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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
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Report on the resettlement of refugees

I. INTRODUCTION

1. UNHCR supports the resettlement of an individual refugee or a refugee group once it has been determined that voluntary repatriation or local integration are excluded as durable solutions. In situations which justify resettlement as the viable durable solution, the identified needs of the refugees concerned should determine the criteria of a refugee resettlement programme. The resettlement activities of UNHCR are in turn determined primarily by conditions in the country of first asylum or temporary refuge.

2. UNHCR appreciates the efforts of those countries which continue to receive refugees on the basis of established immigration programmes and policies. However, as such policies largely identify refugee candidates on the basis of likelihood of their integration into the society and contribution to the economy of the receiving country, they do not necessarily address the problem of either the country of first asylum or of the refugee in need of resettlement. In order to apply resettlement as a humanitarian solution to refugee problems, provisions should be made to include in admission programmes refugees who lack professional qualifications or who are not in a perfect state of health, in addition to facilitating reunification of refugee families.

II. REVIEW OF OPERATIONS

3. In 1983 UNHCR helped to resettle some 114,000 refugees, including 19,000 persons from Viet Nam who emigrated under the Orderly Departure Programme (ODP) to join their families abroad. Countries which operated substantial immigration programmes continued to take the largest number of refugees, but many other countries made an important contribution by taking persons whose resettlement for security, medical or other reasons was urgent, or whose placement would otherwise have been difficult.

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4. As in the past, most of the refugees' transportation was arranged by the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration (ICM). In co-operation with ICM and the United States Government, a tripartite language training programme for refugees resettled in or in transit through Europe was continued. The Office also collaborated with ICM and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) in the dissemination of information and materials on refugee resettlement and integration through the International Refugee Integration Resource Centre (IRIRC), which was run under a tripartite agreement between the three organizations until its incorporation with UNHCR's own documentation activities at the end of May 1984. The quarterly bulletin "Refugee Abstracts" has been published regularly and distributed on the basis of subscriptions. Preparation of a bibliography on refugee resettlement and integration, as well as of a thesaurus of refugee terminology, has reached the final stage.

5. During the period under review, several Governments invited the Office to assist in the planning of their resettlement programmes. In response to these requests UNHCR provided information and its assessment of the needs and priorities of various refugee groups and participated in discussions with the authorities. In 1984 the Office also provided, to countries admitting refugees for resettlement, an assessment of resettlement needs, in accordance with the decisions of the thirty-fourth session of the Executive Committee.

6. UNHCR's resettlement expenditures in 1983 amounted to \$ 13.5 million for transportation, resettlement processing and other resettlement-related costs.

A. Africa

7. The number of African refugees who need to be resettled remains small in comparison with the total refugee population on the continent. UNHCR continues to work with Governments to facilitate voluntary repatriation or local integration where feasible. In a number of African countries, UNHCR offices have been advised of the presence of refugees who are not permitted to integrate locally. Resettlement of individuals has become necessary where this is the only way to guarantee their security or release from detention; it also continues to be one of the solutions in countries where the presence of refugees or the situation of refugee camps pose problems of personal security.

8. UNHCR seeks to resettle African refugees within Africa, insofar as possible. The Office continues to work closely with Governments and with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to this end. A workshop on resettlement was held in Addis Ababa in March 1984 with the participation of the OAU Bureau for Refugees.

9. Several States outside the continent do, however, operate resettlement programmes from which refugees in African can benefit. Of the 2,613 refugees who were resettled in 1983, 1,856 went to the United States and 416 to Canada. Australia also began a resettlement programme for African refugees under which the first refugees were admitted in 1984. Some European countries accept refugees from Africa on an exceptional basis; their rapid action and flexible criteria are extremely helpful when resettlement is sought as an emergency solution.

10. The situation of refugees in southern Africa remains particularly volatile and Governments are asked to bear in mind the potential needs in this region.

B. Americas

11. Changing conditions in Latin America have led to a decrease in requests for resettlement from this area. UNHCR limits its resettlement efforts to the promotion of family reunion and to those refugees facing serious protection and health problems. During 1983, a total of 1,025 refugees were resettled; at the end of the year, some 800 refugees were registered for and awaiting resettlement.

12. The situation in a number of countries, including in Central America, remains unstable. The continued involvement of countries operating resettlement programmes and other countries which traditionally admit refugees from Latin America appears to be necessary.

C. Europe

13. During 1983, 20,847 refugees were resettled from Europe, a decrease of 44 per cent from 1982. Over 90 per cent of them went to Australia, Canada or the United States. Refugees continue to seek migration from Europe. Although their overall number has decreased, UNHCR considers it necessary that the situation of refugees in Austria, Greece, Italy, Spain and Yugoslavia be kept under review.

14. UNHCR has been able to rely on the understanding and assistance of those European countries which provide transit facilities for refugees awaiting immigration processing. This has enabled UNHCR to continue to assist refugees whose situations in other countries had become difficult.

D. East and South Asia

15. Resettlement remains the principal durable solution for Indo-Chinese refugees. From July 1983 to June 1984, a total of 15,876 Vietnamese refugees (boat arrivals) were resettled. This is 49 per cent fewer than during the last reporting period, and 82 per cent fewer than during the corresponding period in 1981-1982. Clearly, resettlement momentum has faltered. However,

the number of refugees who arrived in countries bordering the South China Sea has also decreased, although not to the same degree. The 28,055 Vietnamese boat refugees who arrived during 1983 were 36 per cent fewer than during 1982. Arrivals during the first six months of 1984 totalled 14,763, a further reduction of 12 per cent from the same period in 1983.

16. A small but increasing number of Kampuchean continued to arrive by boat, mainly in Thailand; there were 9 in 1982, 155 in 1983, and 374 during the first six months of 1984.

17. The population of boat refugees in camps in countries of first asylum at 30 June 1984 stood at 41,109, 13 per cent fewer than in June 1983. It should be noted, however, that the average number of Vietnamese refugees in camps has been around the same level since October 1981.

18. A cause of great concern is the continued decline in the willingness of ships to rescue refugees at sea. Rescues, expressed as a percentage of total boat arrivals, stood at 21 per cent in 1980, 20 per cent in 1981, 15 per cent in 1982, 12 per cent in 1983, and a low of 7 per cent during the first six months of 1984 when only 1,055 refugees were rescued.

19. It has been recognized for several years that the resettlement of refugees rescued at sea presents certain difficulties to flag States in view of the unpredictable nature of rescues and the lack of adequate burden-sharing arrangements. In an attempt to rationalize the system, to share more equitably the responsibility for resettlement and to encourage ships of certain countries to rescue refugees, UNHCR, in accordance with the relevant conclusion of the thirty-fourth session of the Executive Committee, has urged both maritime and non-maritime States to contribute to a pool of "Rescue at Sea Resettlement Offers" (RASRO). At the time of writing, 11 countries had pledged a total of 2,346 places to the scheme. UNHCR needs more places in order to start RASRO for a one-year trial period.

20. The particular problem of refugees rescued by vessels flying flags of States operating an "open registry", as well as of other countries not considered able to accept refugees for resettlement, continues to be successfully remedied by the arrangement known as DISERO (Disembarkation Resettlement Offers). Countries contributing to the DISERO pool at present are Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. 333 rescued refugees were disembarked under the scheme in 1983. During the first half of 1984, only 63 refugees were disembarked under DISERO, as compared with 163 during the first six months of 1983; this seems to indicate an increasing reluctance on the part of ship masters and owners to rescue refugees, even when rapid disembarkation and resettlement are assured.

21. The Office has continued to distribute the pamphlet "Guidelines for Disembarkation of Refugees" which is now available in three language versions: English, Japanese and Tagalog.
22. UNHCR remains concerned about Vietnamese boat refugees in Hong Kong, a large number of whom have been in camps for over three years. Although 4,200 refugees left Hong Kong in 1983 for resettlement, the camp population, which stood at 12,881 on 30 June 1983, decreased only slightly to 12,533 one year later. Of this total, 4,939 are in closed camps.
23. Resettlement opportunities for Vietnamese in Thailand, who risked a hazardous journey overland to the border, have declined. Only 103 departed during the first six months of 1984, compared to 1,916 during the same period in 1983.
24. Under the Orderly Departure Programme, 18,978 Vietnamese left Viet Nam during 1983, an increase of 88 per cent over the previous year. Of this number, 8,242 were admitted to the United States, 3,253 to Canada, 2,229 to France, 1,678 to the Federal Republic of Germany, 904 to Australia, and the remainder to 23 other countries. During the first half of 1984, 14,198 Vietnamese left under the Programme, a figure rivalling the 14,762 boat arrivals. Of these, 6,608 went to the United States, 3,382 to Canada, and 1,374 to Australia.
25. For the third consecutive year, UNHCR had talks in 1983 with a delegation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam during which the evolution of the ODP was the main concern. These talks provided an opportunity for all interested parties, including resettlement countries, to discuss difficulties, consolidate progress and improve results.
26. The resettlement of Indo-Chinese unaccompanied minors has been the subject of considerable discussion over the past year. Total numbers declined by 21 per cent from 3,121 on 30 June 1983 to 2,452 one year later, of whom 1,229 have close relatives in the United States, 523 in another resettlement country and 700 have no relatives outside Viet Nam. It is for this last group that UNHCR is seeking resettlement opportunities. In June 1984, 386 unaccompanied minors were Lao, 126 Khmer and the remainder Vietnamese.
27. Assistance is provided to refugees in China who wish to be reunited with relatives abroad. During 1983, 311 persons left China for this purpose and another 58 left during the first half of 1984.
28. There were 70,338 Kampuchean refugees in camps in Thailand on 1 July 1983 and 46,833 on 30 June 1984, a reduction of 33 per cent. During this period, 26,734 left for resettlement compared with 23,673 during the corresponding period in 1982-83.

29. Of approximately 26,000 Kampuchean refugees in Viet Nam, 16,000 are living in six rural centres partially supported by UNHCR. The Vietnamese authorities have advised UNHCR that about 8,000 Kampucheans have relatives abroad and wish to be resettled. Since 1983, UNHCR has received lists from the Vietnamese authorities of 6,649 names of refugees with relatives in 16 different countries and territories. On the basis of these lists, the competent authorities will determine which of these refugees qualify for resettlement. A total of 516 were resettled in 1983 and 494 during the first six months of 1984.

30. The number of refugees from the Lao People's Democratic Republic in camps in Thailand at 30 June 1984 was 72,392, a reduction of only 3.6 per cent over the previous year. Only 28 per cent are ethnic Lao, the remainder being Hmong - in ethnic terms the largest Indo-Chinese refugee population - plus small numbers of other tribal groups. Many Hmong are reluctant to consider resettlement as a solution to their present predicament. In 1983, 7,126 ethnic Lao were resettled, compared to only 1,414 hilltribe refugees; during the first six months of 1984, the figures were at 5,985 and 1,329 respectively.

31. In 1983, a total of 87,030 Indo-Chinese were resettled in over 20 countries of whom 34,687 were Vietnamese refugees, 27,509 Kampucheans and 5,856 Lao. These figures do not include Vietnamese leaving under the ODP. 52 per cent of those resettled went to the United States, 16 per cent to Australia, 11 per cent to France and 9 per cent to Canada. The High Commissioner explores carefully any possibility for the regional resettlement of refugees within East Asia.

D. Middle East and South-West Asia

32. UNHCR is confronted with an increasing demand for resettlement of refugees of various origins in this region. Although the vast majority of refugees from Afghanistan continues to be assisted in camps and does not require resettlement, there are large numbers of refugees from other countries for whom resettlement is the only viable solution. Adequate processing mechanisms for the migration or resettlement of such refugees have not yet been established by all countries and, as a result, many refugees find themselves "in orbit" or become victims of measures instituted by national authorities to curb increasing illegal movements.

33. In May 1984, UNHCR requested certain Governments to take urgent action to resettle refugees from this region, especially those in the Gulf States, India and Pakistan where their situation is precarious, but also in the Philippines, Thailand and Turkey where refugees from this area are not allowed to remain. Although a number of countries are admitting such refugees for resettlement, UNHCR is of the opinion that the criteria being applied are not sufficiently wide to cover the variety of different refugee categories. In addition, UNHCR finds it extremely difficult to obtain admission to any country for these refugees unless they can establish a particular link which would make them eligible.

E. Vulnerable cases

1. Disabled refugees

34. Governments have accepted in principle UNHCR's request to increase the number of places specially reserved for the admission of disabled refugees; however, decisions to this effect have not yet been fully implemented. Available records show that in 1982, a total of 240 disabled refugees registered with UNHCR were resettled, together with their families (a total of 800 persons). In 1983, another 295 disabled refugees registered with UNHCR found resettlement places, together with their families (969 persons), in more than 14 countries. 150 disabled refugees, together with their families (411 persons), were resettled during the first six months of 1984.

35. At present, UNHCR is seeking resettlement opportunities for about 700 disabled refugees who cannot be admitted under normal resettlement programmes. The majority of these refugees are physically handicapped but a small number suffers from severe mental disabilities. While UNHCR faces particular difficulties in locating places for the mentally disabled, increased resettlement offers are needed for refugees of all nationalities suffering from various handicaps. The Office remains concerned that, at the present rate of acceptances, it will take another three years to resettle only those who have already been identified.

2. Emergency (protection) cases

36. In order to be able to respond rapidly to situations where a refugee's physical safety is at stake, UNHCR requires resettlement places which are not subject to particular criteria and which can be made available at very short notice. A few Governments have advised the Office that they are prepared to consider such cases and have admitted refugees in 1983 and 1984 at the Office's request. When an emergency arises, UNHCR contacts the resettlement country which it considers most likely to be able to assist. Often, the urgency of the situation is such that a resettlement country is asked to make a rapid decision, thus relying largely on UNHCR's appraisal of the situation. UNHCR is compelled to continue efforts to convince Governments to make places available in sufficient numbers to ensure resettlement opportunities in crisis situations where availability of resettlement places serves primarily to ensure the protection of refugees.

III. CONCLUSIONS

37. It is imperative that resettlement opportunities be available for refugees who have no possibility of local integration and, in some instances, need resettlement to guarantee their physical safety and well-being. UNHCR is concerned about the application by some resettlement countries of increasingly restrictive selection criteria which create, on the one hand, a "favoured" class of refugee and, on the other, leave other refugees unassisted who may well be equally in need of resettlement but who are not considered eligible. While UNHCR fully understands that Governments prefer to admit refugees likely to have fewer integration problems by virtue of their family ties or professional qualifications, it is vital that sufficient resettlement places be allocated for those refugees who have neither links in a resettlement country nor a particular skill, but who nonetheless require this form of durable solution.