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DESKBY 300800Z (FCO AND UKMIS GENEVA)

FM WASHINGTON 292320Z MAY 79

TO IMMEDIATE FCO TELEGRAM NO 1279 OF 29 MAY
INFO IMMEDIATE GOVERNOR HONG KONG, UKMIS GENEVA,
ROUTINE MOSCOW
INFO SAIGON HANOI.

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Prime Minister

*SM
30/5*

YOUR TELNO 561 VIETNAMESE REFUGEES.

1. MR BLAKER RAISED THIS WITH WARREN CHRISTOPHER THIS AFTERNOON. HE EXPLAINED THAT WE WERE PROFOUNDLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE INFLUX OF REFUGEES FROM VIETNAM TO HONG KONG, AROUND TWELVE THOUSAND IN THE LAST MONTH. THIS PROBLEM AS FAR AS HONG KONG AUTHORITIES WERE CONCERNED WAS IN ADDITION TO THE VERY LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE ARRIVING FROM THE PEOPLES' REPUBLIC OF CHINA. HONG KONG'S CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE THEM WAS VERY LIMITED. IN THE OPINION OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT A CONCERTED INTERNATIONAL EFFORT WAS NEEDED TO ALLEVIATE MATTERS.
2. MR BLAKER SAID THAT THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION HAD BEEN HIGHLIGHTED BY THE ARRIVAL LAST WEEK AT HONG KONG OF THE BRITISH-REGISTERED SHIP SIBONGA WITH NEARLY ONE THOUSAND VIETNAMESE REFUGEES ON BOARD. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED THAT THESE PEOPLE WOULD BE ACCEPTED FOR SETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AS AN EMERGENCY MEASURE BUT WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO OUR ATTITUDE ON FUTURE CASES OF THIS KIND. MR BLAKER EXPLAINED THE UK'S EXISTING DIFFICULTIES OVER IMMIGRATION FROM OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD.
3. THE SITUATION HAD NOW BEEN AGGRAVATED BY PRESSURE TO ACCEPT SOME THREE HUNDRED REFUGEES PICKED UP BY ANOTHER BRITISH-REGISTERED VESSEL, MV ROACHBANK, WHICH WAS NOW STANDING OFF TAIWANESE WATERS. MR BLAKER ASKED CHRISTOPHER IF THE AMERICAN AUTHORITIES COULD USE THEIR INFLUENCE WITH THE TAIWANESE TO PERSUADE THEM TO ACCEPT THESE REFUGEES FROM ROACHBANK IN ACCORDANCE WITH ACCEPTED INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION.

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/ 4. MR BLAKER

4. MR BLAKER ALSO ENQUIRED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF THE AMERICANS TAKING MORE REFUGEES FROM HONG KONG. HE ADDED THAT A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES ROUND THE WORLD HAD NOT DONE AS MUCH TO HELP, NOTABLY IN LATIN AMERICA. DID THE AMERICANS AGREE ?

5. MR BLAKER SAID WE HAD PUT PRESSURE ON THE VIETNAMESE TO MEND THEIR WAYS, AND WE HAD RAISED THE MATTER WITH THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES. WOULD THE AMERICANS CONSIDER RAISING THE MATTER WITH THE SOVIET UNION?

6. IN RESPONSE CHRISTOPHER SAID THAT THE US GOVERNMENT ADMIRERD THE EFFORTS OF THE UK AND IN PARTICULAR OF HONG KONG. BUT THE US WAS ALSO STRETCHING ITSELF TO THE LIMIT BY ACCEPTING SOME SEVEN THOUSAND REFUGEES PER MONTH FROM SOUTH-EAST ASIA. NEW LEGISLATION WAS BEFORE CONGRESS DESIGNED TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR LARGER NUMBERS OF REFUGEES TO ARRIVE AT ONE TIME IN THE UNITED STATES. BUT AS FAR AS INCREASING THE OVERALL NUMBERS WAS CONCERNED PUBLIC OPINION IN THE UNITED STATES WOULD NOT STAND FOR MORE.

7. ON THE ROACHBANK CHRISTOPHER SAID HE WOULD SEE IF THEY COULD BE HELPFUL. ONE DIFFICULTY WAS THAT THE AMERICANS WERE CONSISTENTLY EMBARRASSED BY THE EFFORTS OF THE TAIWANESE AUTHORITIES TO TRANSLATE THE UNOFFICIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES INTO AN OFFICIAL ONE. THE AMERICANS HAD TO CHOOSE WITH CARE THE ISSUES WHICH THEY RAISED WITH THE TAIWANESE AUTHORITIES.

8. ON THE QUESTION OF RAISING THE MATTER WITH THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT CHRISTOPHER SAID THAT IN VIEW OF THE PRESIDENT'S CONCERN OVER HUMAN RIGHTS, AND IN PARTICULAR THE QUESTION OF EMIGRATION FROM THE SOVIET UNION, ANY REPRESENTATIONS WOULD NEED TO BE HANDLED VERY CAREFULLY. HE REFERRED TO THE UNHAPPY HISTORY OF EMIGRATION FROM GERMANY IN THE 1930S.

9. NEWSOM NOTED THAT THE AMERICANS WERE NOT SATISFIED WITH THE EFFORTS OF THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES. THEY WOULD BE PRESSING HIM TO DO MORE, IN PARTICULAR TO IDENTIFY OTHER COUNTRIES WHICH MIGHT IMPROVE THEIR PERFORMANCE. THEY HAD ALSO MADE SOME REPRESENTATIONS TO THE VIETNAMESE BUT HERE AGAIN WITHOUT PROMISING RESULTS. SOME VIETNAMESE WERE HINTING THAT IT WAS THEIR OBJECTIVE TO SEE ALL 600,000 ETHNIC CHINESE LEAVE VIETNAM.

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10. NEWSOM ALSO SAID THAT SOME OF THE LARGER SHIPS CARRYING VIETNAMESE REFUGEES APPEARED TO ORIGINATE IN HONG KONG, OR AT LEAST TO HAVE SOME HONG KONG CONNECTIONS. MR BLAKER SAID THAT WE WOULD LOOK INTO THIS.

11. IN CONCLUSION MR BLAKER EMPHASISED THE URGENCY OF THE ROACHBANK CASE. HE ADDED THAT IF THE INFLOW OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES CONTINUED WE WOULD HAVE TO LOOK AGAIN AT OUR POLICIES.

CONCLUSION

12. CHRISTOPHER AND NEWSOM WERE BOTH CLEARLY SYMPATHETIC WITH OUR PROBLEMS, AND PARTICULARLY WITH THOSE OF HONG KONG. NEWSOM SUBSEQUENTLY TELEPHONED TO SAY THAT THE AMERICANS WILL AT ONCE APPROACH THE TAIWAN AUTHORITIES ON THE ROACHBANK, THOUGH HE COULD NOT SAY HOW SUCCESSFUL THEY WOULD BE. HOWEVER, IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTOPHER'S OTHER COMMENTS, WE WOULD BE UNWISE TO EXPECT TOO MUCH FROM THE US ON THE WIDER PROBLEMS HONG KONG FACES.

FCO PASS SAVING HANOI

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[REPEATED AS REQUESTED]

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