



EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Bern, December 6, 1978

Ambassador Francesca Pometta
Federal Political Department
Bundeshaus West
3003 Bern

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Dear Ambassador Pometta:

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will hold a consultation in Geneva December 11-12 on the matter of the Indochinese refugees. The President and the Secretary of State are personally and deeply concerned that the consultations be successful. In this regard we would appreciate Switzerland consider making an approach to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to suggest that Vietnam attend the Geneva consultation.

The United States is making an extra effort to assist the Indochinese refugees. There is a need, however, for all nations to join together to avert the possibility of a major human disaster. We hope that Switzerland will send a delegation at a sufficiently high level to be able to make commitments, help identify remaining areas where we can look for further resources and follow up the Geneva meeting.

The two major areas of concentration at the Geneva consultation will be the related goals of increased resettlement opportunities and funding for the UNHCR. However, we believe a more detailed breakdown of the topics for discussion may help focus efforts more effectively and have tentatively identified the following:

- Increased rate of refugee arrivals: role of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam authorities; possibility of achieving more orderly outflow;
- Refugee camps: needs & costs; possible large-scale holding centers;
- Resettlement: relation to arrival rate and camp population; national & regional quotas; resettlement in countries of first asylum, e.g., Thailand;

-- Finances: National quotas; possible quotas for EC, OPEC, etc; special project funding; and,

-- Timing: Matching contributions to the rate of refugee outflow.

The increase in the rate of exodus from Indochina, chiefly boat cases, that began in April has consistently outstripped the rate of international resettlement, running at about 45,000 per year up until mid-November. In the last six weeks alone, over half that number of refugees have arrived in countries of first asylum. Thus, there has been a rapid build-up in the refugee camps, e.g., a threefold increase in Malaysia's camps in six months, with understandable fears of a continuing flood to follow. This erodes the willingness of countries of first asylum to admit refugees and to assist the UNHCR in providing adequate refugee facilities, consequently making the UNHCR task more difficult, complex and expensive. Locating and transporting refugees, and supporting resettlement all place a heavy financial burden on the UNHCR, which has a deficit of \$8 million in the current year already and which we fear may be \$10 million by January unless significant new contributions are received. Much the same can be said of the various voluntary agencies sharing the refugee effort, some of whom will be represented at the Geneva consultation.

In keeping with its humanitarian tradition, the U.S. Government has moved to meet the challenge posed by recent refugee increases. On November 28, the Attorney General consulted with Congress on an additional 15,000 parole numbers for boat refugees during the period ending April 30, plus 4,375 additional spaces for Cambodian refugees. While final decision will not be made until congressional reaction can be assessed, the over-all total of Indochina refugees authorized for resettlement in the United States between May 1, 1978 and May 1, 1979 could be over 51,000 by December 11 (the initial annual program approved to begin last May 1 was 25,000). We also plan to make an additional \$5 million contribution to the UNHCR, for a total this year of \$13.5 million or about 40 percent of the total. The program to begin next May 1, which the Administration will present to Congress for the latter's reaction, will be heavily influenced by the efforts made by the international community.

If Geneva and its follow-up demonstrate a major increase in resettlement and funding by other countries commensurate with what we have been doing, prospects will be favorable for a continued high-level effort by the U.S. Government. Another significant factor will be the continued cooperation by Southeast Asian countries of first asylum, essential to any international effort.

After 3-1/2 years of ad hoc coping, the prospect that the exodus will continue and over the near term may increase even beyond present levels calls for establishment of mechanisms suited to continuous effort. High Commissioner Hartling, recognizing that, has indicated that he intends to make the establishment of annual quotas or targets, for resettlement and specific pledges of financial support a prime aim of the consultation, which he will chair. Setting such targets will be among our own prime objectives as well, not only because it is the most realistic way to support the refugee effort but also because we must be able to demonstrate to Congress that refugee program support has been internationalized as much as possible if we are to be successful in seeking permanent refugee legislation and the concomitant resettlement measures and adequate funding for our own refugee operation and our contributions to the UNHCR.

During the years 1975-78, the United States took or is processing some 200,000 Indochinese refugees for permanent resettlement. The great majority of refugees left to avoid persecution because of past association with the U.S. Government or former indigenous governments which we supported. However, in the past year the exodus from Vietnam, no less than from Laos and Cambodia has changed in nature. It now stems from intolerable pressures by the regime on the livelihood and even the right to existence of those classes of individuals deemed superfluous to the political and social programs of the state. The prospects of being foreclosed from earning a living or practicing a profession, being forced to move to the very harsh conditions of the new economic zones, described by the media as the Vietnamese Gulag, or being conscripted into the Vietnamese Armed Forces or worse (particularly in Kampuchea) has impelled tens of thousands of people to relinquish all they own and undertake incredibly hazardous voyages. Thus it is no longer directly related to the war and of special relevance to the United States, but has become a problem of general international concern.

It is increasingly clear in a great many cases that refugees are able to buy their way out of Vietnam, either to enable flight on a small boat or, by arrangement with the authorities, to obtain passage on a larger craft, of which we have known two so far, Southern Cross and Hai Hong. We cannot say with authority that the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam directly profits from this arranged exodus or that it is an explicit Vietnamese Government policy to rid the country of unwanted elements. It is beyond dispute, however, that local Vietnamese officials have received large and systematic bribes from escapees and have actively organized mass departures. At the same time, other refugees continue to flee the Socialist Republic of Vietnam against the wishes of the authorities. In the view of the UNHCR, all are refugees who deserve the right of asylum, given what they face at home. We support this position, as do most governments.

The drastic increase in escapees from Vietnam has created serious political concern in Southeast Asian countries, notably Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Australia. The UNHCR has broached with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam the possibility of a regularized program of emigration, perhaps built around family reunification, but has as yet had no meaningful response. Other governments have approached the Vietnamese Government directly on this issue, also without apparent effect. Latest reports indicate that the Vietnamese Government declined the UNHCR invitation to be present at Geneva. Nevertheless, we believe the subject of a more regularized refugee exodus should be explored at Geneva, either as a formal agenda item or informally. We also believe that governments with representation in Hanoi should urge the Vietnamese Government to participate, even if it is ostensibly for the sole purpose of discussing Cambodian refugees in Vietnam (whom the UNHCR is assisting in camps in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam). We do not wish a confrontation on this issue, nor to encourage the Vietnamese Government to slam the door on such departures. We do believe an international solution would be facilitated if the Vietnamese Government could seek seriously with the UNHCR a means of regularizing the outflow, whether through family reunification or some other means.

There are probably about 175,000 Indochinese refugees in camps in East and Southeast Asia, all but a few thousand in the camps of Malaysia and Thailand. There are about 120,000 refugees in Thailand, mostly land

refugees from Laos and Cambodia, in 13 major camps and several more smaller ones. In Malaysia, over 40,000 boat refugees are in 7 major camps, as well as several more smaller ones. The largest Malaysian camp is Pulau Bidong, an uninhabited island six months ago, now holding about 20,000 refugees. Indonesia has 2 major camps; the Philippines, Japan, and the Republic of China each have one principal camp. Singapore and Hong Kong (and Macau) do not maintain camps as such but place refugees in hostels, hotels, etc. The Hong Kong/Macau refugee population is now over 5,000. It is essential to the maintenance of the humanitarian policies of granting asylum in the countries near Indochina that we stop the increase in their already excessive camp populations. The most practical solution would be a system of new island camps, under UNHCR auspices, capable of holding additional refugees in a camp system where each would have to wait his turn for resettlement. The camp would be equipped and run by the UNHCR which would also be responsible for working out with first asylum countries a means of sharing the load between new and present camps so that boats are not automatically pushed away at the peril of the refugees and forced to sail to new places of asylum, seaworthy or not. The UNHCR should be encouraged to seek such a camp actively, including the necessary pledges of financial and other assistance. The ASEAN states, particularly Thailand and Malaysia, should be prevailed upon to be as active and persuasive as possible at Geneva in seeking such a solution since it would be in the interest of all the ASEAN countries to have such a facility established. The best location would seem to be an island or islands off Singapore, the Philippines or Indonesia.

It is important to keep resettlement and financial support closely linked in the eyes of other governments in order to get countries unable to undertake more resettlement to increase their financial contributions as an offset. Both resettlement and funding should be discussed initially in terms of annual quotas or targets on which the UNHCR could rely while the Indochinese refugee problem continues. Where exceptional circumstances, e.g., Canada's offer to take 600 of the Hai Hong refugees, Norway's pledge to accept those picked up by its ships, and Lower Saxony's offer to take 1,000 boat refugees, we should press the government to incorporate that number in an annual quota on the valid assumption that the same thing is likely to happen again.

Countries like Denmark and New Zealand apparently intend to move toward annual quotas rather than intermittent announcements of new numbers every few years. Even relatively small numbers, when they are taken cumulatively on a regularized basis, would increase substantially the annual quota on which the UNHCR and countries of first asylum can rely. A thoughtful Australian suggestion concerns the feasibility of establishing a regional quota for Western Europe or for the European Community. This has the apparent advantage of being something France might be able to support in order to get other European countries more actively involved in resettlement. This would also be an appropriate follow-on to the ASEAN-EC talks.

Permanent resettlement in Southeast Asia and Africa remains largely unexplored; and in view of the new dimensions of the refugee exodus, these areas should be considered. There is a small but successful rural refugee resettlement project in French Guiana, with a present population of about 800. This unpublicized project demonstrates the practicality of resettling rural refugees in marginal areas where their skills and acclimatization would be valuable assets. Tentative approaches to Brazil indicated that refugees or others who wanted to settle there had to bring their own capital. There are areas of sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the Francophone countries, where there already are Vietnamese settled since the old colonial days and where, with the diplomatic support of France, openings might be found for additional resettlement. In all such cases, we believe the UNHCR would have to be the primary motivation and implementing force. Given the economic problems of LDC's with a potential for resettlement, the UNHCR would have to be prepared from the beginning with the ability to guarantee full funding for such projects. Thus far, there has been no approach to any potential third country of resettlement in which full funding was part of the proposal, though we have indicated to Thailand that local funding by the international community could be obtained for any local settlements in Thailand. An associated problem, of course, and one that would have to be worked out thoroughly, would be that of continuing oversight and control. This is a problem that has cropped up in preliminary discussions of resettlement and sovereignty; and, in any case, at some time, the UNHCR role has to terminate once the refugee is accepted for resettlement.

In addition to routine care and feeding responsibilities, the UNHCR often pays for transportation from camps to countries of resettlement and for special projects related to resettlement. If an island transit camp is established, it will be an additional major financial burden. In many areas, essential refugee work is farmed out to voluntary agencies. The expansion of the refugee problem has placed UNHCR and voluntary agencies alike under great financial strain. Urgent attention must be given at the consultation to provide financial support quotas from all countries capable of contributing. Developed countries may well be able to provide both resettlement and funds. Countries for one reason or another unable to provide resettlement should be made to feel an obligation to provide an added measure of funding. In this connection, Japan and the EEC and OPEC countries come most readily to mind. Japan has already pledged a special contribution of \$10 million, an example for others to follow. The Federal Republic of Germany should be included but with consideration given to the large amounts contributed by its private German foundations at various times. In considering this question, it should be remembered that very large domestic costs are incurred in the resettlement process. In fiscal year 1979, for example, in the United States alone, \$98 million was appropriated by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare for such costs.

We would appreciate receiving Swiss views on the Indochinese refugee problem and would welcome close cooperation between our delegations at the Geneva consultation.

Sincerely,

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