

Two notes on the position
(written on Tuesday) are attached
mys



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

Cabinet : Foreign Affairs

I understand that
the Home Secretary may
raise the question of
the Vietnamese "boat
people", in order to
elicit a preliminary
reaction from colleagues
on the problem of their
admission to the UK.

DM
24/5

BACKGROUND NOTE

VIETNAMESE REFUGEES ON THE m.v. SIBONGA. IMMIGRATION ASPECTS

A United Kingdom registered ship, the m.v. SIBONGA, has just rescued about 900 boat refugees in the South China Sea. The Sibonga is making for Hong Kong, and will reach there on Wednesday, 23rd May, and the Hong Kong Government has asked the United Kingdom to accept the refugees here within a month.

THE UNITED KINGDOM CONTRIBUTION TO THE VIETNAMESE REFUGEE PROBLEM

2. The problem is one for the international community as a whole. The U.S.A. and France have accepted the largest number of refugees. The United Kingdom considers sympathetically the admission of Indo-Chinese refugees who have some tie or connexion with the United Kingdom. On 17th January 1979 the Government announced that it would admit a special quota of 1,500 - 1,000 from Hong Kong and 250 each from Malaysia and Thailand. Just over 200 of these have already arrived here. We have also admitted about 800 picked up by ships registered in the United Kingdom whom other countries would not accept for resettlement.

3. In total, the United Kingdom has accepted for resettlement, or allowed to remain, more than 1,800 Indo-Chinese refugees since the fall of Saigon and the Communist take-over of Laos and Cambodia in 1975.

THE FUTURE OF THE REFUGEES ON THE SIBONGA

4. Technically, in view of the constitutional position of Hong Kong, the United Kingdom Government could probably refuse to take the 900 refugees picked up by the SIBONGA, but in practice it seems that we shall be obliged to accept them. Hong Kong has a desperate refugee problem, and it would be said that it would be hypocritical for the United Kingdom Government to urge other countries to help Hong Kong but not to take itself refugees left in Hong Kong by a United Kingdom registered ship.

5. But it is too soon to give any undertakings about these refugees. We know virtually nothing about them. If we do take them, the precise arrangements would be a matter for negotiation with the

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Hong Kong Government. That Government is likely to want us to take the 900 virtually at once, but this would create quite exceptional difficulties for us. The feasible rate of intake would need to be discussed with the voluntary agencies, and extra financial provision would have to be made.

FCO

(Tuesday)

BACKGROUND NOTE

VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN HONG KONG

The M.V. Sibonga

1. The British registered vessel, MV Sibonga, (British Bank line) rescued about 900 Vietnamese from two sinking boats about 100 miles off Vietnam on 21 May. The vessel is due to arrive in Hong Kong (her next scheduled port of call) late on Wednesday 23 May.

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arrive yesterday
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Hong Kong Policy

2. The Hong Kong Government give temporary shelter to any refugees who arrive in Hong Kong in their own small boats, or who are brought to Hong Kong after being picked up at sea by ocean-going vessels for whom Hong Kong is the next scheduled port of call. Because of suspicions in some recent cases that refugees being brought to Hong Kong were in effect fare-paying passengers picked up at pre-arranged rendez-vous, the Sibonga will be stopped outside Hong Kong while officials of the Hong Kong Government check that the refugees are genuine shipwreck survivors. Provided (as seems probable in this case) that this is established, the refugees would then normally be landed in Hong Kong and in due course handed over to the care of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to arrange resettlement.

3. There are now over 30,000 Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong and more are arriving at a rate which is currently over 400 a day. By contrast, the UNHCR have only been able to arrange for about 800 a month to be moved out from Hong Kong to countries of permanent resettlement. Conditions in Hong Kong for refugees are desperately overcrowded: all available camps are full and some new arrivals are having to be kept in prisons or on the boats in which they arrived.

4. In these circumstances, and in view of the fact that the Sibonga is a British vessel, the Governor of Hong Kong has asked HMG to agree to accept into the UK all of those refugees from the Sibonga who cannot be resettled in the US or elsewhere within a month (the Home Office are submitting separate briefing on the response we should make to this request).

/Immigration

Immigration from China into Hong Kong

5. Hong Kong's difficulty in coping with the Vietnamese refugees is compounded by the fact that the territory is also having to absorb large numbers of immigrants from China. Over 100,000 arrived last year (the equivalent of over $1\frac{1}{4}$ million immigrants in a country the size of Britain). The total in the first four months of this year exceeded 60,000. We have discussed the problems that this influx creates for Hong Kong with the Chinese Government on several occasions. We believe they understand the problem and are making efforts to reduce the inflow, which is largely the result of the greater freedom of movement that has been allowed in China in the last two years.