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The Plight of the Hmong Refugees

Unequal Treatment of America's Closest Allies

1. There are now some 70,000 Hmong refugees among the 300,000 total Indochina refugees in Southeast Asia, or 23% of the total. But they receive only 2000 "spaces" out of the 14,000 per month accorded by U.S. Immigration for entry to the United States, or 14%. If the Hmong were treated even on a equal basis with other refugees, they would be accorded about 3200 spaces per month.

2. But the Hmong in fact deserve not only equal treatment, but even preferred treatment. WHY ?

- a. They fought for us. Whereas US troops fought for the South Vietnamese in Vietnam, in northern Laos the process was reversed. We enlisted the Hmong to hold northern Laos and deny it to the North Vietnamese invaders. This the Hmong did for thirteen long years, until our Indochina program collapsed in 1975. The Hmong were left holding the bag, after having per capita casualties greater than those of the Soviet Union in World War II.
- b. They are being exterminated by the Vietnamese and Pathet Lao armies. For the Hmong, the war did not stop in 1975. Cut off from US arms and food, they have been the victims of a well-documented campaign of extermination by several divisions of Vietnamese regulars and Pathet Lao troops, using heavy artillery, Soviet tanks, captured US and Soviet aircraft and poison gas. Tactics include the systematic destruction of Hmong mountain villages, burning of crops and poisoning of water holes. Hmong attempting to flee to Thailand run a gauntlet of forces assigned to their destruction - men, women and children. All this is documented beyond doubt. Among all the Indochina refugees, including ethnic Chinese from Vietnam who leave because of economic pressures, or Cambodian civilians who are caught between contending armies, only the Hmong are systematically hunted down in a deliberate campaign of extermination.
- c. Conditions in the Hmong refugee camps are now the worst of all land refugee groups in Thailand. Overcrowding, disease, malnutrition, enforced idleness, and hopeless delays have caused morale to decline sharply. There have been recent suicides. Many Hmong have been living like this for four years, including many who bear combat wounds suffered while fighting the North Vietnamese communists at our behest. This should be a reproach to the American conscience.

3. Because of the lull in arrivals of "boat people" from Vietnam since the Geneva Conference in June, when Hanoi agreed to "turn off the tap" - at least for the time being - the camp populations of "boat people" have declined sharply. Thus in August '79 some 8792 new boat people arrived from Vietnam, but more than 14,000 were resettled in the US and other countries. In September '79 only 7090 boat people arrived in the refugee camps, while more than 21,000 departed for resettlement. NOT SO WITH THE HMONG. An average of 2500 new refugees arrived each

month, with not more than 2000 departing.

4. Why do the Hmong not receive even equal treatment ?

Perhaps most important, because the hinge which squeaks loudest gets oiled first. The Hmong have not received the enormous worldwide media coverage accorded to the "boat people". TV cameras cannot cover Hmong families being shot down in the forests of Laos, or even while swimming the Mekong, even though their bodies float by the Thai police posts. Still less do TV cameras or reporters cover the thousands who die of starvation and battle wounds in the mountains of Laos.

Secondly, even though the Hmong fought under CIA control and funding, the fiction is maintained that they were not working for the United States since their salaries were "laundered" through official Hmong intermediaries. Thus even those Hmong refugees who have battle scars are classified as having worked "with" the United States - Category 3, not "for" the United States - Category 2. This means that a Laotian chauffeur or typist who worked at a US installation in Laos gets automatic preference over a Hmong combat veteran.

5. How well do the Hmong do when resettled in the US ?

While US resettlement agencies have a policy of avoiding any official "ranking" of refugee groups, privately they will confirm that the Hmong are at the top of the list, because of their innate characteristics. These include a willingness to work at any job available rather than go on relief; honesty and directness which are appreciated by US employers; loyalty, and an enormous appetite for education. Hmong communities thrive in places like Minneapolis, California, Washington DC and the Pacific Northwest. Two Hmong kids in the Tacoma school system have been classified at the "genius" level. They have a reputation for talent and ability in school. They also have a tradition of craftsmanship. Hmong as a group are predominantly honest, brave, hardworking, loyal to the United States and passionately opposed to communist totalitarianism. What else should we require of immigrants ?

ACTION REQUIRED: Take immediate advantage of the current lull in new arrivals of "boat people" to give higher and well-deserved priority to the Hmong, by doubling the "spaces" allocated to them. Right now, the total US entitlement is 14,000 spaces per month. Of these, 8000 still go to the "boat people", with only 6000 for all the land refugees - Hmong, Laotian and Cambodian. Of this 6000, the Hmong now get only 2000. The "boat people" quota should be reduced to perhaps 5000, with 2000 additional spaces going to Hmong and 1000 to Cambodians or other land refugees. As a target, all verified Hmong combat veterans, and their dependents, should be moved out of the Thai camps where they have lingered for up to four years, and at the earliest practicable time. AMERICA SHOULD PAY HER DEBTS.