

STATE OF VIETNAM

STATEMENT of Mr. HO-BAO-THANH, Chief of Province BienHoa, on Sept.21, 1954, to the Press Conference regarding the resettlement of Refugees from North Vietnam.

In reply to the National Government's appeal heeding our conscience in the matter, all the people of the Province of BienHoa, including the soldiers of Franco-Vietnamese Troops (Provincial Council, Communal Council, Chiefs of District, Officials and Private services) everybody is ready, with justice in spirit of friendliness to receive the Refugees from North Vietnam. Those persons who have abandoned their houses, their fields, their fortunes, left their birth-place to seek "freedom" and serve worthily our native country. The Provincial Reception Committee organizes and studies the problem of installing NVN Refugees, and finds suitable jobs to provide facilities for them in order to make more easily a living. In other words, everything is prepared in a complete manner, so that our NVN countrymen will have hopes of renewing their happiness in the future.

A well-known proverb says: "Using the red silk to cover the frame of the mirror, the men who live in the same country must love each other", and I think that the SVN countryfellows at BienHoa Province have applied this proverb in its deepest sense.

The generous attitude of BienHoa population has deeply touched the NVN Refugees, and within a month more than 32,000 persons have voluntarily come to settle in the province as a whole.

The first day, a large number of refugees arrived suddenly. Consequently, some difficulties arose regarding supplies, because, at that time, we had no caterpillars-bulldozers, tractors or well drilling-machines, construction implements, etc...., then all work was done by hand causing loss of time and labor. Tents, camp-beds, water, food, drugs, etc.... are not enough to meet the needs.

Although initially we had many obstacles, we always tried our best to meet the existing situation, and now, we realize that there has been built throughout the province:

- 380 coupled-wooden-houses, asbestos sheet roofing.
- 50 shelters made of wood and straw or thatch.
- 250 coupled-houses made of wood, bamboo & thatch.
- 200 big tents.
- 30,000 small tents.
- 450 camp-beds.
- 10 wells for supplying water.

Besides this, we have not counted numerous implements for housing construction, forest clearing, fishing gear & boats, draft animals which have been purchased and distributed to the refugees from North VN.

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We felt the work carried out was almost completed by the Provincial Administrative Service, but out of our expectation, unwillingly we encounter other difficulties:

First.- The living costs at BienHoa have increased suddenly because the NVN refugees became overcrowded;

Second.- According to Note 1078-BNV/VP dated July 29, 1954, the Minister of Interior proposed the distribution of 1 hectare of land to each NVN refugee-family (belonging to the agricultural class). This note has inadvertently come to the attention of the South VN refugees who have been in the same circumstances as the NVN refugees. They say: "We have suffered for more than 8 years during the war, but why do the NVN refugees have so much priority, while the SVN refugees seem to have been abandoned".

Regarding the high living costs, I realize this difficulty is not only due to the arrival of the NVN refugees, but also our province has received soldiers and their families belonging to 4 Divisions of Franco-Vietnamese troops. Therefore, the population of BienHoa will have been increased by approx. 100,000 persons.

In order to solve this problem immediately, a problem which comes under my jurisdiction, I have given orders to the Police to exercise rigid control and punish severely speculators who sell their goods for prices exceeding the prices fixed by the Government. (My letter N° 494-C/CAB dated Sept. 10th, 1954).

I have often explained to my SVN countrymen that the NVN Refugee Problem is a "National Problem", of great importance and related to the "International Problems". From personal knowledge, I know that up to the present time, we have received 300,000 NVN refugees in SVN. In addition, we can expect to receive 100,000 persons from Haiphong. Thus, we have altogether a total of 400,000 refugees to be received.

The population of Vietnam below the 17th parallel is about 8,000,000. Then, plus 400,000 refugees, we will receive only 5% of the total number. (8,000,000 : 400,000 = 5%).

My South VN compatriots understand as well as I do that now in the whole world, all the foreign nations expect results from the gigantic evacuation program of the Vietnam Nation. If, unfortunately, we are not able to arrange our own affairs between ourselves in a satisfactory manner, you can imagine how the foreigners will criticize us?

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Returning to the problem of high living costs, I have often stated that if we wish to lower the living costs, it is not necessary to decrease the number of consumers but rather we must increase the production.

Thus, in the near future when the NVN Refugees will begin working (plowing, planting fruit-trees and vegetables, etc...), our national product will certainly increase and consequently the high living costs lowered thereby.

Regarding the complaint of the SVN Refugees as to land distribution to the NVN refugees; I must somehow recognize the reasonableness of their argument. Therefore, at the same time as I have provided for the NVN Refugees, I have constructed 2 villages for SVN Refugees at TAMHIEP (Chieftown district) and at HUNGLOC (XuanLoc district).

During two meetings of the Chiefs of Provinces held Sept. 11 and 17, 1954, at the TownHall and at the Presidency (also attended by Representatives of the People), I proposed to the Government to set the land distribution scale for NVN Refugees at one Half Hectar (0Ha50) to each family-unit, and the other half hectar would be reserved for South VN Refugee families.

The General Commissioner for Refugees, the Representative of Government and Mgr. PHAM NGOC CHI approved my proposal and promised to submit it to the President of the Government.

I hope that in the very near future my proposal will be accepted by the Government.

In order to activate immediately a decrease in living costs, I made the following suggestions to the Government Representative:

- 1.- To cancel taxes imposed during the war which now have no valid reason for being continued (Road & River Security Tax, Export Tax on Local Products, 1% Turnover Tax, Surtax of 3% on Armement, Special Tax for Pacification 0.50% on Turnover, Customs, etc...);
- 2.- To authorize free transportation of rice, paddy and other food-stuffs from Saigon and the Western Provinces to BienHoa;
- 3.- To place the NVN Refugees on the same basis with the SVN Refugees in order to avoid a controversy between Northern countrymen who are equally citizens of the country.

(Translated/VDD-Sept. 23, 1954)