



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

28 May, 1979

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Dear Bryan,

VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

1. The Prime Minister has asked to be told urgently what action we have taken internationally to deal with the problem of refugees from Vietnam and what further action might be taken. The problem has been approached from two angles:-

- (a) pressure on Vietnam to stem the exodus;
- (b) resettlement of refugees.

2. Pressure on Vietnam

(a) Direct

(i) We have made numerous representations to the Vietnamese Government both in London and in Hanoi with the object of getting them to improve conditions in Vietnam so that fewer people will want to leave and to stop the racket by which potential refugees are required to pay in gold for places on ships large and small. Our last representations were made on 24 May in London (FCO telno.323 of 24 May attached) and on 28 May in Hanoi.

(ii) The last Government decided to cancel all future aid to Vietnam but saw legal difficulties in withdrawing from commitments to make finance available under the aid and trade contingency provisions for four ships and turbine generators (given in addition that construction was well advanced and jobs were at stake). British exports to Vietnam fell from £5 million in 1977 to £2½ million in

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1978. Imports from Vietnam were negligible. Any attempt to reduce still further this trade would be unlikely to have any effect on Vietnamese attitudes.

(iii) We shall review urgently with ODA and the Department of Trade the current position on aid/trade with Vietnam.

(b) Indirect

(i) We have been in frequent touch with the Governments of the ASEAN countries (Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines) and have urged them to put pressure on Vietnam. The ASEAN governments have their own strong reasons for making such representations but their influence is limited and Thailand in particular is inhibited by its problems with refugees from Cambodia.

(ii) We have also been in touch with the Americans and the Japanese and both governments have told us that they are doing all they can.

(iii) The only government which has any direct influence with Vietnam is the USSR with which Vietnam is allied. We are consulting HM Ambassador in Moscow about whether and if so how representations might best be made to the Soviet Government and have asked the Minister of State, Mr Peter Blaker, who is seeing the Americans tomorrow, to seek the views of the State Department on this.

(iv) The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary hopes to discuss this and other aspects of the Vietnamese refugee problem with representatives of the Nine in the margins of the Greek accession meeting in Athens. At official level we have discussed the matter frequently with representatives of the Nine. It was last raised, again at British initiative, in the Asia Working Group of the Nine on 18 May. Our partners recognise the seriousness of the situation but have no solutions to offer.

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(v) The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary also proposes to raise the question at the quadripartite dinner at The Hague tomorrow and at the NATO Ministerial meeting this week.

3. Resettlement of Refugees

(i) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

We have been in constant touch with UNHCR about the resettlement of refugees in Hong Kong. In particular we have urged the High Commissioner to strengthen his staff in Hong Kong and to accept responsibility for all Vietnamese refugees in the Colony. (At present the UNHCR only have responsibility for about a third of the 35,000 refugees in Hong Kong and these are being processed very slowly because of shortage of staff.)

(ii) United Nations - other aspects

Dr Waldheim, the UN Secretary General, who visited Asia earlier this year, is well seized of the whole problem and has, we understand, been in touch with the Prime Minister recently. We have considered whether we should raise this issue in e.g. the UN Security Council as a threat to peace. But in view of the Soviet vetoes on resolutions earlier this year over the Vietnamese attack on Cambodia and the Chinese attack on Vietnam we all think that Security Council action would not be productive. We shall, however, consider urgently what if any other UN action is possible and desirable.

(iii) ASEAN

The ASEAN countries, especially Thailand and Malaysia, have received very large numbers of refugees. On 21 May, Malaysia had 71,874 refugees awaiting resettlement. There are 160,000 refugees in camps in Thailand, mostly from Laos and Cambodia. In addition there are to be a further

/50,000



50,000 from Cambodia and some boat refugees. Some 13,000 refugees are in Indonesia and about 4,000 in the Philippines. The ASEAN countries have proposed the setting up of an Island Processing Centre to deal with the refugees and Indonesia has offered an island for this purpose. We made it clear at a recent conference in Jakarta that we could only support the Island Processing Centre if refugees from Hong Kong were not excluded. However any Centre could only deal with a small proportion (perhaps 10,000) of those awaiting resettlement: it is a temporary palliative, not a solution.

(iv) The United States

The United States Government have accepted over 200,000 refugees from Vietnam and are now taking 7,000 a month, of whom 500 are being taken from Hong Kong. We have pressed them hard to do more for Hong Kong. We are in touch with them about approaches to other governments and Mr Blaker, Minister of State in the Foreign Office, will be discussing this and other aspects of the refugee problem with the State Department tomorrow.

(v) The Nine

We have approached all Governments of the Nine other than Luxembourg, asking them to take Vietnamese refugees from Hong Kong and have also raised the whole problem in the political machinery of the Nine (see paragraph 2 (b) (iv) above). The French have taken over 40,000 refugees from Vietnam, most of them direct. Other EEC Governments have only been able to take small numbers.

(vi) Other European countries

We have approached a number of other European Governments including Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Austria, with negligible results.

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(vii) Latin America

We have also approached the Governments of Argentina and Brazil, again with a poor response. The US Refugee Coordinator has suggested that we should talk to other Latin American countries, particularly Venezuela, Colombia and Bolivia. Mr Blaker will discuss this in Washington tomorrow and we shall send appropriate instructions to our Missions in the light of what is agreed with the United States.

(viii) Australia, New Zealand and Canada

Apart from the United States, Australia and Canada are the only countries with continuing resettlement programmes for refugees from Hong Kong. Australia received a number of shiploads of refugees from Vietnam last year and will absorb by the end of this year some 16,000. The Foreign Secretary will be briefed to discuss this issue with Mr Peacock, the Australian Foreign Minister, who is due in London on 15 June. New Zealand is suffering from a serious unemployment situation and has so far not been able to respond to the representations we have made, but the Prime Minister may wish to discuss the matter with Mr Muldoon during his forthcoming visit to London on 11 June. We have been in close touch with the Canadians about refugees since the end of last year and they have been active in trying to focus international attention on the problem and have taken creditable numbers of refugees (about 8,000 a year), considering their own economic difficulties.

(ix) Japan

Lord Carrington raised this with Mr Sonoda, the Japanese Foreign Minister, on 22 May, and Mr Sonoda admitted that the Japanese record in taking refugees had been bad but

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said that Japan would now take a token number (500) and would contribute generously to the UNHCR.

(x) China

A very large proportion of recent refugees from Vietnam have been ethnic Chinese. Many of them were small businessmen from the South whose life became intolerable after the fall of Saigon and who could be fleeced by the Vietnamese authorities. Since the deterioration in relations between Vietnam and China, ethnic Chinese in North Vietnam have been persecuted and expelled. The Chinese have told us that they have received over 200,000 ethnic Chinese from Vietnam over the last year or so. Some of these find their way to Hong Kong, and the Chinese are then unwilling to take them back. We are considering urgently further discussions with the Chinese about the problems caused by the very large influx of people from China into Hong Kong.

4. We are keeping in close touch with the Government of Hong Kong about the practical problems facing them as a result of the recent influx from Vietnam and China. We may need to provide reinforcements (naval and perhaps land) to enable increased patrols to be mounted.

Yours ever

H A H Cortazzi

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