



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

11 June 1979

*Dear George.*

Thank you for your letter of 1 June about the problems of providing accommodation for the Vietnamese boat people after their initial reception into this country.

You are right in thinking that there will be problems in finding sufficient local authority accommodation for settlement after the six months or so these people will need in the reception centres. Your offer of help, therefore, is particularly timely and I warmly welcome it.

Willie Whitelaw is co-ordinating the arrangements for receiving these refugees. Immediate operational responsibility, however, is being undertaken by the main voluntary refugee organisations - specifically, the British Council for Aid to Refugees, the Ockenden Venture and Save the Children - including negotiations with local authorities which have offered long-term accommodation and the transfer of the refugees from reception centres to their permanent homes. The position is also complicated by the existence of other Vietnamese refugees who are already here or due to arrive here shortly and who will be equally in need of long-term accommodation. Translating your prompt and generous offer into action on the ground therefore, may need careful handling, particularly in view of the sensitivities to which you draw attention.

One option may be for you to make the accommodation available to the Vietnamese refugees in this country generally (ie not just those from the MV Sibonga) and to discuss direct with the refugee organisations the numbers and locations in which they would be provided. Home Office officials will be writing very shortly to the

/ local authority



local authority associations and to your Council drawing attention to the long-term problems of resettlement of the Vietnamese refugees and their accommodation needs, particularly as a result of the Sibonga rescue. You may find this a useful approach to which to relate your offer. Alternatively, in view of the scale of the resources your Council is proposing, you might prefer the Home Office itself to act as an intermediary between yourselves and the refugee organisations and to allocate whatever accommodation you can make available to the individual organisations according to their particular needs.

You may well find it useful for you or your officials to discuss these possibilities direct with the Home Office and if so I suggest you get in touch with the Home Secretary's Private Secretary to arrange this; his telephone number is 01-213 3110. In the meantime, I think it would be very helpful if you began to make the necessary contingency arrangements.

I am most grateful for your help.

Yours etc

*Raymond*

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George Tremlett, Esq.

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