



CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSLETTER ON REFUGEES

# REFUGE

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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 Kampuchians 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

**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.



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 Ghandi'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

## ONE IN TEN AFGHANS IS A REFUGEE

Mr. Dave Jenkins of Vancouver recently returned from fifteen months as chief delegate for the League of Red Cross Societies in Pakistan, where he helped the Pakistan Red Crescent Society run a relief programme for 100,000 Afghan refugees.

Mr. Jenkins estimates that there are close to two million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, 1.6 million being registered with the UNHCR. Of these, 30-40,000 are nomads who traditionally spend the winter in Pakistan, but in 1978 did not return to Afghanistan following the April coup that installed the communist People's Democratic Party government. The majority of the refugees are labourers and farmers, once homeowners, now living in tents along the border. Some urban and professional refugees are living in Pakistan's cities on their savings.

The most pressing material problem for these refugees, Jenkins said, is the extreme cold. For example, because the refugees are scattered wide apart in tribal clusters of tent villages - often so wide apart that they have to walk for days to receive their monthly rations - sanitation has not yet posed a health hazard, and disease is not more prevalent among the refugees than within Afghanistan or Pakistan. However, the cold means that the condition of anyone who does get sick can deteriorate rapidly: a child with the measles who would recover at home in bed may die on the cold ground in a tent. Jenkins turned most of his efforts to obtaining tents, blankets and warm cloth and clothing.

The refugees brought three million goats, sheep, and other livestock with them, so they aren't starving, "although that does not mean the people aren't hungry." International agencies provide wheat, oil, tea, and sugar, and the government of Pakistan provides the refugees with cash to purchase meat and vegetables locally.

The women face particular problems, Jenkins noted. In Afghan culture, it is unacceptable for a male doctor to examine a woman. The international agencies' medical teams therefore include "lady health visitors." Another problem facing women is that rations are distributed through heads of households or through tribal leaders. Women, especially



widows, sometimes do not get their fair share and special programmes have had to be developed to help feed women and children. Also, the girls receive no education.

Whatever time these refugees don't spend for survival they devote to religious education. A common sight, Jenkins said, was young boys huddled behind a stone wall to ward off the wind, learning the Koran by rote under the tutelage of the religious leaders.

When will these people be able to return home? Pakistan has discouraged the erection of mud buildings, because the land the refugees occupy is not government-owned. Jenkins speculated on an additional reason: such building would imply the long-term nature of the problem and, in turn, acceptance of it. But no one has gone home yet, and a few educated, urban refugees have turned to resettlement in third countries as the only possible solution to their problems. The rest continue to wait.

- K.H.

## THE CANADIAN FOUNDATION FOR REFUGEES

Throughout the past spring many Canadians participated in local consultations held under the auspices of the Canadian Foundation for Refugees regarding the need for a national grass-roots organization on behalf of refugees. The Board of Directors of the Foundation has already decided to act on several of the 68 specific recommendations in the draft report:

### Distribution of the report:

One copy of the full draft report will be deposited in a convenient place in each community where a workshop was held. Each participant will receive a copy of the summary of the workshop in his community and information on the location of the full report. Comments are welcome. (Although the report itself had recommended that copies of the recommendations should also be distributed to all workshop participants, the Directors felt this would be unnecessarily costly.)

### Loans to help organize local networks:

In order to facilitate the development of local, regional

and provincial organizations, seed money will be made available in the form of loans, repayable if and when the organization obtains federal and provincial grants, to enable existing community organizations to organize local chapters of volunteers in association with settlement workers, language teachers, ethnic organizations concerned for refugees, etc. Details are being worked out.

### Documentation Centre:

The Foundation is in the process of creating a Documentation Centre for the distribution of refugee-related materials in both English and French. The kind of documentation centre recommended in the draft report "should not originate needed documents but should solicit invitations to produce such documents by local organizations and assist to arrange the funding for their production" (p. 38).

- K.H.

*Suggestions for additional members of the Board are encouraged.*