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OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

International Conference on Indo-Chinese RefugeesReport of the Secretary-General

1. Following the conclusion of the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees (ICIR), three meetings of the Steering Committee of that Conference have been held on the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action adopted at the Conference. Considerable progress has been registered on all aspects of the Comprehensive Plan of Action, except the issue of the return of non-refugees.
2. On departures, a public information campaign was conducted in northern Viet Nam to inform inhabitants about the situation of asylum-seekers in first asylum camps in the region, the establishment of procedures for the determination of refugee status and the limitation of resettlement opportunities only to those recognized as refugees. This campaign, together with increased voluntary repatriation of asylum-seekers from Hong Kong, contributed largely to the drastic reduction (97 per cent) in arrivals in Hong Kong during the first half of 1990. In the rest of the region, however, no significant change was noted in the number of arrivals and a public information campaign will be undertaken shortly in southern Viet Nam.
3. The practice of granting temporary refuge to asylum-seekers was generally respected throughout the region, although UNHCR received reports of denial of asylum and "redirection" of several thousand persons in part of the region. Procedures for the determination of refugee status were established in all countries of temporary refuge in the region, in accordance with international standards and in close collaboration with UNHCR at all stages of the process,

* A/45/150 and Corr.1.

including appeals. UNHCR conducted a number of training/briefing sessions for government officials involved in the determination of refugee status and has an observer/adviser role in the procedure in each of the countries. Although there were some problems in the initial stages, these have now been generally overcome and UNHCR is very encouraged with the progress made so far.

4. Special procedures have been established with the assistance of UNHCR for unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable cases in all countries of first asylum in the region in order to ascertain the solution in the best interest of such persons. Considerable progress has also been made on the resettlement of the pre-cutoff date case-load. Although only 50 per cent of the case-load was to have been resettled by the end of June, to date over 80 per cent have been accepted or have departed for resettlement.

5. On voluntary repatriation, 3,345 Vietnamese have to date returned to Viet Nam from camps in the region, the majority from Hong Kong. The active promotion of voluntary repatriation by UNHCR has resulted in an increasing number of asylum-seekers submitting applications for voluntary repatriation. Initially Vietnamese consular missions to interview candidates for return were made only to Hong Kong but in view of the increased number of applicants such missions are planned for Thailand and Indonesia and will be extended also to Malaysia and the Philippines.

6. At the last session of the Third Steering Committee, held at Geneva on 24 and 25 January 1990, participants agreed on all outstanding issues, including the principle of the return of non-refugees in a phased, orderly and safe manner, but were unable to reach consensus on a timetable for the implementation of return of those who do not volunteer. At the request of the Steering Committee, the High Commissioner intervened with the Governments that were unable to join the consensus.

7. Following such discussions, an informal meeting of the Steering Committee was held in Manila on 17 and 18 May 1990 in order to review, at a working level, aspects of the Comprehensive Plan of Action, which required further consolidation. During this meeting the first asylum countries issued a statement indicating that if there was no solution for non-refugees by 1 July 1990, either in terms of return to Viet Nam or the setting up of a regional holding centre for such persons, these Governments reserved the right to take unilateral action as they deemed necessary to safeguard their national interest, including the abandonment of first asylum.

8. Active discussions are currently under way at the highest level with all parties concerned to arrive at a solution that would preserve first asylum in the region. It is hoped that if sufficient progress is achieved in the negotiations a fourth meeting of the Steering Committee can be convened in August to resolve the outstanding issues.
