
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