



AN APPEAL For Indochinese Boat People

September 1979

Dear Friend:

The plight of the Vietnamese boat people - and of refugees fleeing from Cambodia and Laos - is surely the greatest human crisis of our decade. A statement issued by a coalition of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish leaders expressed the enormity of the tragedy:

"A sense of urgency and deep outrage is developing throughout the United States in reaction to the drownings of innocent men, women and children; boats being pushed to sea; refugees drifting in unfriendly waters looking for safe havens; forcible repatriation and reprisals. Refugee experts estimate that between 50 and 70 percent of these Indochinese will perish within the next few months. About 200,000 boat people have already drowned in the South China Sea. Some 70,000 persons are now arriving in Asian camps every month. At this rate, there will be a half million refugees in the camps by September, and over a million a year from now."

Since April 1975, when the exodus from Indochina started, the International Rescue Committee has been a major humanitarian force in helping the refugees to survive and find asylum in free countries. In Thailand - where 200,000 refugees are concentrated - IRC doctors, nurses and paramedics provide emergency medical care and health services in the crowded camps. An IRC medical team is now in Malaysia, where 60,000 boat people are crammed into camps with virtually no sanitary facilities. All too often the refugees don't know if they will have any food or water for the next day. At least half of the camp refugees are children.

It is not only the boat people surviving the ordeal of escape who are suffering so deeply. There are the Cambodians who have fled from their country's holocaust to Thailand. And there are refugees from Laos -- among them the Hmong hilltribe minority whose livelihood and culture are being obliterated by their ruthless government. A letter I have just received from Dr. Dominica Garcia, who heads the IRC refugee hospital at Nong Khai camp, included the following passage:

"The terrible scourge of the refugees now is malaria, and it is common to find two or three diseases in a single patient, each one fatal in itself. Even the youngest infants are not spared. We have scarcely enough space for admissions in the IRC wards. Their low resistance from malnutrition and exposure during their escapes renders them susceptible

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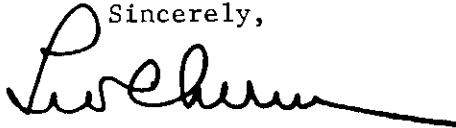
to all kinds of diseases. For days children lie unconscious, their tiny bodies fighting disease. And yet, nearly all of them survive -- only the weakest do not make it. All this suffering grips us with silent anger, and every loss numbs our hearts. But every time we discharge a patient, our hearts take more courage."

A vital role of the IRC is to bring the Indochinese refugees out of the camps into countries of "final asylum." With our government's decision to admit larger numbers of the Indochinese, IRC will now have to double its resettlement operation to assist at least 15,000 of the refugees entering the United States during the coming year. We are therefore expanding our resettlement centers and opening new offices. This is essential if we are to rebuild the shattered lives of the refugee families, help them adjust to American life and become self-supporting. Resettlement problems will persist - and may intensify - even if the Hanoi government decides to "normalize" the refugee flow from Vietnam.

Meanwhile, IRC must continue to provide relief and resettlement services for refugees escaping from political, racial and religious persecution from other countries -- Russians, Cubans, Angolans, Czechs, Chileans, Ethiopians and many more. All need help in finding sanctuary in free countries and the opportunity to lead useful, productive lives.

IRC must rely on your generosity in order to carry out the humanitarian mission it started in 1933, when Hitler seized control of Germany. We are the leading voluntary, nonsectarian refugee agency, and our future depends on the concern and support of the American people. Please help by sending your tax-deductible contribution in the enclosed envelope. Will you try to be as generous as you can? The need is truly urgent.

My thanks and good wishes to you.

Sincerely,

Leo Cherne
Chairman



Vietnamese boat people drifting in the South China Sea plead for help from a passing merchant ship, which provided some food and moved on. Thousands have drowned in their attempt to find sanctuary.