of interpretation. What is persecution? Given a government's role in economic policy, whatever the ideology of that government may be, bourgeoisie (mainly Chinese) may suffer in Vietnam or small landowners (mainly Indians) may suffer in Central America from government policies which deprive these groups of an ability to make a reasonable or even minimal living. Are they persecuted? The distinction between political and economic refugees becomes muddled.

Thus, people fleeing civil strife, people fleeing from a country with an ideology antithetical to the host country (self-exiled Europeans), people who, after having fled, might very well be persecuted upon return (Haitians), people fleeing oppressive economic policies — all have been granted refugee status

under various humanitarian guises without qualifying under the U.N. definition.

However, seeking the basis of refugee policy on a clear definition of "Who is a refugee?" may be itself a source of the problem. Instead, the starting point should be the realities of displacement, for the definition itself is rooted in the particularity of the post-World War II experience in Europe. That perspective stressed resettlement in third countries when the emphasis now should perhaps be given to in-place activity and a development context.

This is Keely's central thesis. Aid should be shifted *from* maintaining camps and seeking resettlement *to* channelling resources to asylum countries for development aid and assistance to the indigenous population. Included in such a shift in emphasis would be our attitudes to humanitarian traditions. We would have to attend to the slow pace of indigenous economic and political solutions as well as the bureaucratic shifts that would be required from domestic human service agencies to foreign ministries and agencies.

When we shift from the strategy issues for dealing with refugees to the actual data on the refugees themselves we see how conceptual issues intersect with facts. Are displaced persons from civil war to be included in the numbers? When are former refugees considered to be firmly resettled and excluded from the calculations? Whose counts are to be relied upon — agencies', those of first asylum countries, etc.?

But, whatever the basis, it is clear that almost all refugees are in developing areas with half of them in Africa. This fact, along with the analysis of the historical background of solutions to the refugee problem rooted in Europe, is used to reinforce the thesis of shifting *from* a resettlement strategy as the backup to repatriation *to* a development strategy of aid to countries of first asylum in the developing world.

