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CABINET

REFUGEES FROM VIETNAM

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the  
Home Department

1. This memorandum considers the serious problem caused by the flow of boat refugees from Vietnam.

NUMBERS AND COMMITMENTS

2. Many South East Asian states will not allow refugees to land on their territories without guarantees of ultimate responsibility from the flag countries of rescuing vessels. Masters of United Kingdom registered ships are bound by international and domestic law to render assistance to those found in distress on the high seas. In recognition of this obligation the previous Administration agreed that an undertaking should be given, where refugees were rescued by United Kingdom registered vessels, that any not accepted by other countries of resettlement within an agreed period would be accepted by the United Kingdom. Such guarantees are now a common practice among maritime states.

3. In addition, the previous Administration agreed in January, at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to admit a further 1,500 Vietnamese refugees. 1,000 were to come from Hong Kong and 250 each from Malaysia and Thailand. The quotas for Malaysia and Thailand have been filled, but only 400 of the Hong Kong quota have so far been selected. A total of 270 have so far arrived.

4. Since the spring of 1975 the United Kingdom has accepted for resettlement a total of 1,923 Indo-Chinese refugees (see Annex A). The United States has accepted more than 250,000, France about 60,000, Canada 11,000 and Australia 18,000. Of our European Economic Community (EEC) partners other than France, Germany has taken about twice as many as us, and Belgium about the same as us.

M. V. SIBONGA AND M. V. ROACH BANK

5. The immediate problems are the refugees on the M. V. Sibonga and the M. V. Roach Bank. The M. V. Sibonga, a United Kingdom registered vessel, has arrived at Hong Kong with 900 Vietnamese boat refugees on board. There are now 34,000 Vietnamese refugees in the Colony, and the



Hong Kong Government regards the situation as desperate. The Colony also has a massive flow of immigrants from China. They have asked us to take the 900.

6. It was announced last evening that the Prime Minister in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and myself, had decided that we should accept responsibility for the Sibonga refugees. A copy of the statement is at Annex C.

7. The M. V. Roach Bank, another United Kingdom registered vessel, has arrived at Taiwan with 293 boat refugees on board. On a previous occasion involving a different vessel the Taiwanese refused to accept our guarantee and insisted that 346 boat refugees be airlifted direct to the United Kingdom. They appear to be taking the same line now.

#### FUTURE POLICY

8. There are serious political implications in the acceptance of a large-scale commitment towards Indo-Chinese refugees. Such a commitment would be seen as leading to an influx of immigrants which we could not control. There is also the risk that a willingness on our part to accept refugees could be exploited by racketeers. But it is difficult to reduce the extent of the commitment. I do not think we can go back on our predecessors decision on the 1,500 quota (paragraph 3). If we try to reverse the policy of giving guarantees to countries in South East Asia that we will in the last resort accept those rescued by United Kingdom registered ships it will be taken as being intended to discourage captains of British ships from rescuing those in danger of drowning. But we should so far as possible - and this will be difficult - monitor each case carefully to prevent corruption; we should not respond positively to any new approach by the UNHCR without the most careful consideration; and the criteria for the admission of other Indo-Chinese refugees on the grounds of United Kingdom ties or connections should be very stringent - indeed we shall have to consider what scope there is for tightening these criteria up.

9. I recognise the difficulties faced by the Hong Kong Government. But I do not think that we can agree automatically to accept refugees landed there from United Kingdom registered ships. We simply cannot tell what numbers this could involve. Nor would such refugees necessarily be more suitable for settlement in the United Kingdom than others in the camps. On the other hand, I recognise that a blank refusal to take any more from Hong Kong would be difficult to sustain. We need to consider carefully what additional numbers we could accept, having regard particularly to those who would present serious resettlement problems. We should also consider ways of offsetting the immigration commitment, for example, by changing the special quota of work permits for the dependent territories.



## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10. If further groups of refugees are to be accepted, there would have to be some once-for-all expenditure on making ready the necessary accommodation, and the Government would have to meet the consequential expenses of the voluntary organisations. The former cannot be quantified at this stage. The best estimate available at present of the cost to the voluntary organisations of coping with the refugees from the Sibonga and the Roach Bank is about £0.4 - £0.6 million in the first year. This would be in addition to social security payments. Other Departments might also incur additional expenditure. The Home Office (and perhaps the other Departments concerned) is unable to meet all these additional costs from its existing public expenditure provision. In my view expenditure of this nature constitutes a legitimate claim on the Contingency Reserve. Moreover, if refugees over and above these are to be accepted, the Government would have to consider becoming even more directly involved in the reception and resettlement process (see Annex B).

## CONCLUSIONS

11. We have to recognise that the problems of the Vietnamese refugees raise the widest issues of foreign policy and that they will need to be dealt with by international action for which I know the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary will press. So far as this country is concerned, however, I invite my colleagues to take note of the decision which has been taken in respect of the Sibonga refugees; and to agree:-

- a. that we should accept the 1,500 quota agreed by the previous Administration;
- b. that we should not agree now to accept automatically all refugees landed in Hong Kong by United Kingdom registered vessels, but should give further consideration to the possible extent to which we can help by taking a limited number who would not present serious resettlement problems;
- c. that in other cases we should continue to give the undertaking to accept refugees rescued by United Kingdom registered ships who are not resettled elsewhere;
- d. that we should monitor the situation carefully and take what action we can to prevent racketeering;
- e. that we should seek ways of offsetting the immigration commitments; and
- f. that any extra cost falling on the Home Office (and, subject to the views of my colleagues concerned, on other Departments) as the result of additional numbers of Vietnamese should be met out of the Contingency Reserve.

W. W.

Home Office

29 May 1979



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NUMBERS

Indo-Chinese refugees have been accepted for resettlement, or allowed to remain in the United Kingdom under the following headings:

(a) In situ refugees

Those Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians who were already in the United Kingdom when their countries fell to the Communists in 1975, and who had no desire to return, have been allowed to remain here as refugees. These were mostly Embassy staffs and students.

(b) United Kingdom ties or connections

Shortly after the fall of Saigon in May 1975, the previous Administration announced that it would be prepared to admit as refugees from Vietnam (later extended to include Laos and Cambodia) those who had some tie or connection with the United Kingdom. These tend to be mostly family reunion cases. Numbers will increase in proportion to the size of the Indo-Chinese community in this country.

(c) Boat refugees

See paragraph 2 of the paper.

(d) The 1500 quota

See paragraph 3 of the paper.

2. From the spring of 1975 to date the United Kingdom has accepted for resettlement, or allowed to remain, a total of 1923 Indo-Chinese refugees, as illustrated by the following table:

	<u>Vietnamese</u>	<u>Cambodian</u>	<u>Laotian</u>	<u>TOTALS</u>
In situ	150	136	51	337
UK ties	313	39	160	512
Boat refugees)	804			1074
1500 quota }	270			
TOTALS	1537	175	211	1923

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ARRANGEMENTS FOR RECEPTION AND RESETTLEMENT OF VIETNAMESE  
BOAT PEOPLE: PRACTICAL CONSTRAINTS

1. The Government relies on the voluntary refugee organisations to handle the reception and resettlement of all refugees. The two major organisations are the British Council for Aid to Refugees (BCAR), who co-ordinate the work of the other bodies, and the Ockenden Venture. The rate of reception is effectively dependent on the capacity of these organisations.
2. The increase in the numbers of refugees in the last year or so has necessitate financial assistance from the Government to meet the additional costs. BCAR's estimate of the cost (exclusive of social security payments) of receiving and resettling refugees is approximately £350 per head per year. In the last financial year, a total of £343,000 was paid by the Home Office to the voluntary refugee organisations. So far in this financial year, out of the £1M estimated for the purpose, £30,000 has been paid in respect of the Vietnamese, £34,000 in respect of refugees from Latin America and £14,000 for BCAR's administrative cost. During the year, the greater part of the likely expenditure will be in respect of refugees from South East Asia (of whom about 1300 are still to come from the quota of 1500 agreed by the last Government). This estimate, however, does not make allowance for groups (like those from the Sibonga and Roach Bank) picked up by British ships and for whom we might have to accept responsibility. There are currently some 550 refugees from South East Asi in the care of the voluntary organisations.
3. The voluntary organisations could not handle substantial extra numbers of Vietnamese refugees without more Government money and other forms of practical help - for example, in finding accommodation and specialist staff - which could make demands on Departments other than the Home Office. They would also have to take on extra temporary administrative and case-working staff.
4. BCAR's initial reaction to the group from the m.v. Sibonga is that, given sufficient notice - say about three months - arrangements could be made between Ockenden and themselves to receive them. A great deal would depend on the rate of arrival. If all, or the bulk, of the 984 were to arrive over a very short period (e.g. on to three months) they would almost certainly have to be received into camps. The Government would have to help BCAR (through the PSA) to find a camp, and possibly Ockenden as well (although the latter may be able to obtain suitable premises on their own). Camps of this size would need extra staff - perhaps 30 to 40 per camp. Some of these extra staff could be found locally, but the professionals, administrative assistants, interpreters and case-workers) would have to be advertised for. BCAR think that the necessary staff could be obtained in time.
5. If the arrivals could be spread over a year, this might obviate the need for more than one camp, but it would still be necessary to obtain more accommodation than is available at present. If the 293 refugees picked up by the m.v. Roach Bank have to be accepted almost at once (Taiwan, the first port of call, refused even temporary accommodation to the 360 "Well Park" refugees), special emergency arrangements, including a camp, will be needed and contingency plans are already in hand.



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6. The voluntary refugee organisations should be able to cope with the refugees from the Sibonga and the Roach Bank. There are doubts, however, about their capacity to cope with any further substantial influxes of boat people beyond that. This would almost certainly mean the opening of fresh camps. It is open to question whether either of the two main organisations have sufficient management ability to control what would then have become a very complex, country-wide organisation with a relatively large budget. If the United Kingdom is forced to admit further substantial numbers over and above those from the m.v. Sibonga and m.v. Roach Bank, it seems inevitable that the Government would have to consider taking over some direct responsibility for their reception and resettlement. As it is, a very close eye would have to be kept on how the voluntary bodies copes with the Sibonga and Roach Bank groups.

7. The availability of local authority services represents a further constraint. This is particularly true of housing. So far, refugee arrivals have been phased so as to allow the voluntary refugee organisations to resettle them in various parts of the country after a relatively short time (three to six months) in a reception centre. They have been able to do this because the numbers have been matched by sufficient offers of housing from local authorities. It would not be as easy to accommodate a further, say, 1,000 refugees arriving over a short period; they would have to spend a longer time in the reception centres. Another possible constraint would be the capacity of local education authorities to cope with the necessary language training on this scale. Outside London (where the "Well Park" refugees were received initially) this capacity has not so far been tested.

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ANNEX C

PRESS NOTICE

The Prime Minister, in consultation with the Home Secretary and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, has decided on humanitarian grounds that this country will accept responsibility for the refugees from Vietnam on board MV Sibonga, who were rescued on the high seas.

They have been in touch with the Governor of Hong Kong.

In taking this decision the British Government stresses that it cannot make any general commitment about similar action in future. Consultation will be pursued urgently with the Government of Hong Kong and the international community about the whole problem of refugees from Indo-China.