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CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

# REFUGEE

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## Indochinese Refugees Revisited

When Ho Chi Minh and his compatriots fought against French colonization in the middle of the 20th century, they might not have imagined that one day the big city of Southern Vietnam would bear Ho Chi Minh's name. They might also not have thought that their struggle would end up with the liberation and unification of the country, and that this phenomenon would chase hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese from the town which bears his name.

Actually, the war, famine and fear of the new socialist regime drove the Vietnamese, the Khmer and the Lao people to flee their homelands and thus they become refugees in many countries in the world. Over time, the profile of the refugees changed as did the reaction of the international

community towards those asylum-seekers: from full humanitarian enthusiasm during the latter half of the 1970s and the early 1980s to a certain level of indifference or fatigue towards the assistance activities during the second half of the 1980s. Paradoxically, as soon as the compassion fatigue reached its peak in 1987, the socio-political conditions in Vietnam and in Laos seemed to improve. The governments of the two countries are trying to mend relations with countries of the non-socialist world, especially in the

economic and political spheres. Therefore, new hope for peace in Indochina is well-founded although the political situation in Cambodia is still unsettled. This expectation of peace should act to reduce the number of asylum-seekers from Vietnam and Laos. And repatriation should become a more realistic durable solution to the refugee problem.

The dynamism of the changing socio-political conditions of the Indochinese countries and its

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We regret the recent passing of Prof. Atle Grahl-Madsen, the internationally-renowned expert on refugee law.

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