

PRIME MINISTER

Vietnamese Refugees

The Ministers in charge are Mr. Whitelaw and Mr. Hurd. Mr. Whitelaw is travelling to Dorneywood at the moment and expects to arrive around lunchtime. Switch know where to contact Mr. Hurd.

I have told both the Foreign Office and the Home Office that you wish to be able to say this evening that action is being taken to deal with the problem of the refugees on the Sabonga. I have also told them that you wish this to be handled as a single act of mercy and not the beginning of an open-ended commitment. I have asked that you be advised early this afternoon of the course of action recommended by the Home Secretary and the Foreign Office.

I think that the Home Office are likely to argue with the Foreign Office that it is more appropriate for the refugees to remain the responsibility of the Hong Kong Government, not the British Government, at least in the short term.

The text of the letter from the Save the Children Fund is being transmitted to Chequers. The Fund are offering to take full responsibility for handling the children in the UK prior to their final settlement. Secretary General Waldheim has also addressed a message to you on the subject, and I am also having this sent down to you.

MAP

28 May 1979

(4c) Taiwan.
message to
Taiwan.

(6) National Trust.

(1) Murray Maclehoon

(2) Press Review,
or newsletters

(3) Circulating with Aids to
Victims.

(4) Reply to Telegrams.

(5) Int. replication.
? from J. Bond
Review on - Answer Ch...

TEXT OF A LETTER ADDRESSED TO THE PRIME MINISTER FROM
SAVE THE CHILDREN DATED 26 MAY 1979

Dear Prime Minister,

Undoubtedly like yourself, we at Save the Children are appalled by the plight of the refugees aboard the MV Sibonga now in Hong Kong harbour. Rescued when hundreds of the children on board were only hours from death by exposure, they deserve every help. The British captain in picking them up was behaving in the great humane tradition of the sea.

I now beg you and your Government to go on with that humanity, to accept these desperate people and give them the hospitality and help they so dearly need. Save the Children will accept the responsibility of looking after and rehabilitating the children and their families for the period of settlement if your Government will only grant permission for them to enter Britain.

As Chairman of an organisation currently helping to look after a quarter of a million refugees throughout the world, I realise only too well that Britain cannot take in unlimited numbers from Vietnam or elsewhere. But this gesture, as a special case, could act as a sign for other countries to recognise their responsibilities also, and to open their doors to help.

The alternative prospect - of women and children being left to die or drown at sea because if picked up there is no port that will accept them, is too atrocious for the compassionate British people to contemplate.

Please give them entry now and we will look after them.

Yours sincerely

Noel H. Moynihan, Chairman Save the
Children