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24 March 1975

President Gerald Ford
The White House
Washington, D. C.
20500

Dear Mr. President,

We wish to express our deep concern at the situation of the refugees who have been forced to flee from portions of the Central Highlands and the northern provinces of South Vietnam during the chain of military events which commenced two weeks ago.

It is our feeling that if widespread loss of life due to mal-nutrition, illness, exposure, and possibly civil disruption is to be avoided, there must be prompt and substantial assistance given to these people. In recent years the South Vietnamese Ministry of Social Welfare and Ministry of Relocation and Resettlement have been able to cope with unforeseen refugee problems largely due to United States government assistance in the form of material and financial aid and logistic support. In the current situation resources from this quarter are much diminished, while on the other hand the dimensions of the problem are reportedly the greatest in the history of the Vietnamese war. One observer has termed this 'one of the greatest mass movements in modern history', and we strongly fear that the widespread upheaval and dislocation will result in much additional suffering if the refugee masses are not given aid from international sources to supplement the efforts of the South Vietnamese government.

We urge that the problem in all its ramifications ---

- physical health and welfare of the refugee masses, in terms of immediate survival;
- provision of agricultural land and other occupational resources where feasible;
- political protection;
- provision of overseas resettlement areas or asylums for those who would be subjected to punishment for political reasons in the event of a change of governments in South Vietnam;

---- be submitted to the United Nations and other international agencies such as the League of Red Cross Societies for urgent study and action.

We wish to bring to your particular attention the case of the ethnic minority groups who have joined the general evacuation of the Highlands. The tribal groups have traditionally been regarded as 'second-class citizens' by the South Vietnamese government, and in past situations their treatment as refugees has been conducted accordingly in terms of the generosity and promptness of all forms of aid including food, land for resettlement, building materials and cash grants. We have a special concern for this group, an underprivileged and relatively primitive agrarian people who have been victimized by both sides in the course of the Vietnam war. If forced to resettle in an unfamiliar lowland climate they would be highly susceptible to disease and discomfort along with the other ills of refugee existence, and might possibly face virtual extinction if special protection from some source outside the Vietnamese government is not introduced.

We therefore urge that in addition to immediate assistance to the general mass of South Vietnamese refugees a special outreach be made to the tribal people, in view of their exceptional vulnerability.

It is our belief that the United States government has the capability to prevent much additional suffering in South Vietnam at this point by intervention with, and support of, the appropriate international relief agencies; and we request you to take the necessary measures with all promptness.

Yours sincerely,

William Rose

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1967-1972

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cc.: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva