

Subject

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

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14/6

VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

The Prime Minister had a short discussion before lunch on 11 June with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Home Secretary about how Mr. Whitelaw should respond to a PNQ tabled for that afternoon by Mr. Ennals about Vietnamese Refugees and the future of those on the MV Roachbank in particular.

Mr. Whitelaw told the Prime Minister that he could confirm that HMG would not be liable for the cost of transporting to the UK either the refugees from the Sibonga or those from the Roachbank, should the latter be landed temporarily on Taiwan. After some discussion, it was agreed that Mr. Whitelaw should make a statement in response to Mr. Ennals' PNQ. The Prime Minister stressed that the statement should contain a strong condemnation of Vietnamese policy.

Mr. Whitelaw pointed out that he could not say that it was impossible for the UK to provide facilities for any further refugees: they could be provided, e.g. by converting barracks, etc., but only at some cost. The Prime Minister said that comparisons between the UK's record in receiving refugees and the records of other countries were invalid, because since the UK had a much larger merchant fleet than most and, more importantly, had already taken in, with full UK citizenship, nearly 2 million immigrants. She could not accept the distinction between refugees and immigrants. She asked that a list should be prepared of the relevant population densities of the various receiving countries.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that the UK could find itself in a difficult position at an international conference on refugees. It seemed clear that both China and

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Japan would refuse to accept the 40 or so refugees on board the third UK ship involved, the Norse Viking; he thought the UK would have to accept these in the end as well. Mr. Whitelaw said that the UK Masters were now re-routing their ships so far as possible in order to avoid the areas in which the refugees were afloat. He asked what he should say about the future of any refugees whom British ships might nevertheless pick up in the future: he proposed to say that the UK could not go on taking them in. The Prime Minister agreed that the UK could not do so and that Mr. Whitelaw should make this clear. The Prime Minister went on to say that there would be riots in the streets if the Government had to put refugees into council houses. She acknowledged, however, that Hong Kong had a dreadful problem. Lord Carrington said that there should be a regional solution for South East Asia.

It was agreed that, since it was still unclear as to whether Taiwan would in the event agree to accept any of the Roachbank refugees, Mr. Whitelaw should take the line that the UK would take in refugees from the Roachbank who could not be found a home in Taiwan.

The text of Mr. Whitelaw's eventual statement is attached below.

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14 June 1979