



CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSLETTER ON REFUGEES

# REFUGE

ISSN0229-5113

## INVESTING IN A MILLION — SUCCESSFULLY

By Maureen Johnson, CUSO

Refugee from Kampuchea

1979 will be remembered as the year of the Indochinese refugees.

Canadian University Students Overseas (CUSO), in a departure from its better-known role of providing skilled Canadians for two-year placements in developing countries, recently became involved in assisting one segment of these refugees - those who fled the war-ravaged country of Kampuchea. One million of them ended up living in makeshift shelters along the Thailand border. Camps were set up for them but were overcrowded immediately: like most refugee camp operations, the aim was to keep the people alive, but initiative and spirit were slowly destroyed.

By late 1979 the largest camp, Khao-I-Dang, was accommodating 120 people. But it was built on a low-lying ricefield: it would be flooded as soon as the monsoons arrived. Evacuation was imperative.

CUSO had been involved with several trial projects at the Khao-I-Dang camp, such as growing mushrooms and beansprouts in limited space, and setting up a dressmaking class since much of the clothing supplied by emergency services couldn't be used because it didn't fit. These projects had proved successful and were being considered for introduction at other camps.

And so several Thais who were appalled at the economic hardship in the camps approached CUSO field staff: they wanted CUSO to build and sponsor a camp to be operated by Thai and Khmer personnel. The camp would offer the refugees reasonable housing and other facilities and could



UNHCR

**REFUGE** 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.

be turned over to the local Thai villagers when it was no longer needed for refugees. It would emphasize and encourage the education and technical skill development of both children and adults, and re-establish traditional cultural and religious activities.

CUSO took up the challenge and agreed to take on one of the four camps being established to accommodate the evacuees from Khao-I-Dang: Kab Cherng, Surin, some 400 kms. east of Bangkok.

Two Thai universities and 12 Thai non-government organizations became involved in planning the camp, and six of them have since taken over its operation. There are no foreigners actively involved in the camp administration. Day-to-day operations are carried out by 50 Thais and the Khmer leaders. Medical services are provided by Thai personnel - a doctor, two nurses and two midwives - who are training 30 Khmer to take over the medical tasks.

In the past, emergency relief has always been a hand-out affair: the refugees are given a finished product - food, clothes and shelter - and are left with nothing to do for themselves. At the CUSO camp, however, refugees grow some of their own food, make their own clothes and furniture, have equipped a school, and are involved in crafts, music and other cultural activities. Sixty Khmer teachers are educating more than 2,000 children, others are providing adult education, and many refugees are participating in vocational training programmes such as sewing and carpentry.

By hiring local agencies to administer Kab Cherng instead of flying in expatriate agency personnel, and by buying food and materials locally, operating costs have been reduced drastically. A little more than one dollar covers the needs of three refugees for one day. Moreover, the local farmers, living almost at the subsistence level themselves, have a new market for their produce. And the villagers benefit from the health and community services supplied to the camp: several hundred villagers, with no other access to health care, visit the camp hospital daily.



CUSO

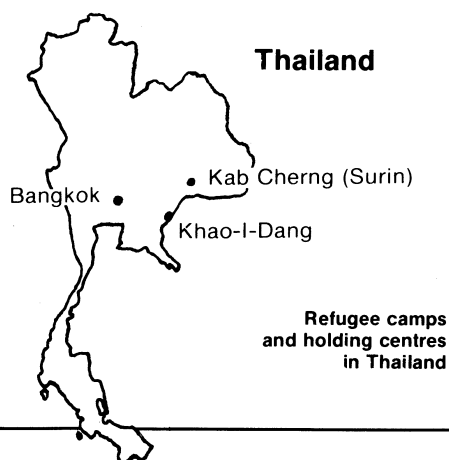
CUSO agreed to raise \$700,000 towards the \$2.2 million needed for the initial six-month operation of the camp. (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees supplied the remainder of the funds.) The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) agreed to provide a grant of \$300,000, leaving CUSO with \$400,000 to raise from the Canadian public.

It was the largest fund-raising campaign CUSO had ever undertaken, yet CUSO reached its target within months. Donations came from Canadian corporations, foundations, parliamentarians, church and community groups, the Alberta International Assistance Programme, the British Columbia Ministry of Labour, refugee and professional associations and individuals from all across Canada.

CUSO, with CIDA's funding assistance, is continuing its commitment for a further six-month period and is expanding its programmes to assist Thai villagers displaced by the border fighting and now living in the vicinity of the camp.

CUSO's aim is to make Canada's first sponsored camp into a semi-permanent home for the refugees, help them become as self-reliant as possible and through emphasis on local involvement in establishing and operating the camp, develop within Thailand a lasting capacity to deal with such emergency situations.

This approach to refugee assistance is expected to become a model for others. □



### ADDITIONAL FUNDS ANNOUNCED

On June 15, 1981, Employment and Immigration Minister Lloyd Axworthy announced that an additional \$4.3 million has been approved to assist the 60,000 Indochinese refugees now in Canada and the 10,000 expected in 1981.

\$3.37 million is allocated to the Adjustment Assistance Programme (AAP) to fulfill the basic needs of newly-arrived refugees.

\$927,000 will fund direct services such as interpretation and counselling provided by various voluntary community organizations under the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Programme (ISAP).

\$8.86 million for AAP and \$1.67 million for ISAP had already been approved for the 1981-82 fiscal year.

*More information on these funding programmes in our next issue!*