



HỘI GIA ĐÌNH TÙ NHÂN CHÍNH TRỊ VIỆT NAM

FAMILIES OF VIETNAMESE POLITICAL PRISONERS ASSOCIATION

P.O. BOX 5435, ARLINGTON, VA 22205-0635

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September 8, 1989

The Families of Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association (FVPPA) is a nationwide, non-profit organization. Our organization tries to provide support to its approximately 10,000 members by sharing information, helping them file documents with INS and the State Department (BRP/ODP), obtaining LOI, helping the ex-prisoners arrive in third country camps, and continually expressing our concern to the State Department and various Congressional entities. We maintain computerized listings of our membership as well as political prisoners at home. Our data is quite up-to-date. It can be useful to resettlement agencies in understanding some of the problems that this population will face when they arrive. (We talk with about 10,000 ex-prisoners plus their family members). Therefore, we would create a profile of the situation.

The group, as based on our records, has the following composition:

- | | | |
|---------------------|---|------------|
| - Army | : | 70 percent |
| - Civil Service | : | 20 percent |
| - Religious Leaders | : | 10 percent |

Occupation/Rank:

- Major, Lt. Colonel, Colonels, some Generals and a few Lieutenants or Captains
- Civil Service: Ministers, Congressional, provincial, chiefs/provincial-city council chairmen, directors
- Religious leaders: Catholic, Buddhist, Hoa Hao/Cao Dai clergy

Reason for reeducation: association with the United States, former regime, worship God.

Length in camps: 5 to 14 years. The higher the rank, the longer the stay. According to the warrants issued at that time by the SRV, Major and upper exhelons - reeducate 1 month (it means 12, 13 years); captains and lieutenants - reeducate 1 week (it means 2, 3 years); privates and sergeants - reeducate locally (it means one week or 3 months).

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Present status: These ex-political prisoners are not allowed to work. The 87 and 88 groups are given ration cards right after their release; while the previous ones had to serve one year of confinement, and were given no ration cards after 2 and 3 years, depending on the People's committees at their residence. These people now either stay with their families or relatives, roaming around the cities. Among this group 45-50 percent have family ties in the United States or in third countries.

Family makeup: The average family size is 5. Their children are mostly grown up and have their own families.

Where Will They Go? Approximately 1/3 of the groups' relatives, spouses, and children are in California. The rest of the anchor families are spread out in five (5) other states: Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington State, Virginia, Washington, D.C. We estimate that about half of this group will come in as free cases.

Problems:

Age: The majority of these people are middle-aged or at least in their late 40's to 60's.

Language: Those military men who had been in the Navy, Air Force, and Intelligence, have been in training abroad, usually the United States, at one time or the other. The Infantry's high-ranking officers mostly went through executive management in the United States. However, their training was short-term - ranging from 3 months to a full year. Their language training was customized to the field they would be trained, therefore, they would need some brush-up. We foresee that they may have problems even in refresher courses because of their age, and years in confinement; it requires more time to pick up.

Job-readiness: They may need the whole range of skill-training because their old skills may not be useable in the new land.

Adaptation: As any newcomers, they have to learn to adapt to the work situation. Their age is such that it is not easy to get a permanent-pensioned job. It is very hard for these people to accept reality - a menial job.

- Health:** With 5-14 years in reeducation camps, these men are now old and loaded with diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, rhumatism, and malnutrition. When they were in reeducation they had to produce their own food. Besides, they had to cut lumbers and carry them to certain destinations. The work is hard, the food is not adequate or enough. Some of them lost all their teeth during the confinement.
- Mental Health:** Naturally, those who were kept in camps for years, with limitation of what they can do or receive, will have problems. For years those men were neither allowed to write or receive letters. Not until 1979-1980 were their families allowed to visit them at the lobby of the camps once or twice a year. Their only resting time was in the indoctrination session at night. They saw their friends go one by one because of suicide, diseases, and starvation (they were too weak to work).
- Family Structure:** Now, coming back to freedom, for those who still have families at home, they see that their children cannot complete their education, but must work on odd jobs; some of the families have already been broken up. And for those whose families left the country, resettling abroad, the situation does not seem any better. Their wives and children have adjusted to American ways and the prisoners will find family relationships changed in ways that are hard to accept. It is not easy for a Vietnamese man to accept his wife's authority, and his children's better knowledge than he himself. Some of the wives have taken another man in their loneliness - although he may not share the same quarters. Worse still, he sees that most of his friends, comrades in arm, are now settled with good jobs, and good living standards.



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OBJECTIVES

1. To continue to work towards the release and resettlement of the rest of the re-education camp prisoners.
2. To provide assistance to the Department of State and ODP in updating lists of prisoners and their families.
3. Assist in facilitating the resettlement of the prisoners and their families.
4. Continue to work with other associations and agencies to help the prisoners and their families to adjust to the new life.
5. We would ask, on behalf of our Association, assistance from ORR and MAA with the prisoners when they arrive to the United States by providing:
 - Training
 - Health Care
 - Housing Referrals and Assistance
 - Education
6. We feel that these objectives will be met and thereby produce loyal, dedicated and productive citizens in the United States.

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