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VIETNAM REFUGEE PROGRAMS: Status Report, April 1 - June 30, 1966

I. INTRODUCTION

In the quarter April 1 - June 30, 1966, two significant elements emerged in the complex of the refugee problem in Vietnam. The first was that the population of refugees in temporary shelters was rising. At the end of June 1965, this figure had been reported at 320,000, and a year later this had mounted to 500,732. In most of the year the GVN efforts to re-establish refugees had kept pace with the continuing influx of new refugees. Beginning in March 1966, however, and continuing over the quarter April-June 1966, the number of refugees returning to their villages, or resettling elsewhere, fell below the rate of new refugee arrivals - thus causing a net increase of the refugees living in temporary shelters. The main feature of this trend was a sharp decline during the quarter of refugees returning to their original villages.

The second and related element lay in the evolution of the refugees' desires and intentions. Almost without exception, the refugees on reaching GVN territory voice the desire to go back to their villages as soon as possible. As time passes without their being able to realize this objective, their plans for the future develop in different ways. Many refugees are living only a few kilometers away from - sometimes even in sight of - their villages. This proximity has fixed their resolve to return. But whereas before they wanted to return at the earliest opportunity permitted by security, now many do not want to return until the war has finally ended.

This change of attitude is partly attributable to the intensification of military operations, partly to a fear of VC reprisal action, and partly to a wariness of being at the extreme edge of a secure area near a strike zone. But this obdurate desire to stay where they are until the end of the war poses a problem for the GVN. The temporary camps, where such refugees are now living, are frequently in areas where there is a shortage of farming land and few job opportunities. It is possible to avert starvation through the supply of commodities, but much more difficult to avert a deterioration of morale as the refugees remain idle.

Other groups of refugees initially fled to areas distant from their original villages and crowded near district or provincial capitals. Here there are employment opportunities, particularly for work with military units. Although their housing conditions may be poor, some are setting aside a small amount of earnings for the eventual return to the village - again only at the end of the war. Some of these are in an urban environment, and the attraction of an easier way of life may well mean that many will abandon the idea of return once the war is over.

Still other refugees - but fewer in number - once uprooted from their normal life aspire to begin in new circumstances. These people hope for better land than they could farm before, they want their children to have an education and to learn skills which can equip them for a better life. These refugees can be finally re-established if this new way of life can be found for them.

Weighing the factors mentioned above, the GVN is faced with the prospect of a mounting number of refugees living in temporary shelters and increasing difficulties in meeting their aspirations for re-establishment. In the northern regions, where refugee concentrations are greatest, there is an acute shortage of usable land which can be made available to refugees for permanent resettlement. Frequently this is because an area is not secure; sometimes because the title of the land is unclear, or because it would have to be expropriated from private owners under land reform legislation.

The GVN is experimenting with inter-provincial resettlement when there are tracts of land which are government-owned and which are suitable for agriculture or located near employment opportunities. This gives the basis for projects which, with careful planning, can provide not only new homes and a new life for refugees, but will also be of substantial benefit to the economy of Vietnam. But, for reasons previously mentioned, these opportunities will not be accepted by all refugees. As Dr. Nguyen Phu Que, the GVN Special Commissioner for Refugees, recognized in a statement shortly after assuming office: "There cannot be a wholly integrated plan for a unique situation, but a composite of specific plans for different areas."

Although this need for multiple solutions and programs was more clearly delineated during the quarter, progress was made towards their development. Because of the circumstances of the war, and the internal unrest during the period, one could not claim a record of solid achievement, but many forward steps.

Again, the events of the quarter brought out the question of the meaning of this migration of refugees into GVN-controlled areas. There is little doubt that many are evacuating battle areas, but there are others who find their first opportunity during military operations to flee from VC control. If this exodus of over a million refugees has confronted the GVN with grave problems for their care and re-establishment, it must have serious consequences for the VC. The refugees must represent a severe loss to the VC - a loss of manpower for labor or military service (conscription in VC areas has now reached age 14); a loss in a source of taxation and income as deserted land lies fallow.

There is no absolute proof of a definite policy on the part of the VC with regard to refugees. However, during the quarter there continued to be reports of reprisal actions taken by the VC against refugee groups:

- a. The night of April 29 the VC occupied the Chan Thanh District refugee center in Vinh Binh Province, temporarily forcing all of its occupants to evacuate. During approximately two hours the VC remained at the center, killing one Quy Chanh who was there on a visit to his family, burning nearly half of the palm leaf sidings of the center, and destroying some of the refugees' belongings. (A Quy Chanh is a defector from the VC cause under the Chieu Hoi program.)
- b. The night of May 13, there was a brutal attack against the An Than refugee camp in Quang Tin Province. Eleven refugees were killed, 13 were wounded, and 11 others abducted. The dwellings of 249 families were burned or destroyed.
- c. The new Cua Viet refugee camp on the coast of Quang Tri was mortared during May and three refugees were wounded. These fishing families were evacuated from a coastal area in late March despite VC threats. The May attack is the third which these refugees have endured as retaliation from the VC for their cooperation with the GVN.
- d. Two hand grenades were thrown on May 2 near the house of the Montagnard Hamlet Chief of Tra Ba II resettlement center in Pleiku, causing some damage to the house and slight injury to two refugees. On May 7, rifle fire from outside the camp area resulted in three bullet holes in the roof of one refugee house and two rice wine jars being broken, but no personal injuries.

- e. As a result of a VC harassing attack on the refugee center in Phong Phu District of Phong Dinh Province, one child was killed and several houses were damaged.

II. GVN REFUGEE POLICY

Originally the GVN set as its basic objective the early return of refugees to their villages after a short period of temporary care. For this reason, it established initially only minimum standards for relief assistance. As it became evident that large numbers of refugees were remaining in temporary centers for long periods of time, policy has changed. Now the Government has focused its attention on making adequate provisions for health, sanitation, and education facilities in temporary camps, as well as to develop training or community programs to avoid refugees remaining idle. In addition a greater emphasis is to be given in finding permanent resettlement opportunities for refugees.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF GVN REFUGEE PROGRAMS

The above change in policy coincided with the establishment of a Special Commissariat for Refugees in February 1966, an action which centralized within the Prime Minister's office the responsibility for refugee programs which had previously been divided between the Ministries of Social Welfare and Revolutionary Development (formerly Rural Construction). Following a formal transfer of responsibilities from the latter Ministries during April, the Special Commissioner effectively took over the execution of GVN refugee programs. A period of transition was arranged through July 14 to enable the Commissariat to recruit field staff, and in the quarter social welfare chiefs in the provinces continued to carry out refugee relief work.

With the handicaps of a shortage of trained civil servants in Vietnam, and against a background of political unrest, the Commissariat was slowly organized and hiatus in programs was avoided and, in fact, substantial progress was made. This was to a very considerable degree due to the dynamic approach taken by the new Commissioner to his work. He visited most of the provinces with large refugee concentrations in the central lowlands and the Delta. As soon as troubled conditions had quieted, he traveled to several provinces in Region I. As a result of these inspections, he has shown a genuine concern for the plight of the refugees and a resolve to improve the conditions of refugee camps.

IV. TECHNICAL GUIDELINES TO THE GVN

USAID provides technical assistance to the Commissariat in developing and implementing programs to meet the needs of the refugees. As a consequence of this cooperative effort, progress during the quarter can be reported in the following areas:

a. Emergency Relief

Both the GVN and USAID are better equipped to provide immediate assistance in food and shelter to persons on their arrival in GVN controlled areas. Close coordination between military and civilian authorities is required to maintain the effectiveness of such assistance. During the quarter some 111,000 refugees arrived and remained in GVN territory within 27 different provinces. In the majority of cases satisfactory emergency assistance was provided to these refugees.

b. The Intermediate Stage of Temporary Care

The Prime Minister accepted the Commissioner's recommendation to increase the daily rate of refugee relief payments from 7 piasters per person to 10 piasters with effect from August 1, 1966. During the quarter the GVN reported the opening of 45 new refugee centers. For new construction and for existing centers the Commissariat set the following standards: One dispensary; two wells, and twenty latrines for every one-hundred families; one classroom for every one-hundred children.

A number of temporary camps are sub-standard and overcrowded. An example is the so-called "Cathedral Camp" at Qui Nhon, where conditions present a constant danger of disaster in the event of fire, epidemic or flood. SCR provided special funds for clearance of graves from an alternative site in the city of Qui Nhon, where there is an acute land shortage. A five-room school and the first sixteen-family housing units of cement block construction have been completed at this site. As families are moved into their new houses, their former dwellings at the "Cathedral Camp" are being torn down.

c. Education

Against an originally authorized program for 269 temporary refugee classrooms in 1966, a total of 104 had been completed by June 30, 1966, and 60 others were under construction. Teachers had been assigned or were in training for classrooms which were completed or were under construction. Many refugee children are attending normal hamlet schools and temporary classrooms are built only when a refugee center is remote from normal schools.

d. Health

There is no evidence that the health of the refugees is below the average of the general population. Many camps now receive regular visits by GVN or ARVN, U.S. Army/Marines, or third country medical teams. Sanitary conditions can only be improved in refugee camps by extensive education and control - identical to the problem with the general population. Lack of trained personnel is the major impediment to early improvement of health and sanitary conditions.

Overall figures are not yet available concerning improvements in camp facilities as a result of the standards set by SCR. An example, however, is Quang Ngai Province, where 16 dispensaries have been built and 9 others have been programmed; also, 14 wells have been completed and 13 others are under construction.

e. Cottage Industries

Cottage industries can provide not only a meaning of livelihood to refugees while they are living in temporary shelters, but also can give the opportunity to bring out native skills and community spirit. USAID has signed a contract with MacLean Associates to furnish technical guidance for developing cottage industries. Present plans call for fast color dyeing of Montagnard woven cloth in Darlac Province; for hammock making in Khanh Hoa, for ceramics in Bien Hoa; for string-mop making in Binh Duong; for the making of conical hats, bamboo fans, baskets, screens and trays in Quang Nam; for bamboo work and sandalwood carvings in Quang Tin; and sea-grass weaving in Quang Ngai. Most of the products are for local sale, but some handicraft items are to be distributed through U.S. Army Post Exchange. Cooperatives will be formed among the refugees. The first - a sea-grass weaving cooperative - got under way in June 1966, when refugees at Ninh Phat and Thu Duc in Gia Dinh Province elected a management committee and two supervisors.

f. Vocational Training

Small training courses for refugees have been locally initiated during the period in several provinces. For example, in Hue some 100 students attended courses in carpentry, metal work and sewing, which were for approximately four months and were supported by USAID, CARE and CRS. Another example, in June, Cai Cay refugee center in Khanh Hoa Province, there were 56 Montagnard refugees who received instruction in improved farming methods, the use of fertilizers and insecticides.

With help from the U.S. Navy, 187 students began courses in June at the Danang Trade School in automobile mechanics, heavy equipment operation and driving, wood work, basic electricity, sewing and tailoring,

typing and filing, and welding and sheetmetal work. These classes are the forerunners of an overall program of short-term vocational courses now scheduled to begin during August 1966, at 6 technical schools operated by the Ministry of Education in Danang, Qui Nhon, Ban Me Thuot, Phu Tho, Saigon, Vinh Long and Quang Ngai. Four cycles of courses are planned under this program which should benefit some 3,000 students.

g. Registration

The Special Commissariat has given considerable impetus to the initiation of a census of the refugee population. Previously, there has been no basic data concerning the refugees which could be used for program planning. However, registration interviews of 9,000 families (approximately 45,000 persons) have been carried out in 6 provinces. Registration is continuing in 4 of these provinces and beginning in 3 other provinces. Data acquired from the interviews is being IBM processed by the GVN National Institute of Statistics.

h. Resettlement

The overall rate of resettlement slowed somewhat during the quarter. In some provinces this was due to delay in processing of resettlement grant payments, but in many provinces it was due to a lack of available land. In the latter instances, the Special Commissioner was prepared to authorize province chiefs to investigate the possibility of renting plots of land nearby camps which could be cultivated by refugees. Such arrangements would not be a basis for permanent resettlement. However, there would be a better utilization of resettlement funds than when payments in cash are made directly to the refugees only to become a form of extended relief because no land can be given.

An example of the exploitation of rented land is at Cao Dai refugee camp in Quang Ngai Province where 19 hectares have been leased from private owners. With irrigation from self-dug wells, crops of rice, watercress, beans, peanuts, and various vegetables are raised. A project for the raising of 200 pigs has just been started, while six fish ponds have been constructed and filled with water drained from the rice land. In fact, so much progress has been made as a result of the initiative of the refugees in this camp, that a seminar of leaders from other camps was arranged recently by USAID and the provincial agricultural services.

Where land availability is not a problem, rapid results can be achieved for permanent resettlement. An example is the De Xa Mai center located approximately 10 kilometers south of the Kontum provincial capital. Construction at this resettlement area began in March

1966 and by the end of June, each of the 87 Montagnard refugee families had their own garden and livestock. A new two-classroom school, a dispensary and recreational hall have been built. Long houses have been constructed of aluminum roofing with bamboo sidings. Apart from gardening, the refugees are engaged in making charcoal, cutting wood, or making cross-bows and baskets for sale in Kontum.

The first inter-provincial resettlement movement under the auspices of the Special Commissioner was completed May 17, 1966, when 852 refugees disembarked from the BDL "USS Page" at Cam Ranh Bay. The refugees came from Phu Yen Province and arrived with household effects, pigs and chickens, plus a new baby born on the vessel just prior to its departure. The 150 families were accommodated temporarily in communal housing, and 40 permanent houses are now under construction on plots of 600 square meters each with sufficient space for gardens. The refugees are finding work as truck drivers, masons, carpenters and laborers in the Cam Ranh Bay area.

As the quarter ended two other inter-provincial resettlement projects were nearing the stage of implementation. One at Van Sohn, Ninh Thuan Province, for 250 refugee families from the insecure Bong Son area of Binh Dinh Province; the other at Dong Lac in Khanh Hoa Province for 250 Nung refugee families. The latter project is co-sponsored by the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor (CVT) and the American trade unions, the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (IUE), whose representatives presented a check for \$15,000, to the president of the CVT at ceremonies in Saigon on May 19, 1966.

V. PERSONNEL

The position of USAID personnel assigned to refugee work in Vietnam showed little change. There had been on March 31, 1966, a total of 30 officers - 11 in Saigon Headquarters and 19 in the field. As of June 30, 1966, there was a total of 32 officers with 10 in Saigon and 22 in the field.

However, AID Washington is processing 16 new officers and a number are expected to arrive in the coming months. In the coming quarter, the first of the new arrivals will be replacing a number of officers on short-term contracts who are due to return to the United States.

VI. LOGISTICS

During the second quarter of CY 1966, delivery orders for movement of USAID Title II and counter-insurgency commodities totaled 10,893 metric

The Special Commissariat for Refugees received and began the distribution of commodities contributed by the Government of Japan, which included 12,000 blankets, 7,000 family medical kits, and 747,000 yards of cotton cloth.

VIII. CONCLUSION

As the second quarter of CY 1966 ended, it was evident that progress had been made in handling the refugee problem in Vietnam. The GVN and USAID were better equipped and had gained considerable experience in coping with the emergency aspects of the problem. In the provinces, considerable time and energy of GVN and USAID officials were devoted to wrestling with logistical obstacles to insure that adequate commodity distribution was made to meet the immediate needs of refugees.

However, there was a growing awareness that greater efforts would have to be made in the future to provide more than food and clothing to the refugees. This awareness was shown by the GVN in broadening its original policy for the early return of all refugees to their villages and in establishing the Special Commissariat for Refugees with a broadened mandate. In its technical advice to the GVN, USAID had attempted to show the many facets of the refugee problem and the various projects which could be developed to meet these varying aspects.

The task ahead is now to consolidate and concentrate on those programs which can give the maximum benefit to the greatest number of refugees, without neglecting any of the varied solutions needed for differing local situations. As the population in temporary refugee centers continues to mount, more attention and effort must be given to finding opportunities for the re-establishment of refugees. If these opportunities are not acceptable to the refugees because of a fixed desire to return to their original village, other means must be found to combat the pervasive lethargy of temporary camps and to equip the refugees for a new and better life once the war has ended.

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tons, somewhat lower than the comparable figure for the first quarter. At the same time, a total of 2,356 metric tons of voluntary agency commodities were shipped directly from Saigon to the provinces for distribution to refugees, as compared to 1,290 in the previous quarter. One-thousand five hundred and seven (1,507) metric tons of voluntary agency commodities were shipped by air in the current quarter.

The problems involved in shipment of refugee commodities were little different from those relating to the overall USAID logistical situation in Vietnam. There was some improvement in the congestion of port and warehousing facilities in Saigon. However, the programming and identification of actual shipments from Saigon were still problem areas.

In the provinces many deliveries of commodities could be readily made. There continued, however, to be a need for armed convoys of air lifts to reach other isolated areas.

VII. VOLUNTARY AGENCIES AND THIRD COUNTRY ASSISTANCE

By the end of June 1966, there were 16 American or international voluntary agencies operating in Vietnam with programs directed towards refugee assistance. Plans had been made for the arrival before the end of the year of the following multi-purpose teams for work at refugee camp level and normally consisting of 6 - 8 members: Two Asian Christian Councils, one American Red Cross, seven or eight Vietnam Christian Services, and one Knights of Malta team (consisting of 25 German youths.) The British Save the Children Fund and American Friends Service Committee, are developing child care centers in Qui Nhon and Quang Ngai respectively. The first of a contingent of 40 International Volunteer Services (IVS) staff arrived in the quarter to take up work with refugees as advisors in agriculture, education, and community development. In addition, more than 100 Vietnamese students began their work in refugee camps under a summer program organized with IVS.

The New Zealand Government confirmed its decision to send two mobile health teams and five vocational training instructors for refugee work in the Qui Nhon area. Eight-hundred and seventy (870) tons of rice contributed by the Federal Republic of Germany was moved by air, road, and junk for distribution to refugee camps in the five provinces of Region I. Formal ceremonies took place on June 14 - 15 in Quang Nam, Quang Tin and Quang Ngai, attended by the German Ambassador, the GVN I Corps Commander, and the Special Commissariat for Refugees. Part of this rice, which had been held in reserve in Danang, was subsequently distributed to meet emergency conditions when there was a sudden influx of some 18,000 refugees into the Dai Loc District as a result of U. S. Marine operations in Quang Nam Province.