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U.S. Aid to Vietnamese Refugees

For almost two years Edward Block was a U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) official in South Vietnam. His particular specialty was refugees. After having personally observed conditions at hundreds of refugee sites in all four military regions of the country, Block came to the conclusion that "the AID-funded relief and rehabilitation program in South Vietnam is a disaster for the refugees involved, a financial bonanza for the officials of the Saigon government, and an insult to both the American people who are being deceived and to the many conscientious American field officers whose reports on these deceptions are routinely suppressed by their supervisors...."

Not surprisingly, given these opinions, Block resigned his job in December 1973, and is now studying for a Ph.D. in political science at Northern Illinois University. On July 2, 1974 he testified before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives, and later before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Members of both the House and Senate were enormously impressed by the statement. After all, whereas the January 1973 Paris Agreement had committed the U.S. to peace, reconciliation and reconstruction, here was a government official (recently departed) telling them that, in fact, on the ground in Vietnam, U.S. policy was a continuing combination of bloody confrontation, crass manipulation of human needs, and subsidization of a corrupt leadership elite in Saigon. And Block had the written documentation to back up his charges.

Minor revisions in his testimony were made by Block for publication here.

Regular readers of the *Indochina Chronicle* will hardly be surprised by Edward Block's general message. The pattern of ignoring and evading the Paris Agreement began to emerge almost before the ink was dry. Nevertheless, Block has a wealth of first-hand, officially-derived information which, if widely known, should serve to lay to rest nineteen months of Nixon and Ford administration talk about "humanitarian assistance" and "postwar reconstruction in Indochina." Readers should particularly bring Block's testimony to the attention of those liberal friends who strongly opposed direct U.S. military involvement, yet who now feel, perhaps out of a sense of profound guilt or misplaced idealism, that somehow AID can be used to "heal the wounds of war." Whatever the case in other countries, AID in South Vietnam has always been an eager tool of military and pacification strategy. Block's testimony demonstrates that nothing has changed since the Paris Agreement -- and that nothing will change as long as the policies of six presidents remain in effect.

By Edward Block

In South Vietnam the "ceaseless fire" continues unabated, obviously fueled by the American and Saigon governments' strong resistance to any of the political compromises agreed to in the Paris Peace Accords signed on January 27, 1973. This failure to reach an accommodation has resulted over the last year and a half in an extremely high toll in human misery. Statistics on military casualties, civilian war casualties, and refugees have reached levels that resemble some of the worst periods of United States involvement in the Indochina War. In 1973 alone, close to 160,000 Vietnamese were reported killed or injured due to the continued fighting, including an estimated 85,000 civilians.* Also in 1973, well over a million people were forced to flee their homes as refugees. Having worked in the Refugee Relief and

Rehabilitation Program with the Agency for International Development from March 1972 until December 1973, I was a very disturbed witness to the events which took place in South Vietnam during the year after the Nixon administration achieved its so-called "peace with honor."

As a result of my experiences in Vietnam, I have formed some rather strong opinions about the

*This is based on Saigon government statistics, which have no listing for "enemy wounded." Saigon also tends to understate its own military casualties and really has no idea of total civilian losses, simply limiting its count to those who manage to reach Saigon hospitals.

impact of AID-sponsored programs on the lives of millions of helpless refugees, primarily women and children, who are caught in the middle of a war that seems to have no end. It is my judgment that the AID-funded relief and rehabilitation program in South Vietnam is a disaster for the refugees involved, a financial bonanza for officials of the Saigon government, and an insult both to the American people who are being deceived and to the many conscientious American field officers whose reports on these deceptions are routinely suppressed by their supervisors and higher-level officials in their region and in Saigon. The so-called "humanitarian aid" program in South Vietnam is as much a scandal as Watergate, and in some ways more serious, since it is a matter of life and death for the refugees who are forced to bear the consequences. I feel I am speaking on behalf of these refugees, who have no political voice in their own country, in the hope that something can be done to put AID out of the "humanitarian assistance" business.

What is of primary concern to me are the "Refugee Relief" and "City to Farm" programs currently being proposed by AID/Vietnam for fiscal year 1975. The cost of these two programs totals \$116.5 million, or about 87 percent of the entire "humanitarian assistance" effort in Vietnam. The cost of these programs in terms of the human suffering, the loss of lives and limbs, and the unnecessary waste in resources will never be measured -- if the Congress allows AID and the Saigon government to pull off this massive hoax.

THE REAL OBJECTIVES OF 'HUMANITARIAN AID'

We should know by now that AID is not requesting public monies primarily for humanitarian purposes, which come in, at best, a poor fifth on their scale of priorities. In fact, what AID is proposing to do this year is to continue a refugee program in Vietnam which has failed, by all standards of evaluation, to satisfy even the most basic humanitarian needs. The real objectives of the U.S. Mission, for continuing to supply AID funds to the refugee program in Vietnam, are strongly political and military in character:

- 1) to support and maintain in power the Thieu regime;
- 2) to subsidize the unstable Saigon economy, noted for its chronic incapacity to internally generate resources for any sustained growth;
- 3) to encourage the Thieu regime to hold hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of refugees as dependents of the government rather than allowing them to return freely and peacefully to their original villages which may be in or near areas

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controlled by the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG); and

- 4) to help the Saigon government to occupy additional territory presently contested or claimed by the PRG.

The first two objectives, I believe, should be obvious both from the past record in Vietnam and from the AID FY 1975 submission to Congress which states, "Increased economic assistance is essential to maintain this stability and to provide the humanitarian aid which is needed after years of war. If assistance is not increased substantially from FY 1974 dollar levels, the consequences could be a collapse of the economies of Indochina." The following article, entitled "U.S. Assistance: A Dangerous Drug" and printed in the

A REPORT FROM QUANG NGAI PROVINCE

"Police stations have been established within refugee camps themselves (some of them within the last four months) with at least one of their purposes being that of keeping closer surveillance on the activities of the camp residents and to prevent any movement of the refugees back to their homes in PRG areas. In one camp in Nghia Hanh district, a farmer, his wife and one child clandestinely did manage to get by police and military checkpoints and return to their native farm in Nghia Phu village which is under PRG control. The farmer's mother, an old blind woman, stayed behind in the refugee camp. For several days the camp police interrogated the woman about where her son had gone. Some camp residents indicated that had the woman not been blind and old, she might have been imprisoned in retaliation for her son's leaving. Whether or not this would have been the case, the police action was a clear warning to others not to follow the farmer's example in returning home.

"In Phu Binh refugee camp, also in Nghia Hanh district, a woman returned from her village of Nghia Thanh, under PRG control, to visit her elderly, ailing mother who lived in the camp. The woman was picked up by the camp police and imprisoned -- later released--under the charge of having communication with the Communists."

--from a May 29, 1974 report by Earl and Pat Martin, Mennonite Central Committee workers.

November 4, 1973 issue of Trang Den, describes the real nature of this "stability:"

Twenty years have gone by since 1954. During all that time, billions of U.S. dollars have been poured into this land in the form of assistance. In what way have these huge sums of money helped the Vietnamese people? By modernizing the agriculture? By developing the industry? By raising the standard of living of the population?

Some Americans often take on elders' manners, boasting that U.S. assistance has helped this country in many ways, especially in the economic field. I want to tell them flatly to their faces that either they are pitifully mistaken or they are deliberately lying....

.... In plain words, I resent and blame the American assistance for having pushed the economy of this country into a state of inconsistency....

I think it is necessary to point out that U.S. assistance is only a kind of narcotic, no more and no less. The economy of this country resembles the body of a drug addict, appearing "healthy" when it receives enough of the drug, but weakening immediately as the amount of drug given is reduced and facing inestimable consequences if the drug injections are suddenly stopped altogether.

The third objective is evidenced by the fact that the Saigon government continued to keep more than a half million refugees in camps long after the cease-fire agreement had been signed (report-

Official Documents Tell The Story

In the United States, refugee assistance is sold to Congress and the public as gracious, non-political, humanitarian aid to the underprivileged. In fact, AID and the Saigon government treat refugees as just more pawns in the ongoing political-military struggling. Following are some excerpts from official AID documents that establish this fact without question:

1. Status report on Thanh Minh Resettlement Village, Quang Nam, by U.S. Provincial Adviser P. Almodiel, November 10, 1973:

Recruitment and training of 100 children with ages from 7 to 14 years old to perform intelligence or detection work among the people within the village and surrounding areas. The motive is to enable the village administration to classify the inhabitants into categories as: A-Unquestionably pro-GVN; B-Inclined to be more pro-GVN; and C-Questionable or doubtful in affiliation. Also, these children may be utilized to do observation jobs for possible infiltrators on areas outside the resettlement site while pretending to be gathering firewood, tending cattle, hunting birds, etc.

2. Partial minutes of a top-level AID-Saigon government meeting, November 13, 1973, on transferring montagnard lands to ethnic Vietnamese control for resettlement purposes:

DR. PHAN QUANG DAN [Minister of State in charge of Land Development and Hamlet Building]. There are over 40,000 Binh Long people and over 160,000 Quang Tri people to be resettled [in Long Khanh and Binh Tuy provinces].

MR. NHON [Deputy LDHB Director]. Request Ministry of Ethnic Minorities Development [MEMD] to have the concession of the said Main Living Areas for resettlement of Vietnamese war victims. DIRECTOR OF CABINET, MEMD.montagnards don't want to let Vietnamese resettle with them.

DR. DAN. Highway No. 1 needs the security.

LONG KHANH PROVINCE CHIEF. Railway is always destroyed by VC. Request to resettle war victims at yellow area (Gia Rai) along Interprovince Road No. 2 because of security. . . . Thai Thien should reserve for war veterans because of the security. People cannot self-defend.

BINH TUY PROVINCE CHIEF. Another site is proposed--Hiep Nghia--but request to reinforce two divisions for military operations.

3. April 3, 1973 letter from U.S. Consul-General Robert L. Walkinshaw to Lt. Gen. Nguyen Van Minh, commander of III Corps and Military Region III:

As you are well aware, South Viet-Nam has placed priority during this critical period on the resettlement of displaced War Victims from other regions to be resettled in Military Region III.... The people will move into areas that were previously considered marginal, thus secure the area, improve movement and security along major routes of communication, develop the agriculture and economic viability to the country as a whole.... Please call on me for any assistance that I may render in this area.

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edly, there are people still unnecessarily stagnating in camps). The refugees remained in camps because the Thieu regime would not give them the opportunity to go back to their original farms, and there was (and still is) insufficient land available to resettle them in areas controlled by Saigon. As one Saigon official said privately to me: "It would be politically impossible for us to allow these people to go back to the VC. After all, we have told everyone that they are refugees because they ran away from the Communists. We would look very foolish if we allowed them to run away from us."

The fourth objective is discussed in detail below. But it should be mentioned here that gaining a strategic military advantage over the insurgents has always been a primary goal in the Saigon government's establishment of resettlement sites. Going back to the days of Land Development Centers, Agrovilles, and Strategic Hamlets, a major aim was to deny to the enemy their control over territory. During the middle and late sixties, in order to establish "free-fire zones," huge numbers of civilians were forcibly relocated and held in resettlement/concentration camps, where many still linger today. During the latest resettlement operations, entitled "Land Development and Hamlet Building," refugees have commonly been placed in "marginal" or contested areas in order to establish "security;" that is, to provide a Saigon military presence in an area where there had previously been none. All of these programs have proven disastrous for the refugees involved--resulting in the death or injury of thousands of helpless civilians. Within the Saigon political establishment, military considerations have always taken precedence over any humanitarian purposes.

THE 'REFUGEE RELIEF' PROGRAM

A major component of the proposed "refugee relief" program is continued support to the Thieu regime for return-to-village and resettlement of refugees through the end of 1975. According to last year's program, only refugees in-camp were scheduled to be RTV'd or resettled, the completion of which would have normally signified a termination of the AID refugee effort in Vietnam.

However, for the reasons I have just outlined, AID is now requesting new funds to continue support through 1975 for the resettlement of 400,000 people and the return-to-village of 100,000 people. The AID rationale, given in its submission to Congress, is that such funds will provide these refugees an opportunity to "earn a living in new resettlement sites" and consequently "achieve self-sufficiency." In reality, this argument is a sham because only a mere handful, if

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any, of the resettlement projects carried out by the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) from 1968 to 1972 and the Office of Land Development and Hamlet Building from 1972 to the present can be considered by any stretch of the imagination to be self-sufficient. As my testimony will show, refugees resettled between 1968 and 1972 are now living in conditions below even a subsistence level, while the Saigon government and wealthy Vietnamese landlords are proceeding to take over their original farms. Furthermore, refugees resettled since 1972 are suffering the same hardships as, if not worse than, those who came before them.

A 1973 AID survey of 198,000 montagnards living in 118 resettlement sites established between 1968 and 1971 found that 64 percent of those people did not cultivate a sufficient quantity of land to provide them with even a six-month supply of food. Most of those surveyed either worked for wages for other people or depended on forest products in order to survive. It was also found that most of these resettled refugees had been given no land of their own and were usually living and working on someone else's land. At the same time, however, they have land titled to them at their former locations, which they have been unable to use because the Saigon leadership will not allow them to return.

Understood in the context of the present request for funds, this is a revealing indictment of the refugee resettlement program in Vietnam. People who have been living in resettlements for as long as six years or more are totally non-self-sufficient. These montagnards formerly cultivated their own land until forced out of their original homes and villages by Saigon military forces. Now, they must work for Vietnamese landlords, serve as day-laborers, or dig for roots and wild plants. In the meantime, there are reports that Vietnamese farmers have been allowed to go into the very areas from which the montagnards were forced to leave. To make matters even worse, the resettlement sites chosen for these montagnard refugees fall well below minimal standards for physical facilities, required community services, land availability, and opportunities for employment. In short, they are a disgrace.

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Additionally, hundreds of thousands of refugees from the 1972 April Offensive are currently being poorly resettled under the same conditions that exist for the 1968-71 refugees. No consideration is given to planting and harvesting seasons when the people are moved; little or no assistance is provided for land clearing; refugees are often placed in resettlements where no land is available; little or no farm land is ever distributed where it is available; and in the relatively few sites where farm land has been distributed, it is totally insufficient to support the refugees.

In many cases, food allowances are arbitrarily cut off, causing widespread hunger and malnutrition. The Saigon government has set a target of six months for resettlement sites to achieve self-sufficiency, after which food and other support can be withdrawn. It is a fact that this target has never been reached; nor is there any indication that it will ever be reached in the future. From all reports, people living in resettlement sites for a year, two years or longer are still in dire need of government food subsidies. How can we possibly believe that 400,000 refugees will achieve self-sufficiency in resettlements next year, when AID and Saigon obviously cannot provide the means for self-sufficiency to the more than two million refugees whom they claim have already been resettled over the last six years?

In its current submission to Congress, AID reports the return-to-village of 355,000 refugees and the resettlement of another 214,000 in 1973. Such figures suggest that the Saigon government has fully rehabilitated these large numbers of refugees. In fact, AID is using a standard administrative ploy to indicate "success" and to deceive Congress and the American public. Most of the refugees reported by AID as having been "resettled" were not at all resettled, but rather may have been paid specific amounts of money or given commodities to assist in relocating. From visits I made to Quang Ngai province last year, for example, I found no indication that means for the establishment of self-reliant and viable communities were even being considered for refugee resettlement sites. Furthermore, I observed that no more than 30 to 40 percent of the reported number of people RTV'd or resettled were actually living at the sites. The true number of people who move to resettlements is unknown, because the Saigon figures relied upon by AID are usually inflated beyond any reasonable degree of reality. And the true "benefits" provided to refugees in these resettlements, in terms of essential requirements such as agricultural assistance, community facilities, etc., are minimal -- in many cases non-existent.

To cite a few more examples, in Binh Dinh province, where over 25,000 refugees had been re-

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ported resettled last year, absolutely no land was available for farming in six of the first seven sites selected. In Pleiku province, more than 5,000 refugees were reported resettled last year on land that was already privately owned. In Lam Dong province, more than 11,000 refugees were resettled in June of last year; as of December, the Saigon government had not even begun to clear land. In Binh Tuy province last year, more than 15,000 refugees were reported resettled; at year's end, only about 120 hectares or three percent of the required amount had been cleared and none distributed. In Long Khanh province, more than 17,000 refugees were resettled beginning in April 1972; yet, a year and a half later, less than 50 percent of the farm land had been cleared and only about ten percent of the families had received any land other than a few meters to build their homes. To make matters worse, the relatively few people in Long Khanh who did receive land have found much of it to be unsuitable for cultivation.

There is good reason to believe that those refugees who finally receive land from the Thieu regime will never be allowed title to that land. In fact, that government has never issued ownership papers in land resettlements. Although hundreds of thousands of refugees had been promised ownership to as much as three hectares of farm land, at the end of 1973 not one family had received official title from the government. Influential officials should have little difficulty in reclaiming such lands from the refugees, once American resettlement funds have been depleted. (Saigon officials are already actively engaged in reclaiming land set aside for montagnard use under the AID-sponsored Land Reform Program, which suffered its demise late last year.)

THE 'CITY TO FARM' PROGRAM

There is little substantive difference between the refugee resettlement program and the newly-proposed "City to Farm" Program, which offers to relocate 300,000 urban dwellers back to the countryside. Such a program merely adds a major new task to the already overburdened and understaffed Saigon agencies responsible for relocations. In its submission to Congress, AID states that, "Given the experience and administrative capability of the Office of Land Development and Hamlet Building, we estimate that around 300,000 urban dwellers can be resettled in 1975." For Congress to finance a program such as this, at a time when

we are supposed to be normalizing our relationship with the Thieu regime, is to ignore all our previous mistakes in South Vietnam. Furthermore, to state that the Office of Land Development and Hamlet Building is capable of managing the resettlement of 300,000 urban dwellers at the same time that it is resettling or returning-to-village 500,000 refugees, all in the period of one year, is absolutely preposterous.

The current administration of the refugee resettlements by the Office of Land Development and Hamlet Building is so mismanaged and inefficient that the refugees resettled under its authority have little hope of receiving the required or promised amounts of land and assistance to give them a chance at self-sufficiency (just as their brethren received too little land and assistance from the MSI between 1968 and 1972). As evidenced by numerous reports AID officials continue to file from the field, no systematic planning is done by the LDHB Office, leading to serious deficiencies in the program. The resettlements are run on an ad hoc day-by-day basis, without any effective planning mechanism; on too many occasions, without any plans at all. In most cases, LDHB officials have no advance data on conditions at proposed resettlement sites, such as land area

available, water, soil quality, crop suitability, etc., in order to properly evaluate the essential requirements for long-term economically viable resettlements. The results of such an operation are what we would expect: the selection of sites is haphazard, site preparation is minimal (in many instances, merely the setting up of tents), and after the refugees arrive, land clearance and distribution do not take place for months and years, if ever.

Because of the extremely large numbers of refugees involved, officials in the LDHB Office have found themselves overwhelmed by the requirements for developing resettlements. There are just not a sufficient quantity and quality of personnel available to properly manage the necessary administrative tasks. Although the LDHB resettlement program is operating in 23 provinces in South Vietnam, at last count, field representatives from that office had been assigned to only four of these provinces. Furthermore, detailed guidelines in resettlement planning and operations had not been prepared. Finally, officials both in the field and in Saigon are very reluctant to make any decisions without prior consultation with the Minister of State for LDHB. In fact, most officials (including the Minister of State) lacked

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the proper information and technical data which are needed to make such decisions. All of this has resulted in inadequate planning, sluggish operations, financial mismanagement, lack of coordination, poor logistics services, and numerous other administrative problems.

The resettlement situation at the Suoi Nghe site in Phuoc Tuy province provides a good illustration of poor LDHB management. This project was originally set up in December 1971 as a model resettlement in Vietnam. Thus, it has received a proportionately greater share of money and attention than any similar project. Since this is one of the few resettlements where there are at least some outward signs of prosperity, it is included on the itinerary of many visiting dignitaries. But appearances can be highly deceptive without the proper background information. Most dignitaries who tour this site, therefore, are not made aware of the serious problems which exist at Suoi Nghe related to the ever-present land situation--particularly its quantity, distribution, and clearing.

Saigon had promised the more than 10,000 settlers at Suoi Nghe three hectares of farm land per family, an amount which many experts feel is barely sufficient to earn a subsistence on dry upland soil. As it turns out, however, even this minimal amount will not be provided. There is only enough land available at Suoi Nghe to distribute, at most, 1.4 hectares per family. This is 55 percent less than the original government commitment, and totally inadequate for economic self-sufficiency. Despite the fact that, as of November 1973, many of the settlers had been living at the site for almost two years, 60 percent had not received their one-half hectare farm plots, which was only the initial allotment to be distributed. Additionally, after more than two years of developing this site, 18 percent of the initial one-half-hectare farm plots still had not even been cleared. Needless to say, the farm income for most of the settlers at this site is minimal, and large numbers of them continue to be dependent on government subsidies for extended periods of time. Once these subsidies are reduced or cut off, the settlers find it difficult, if not impossible, to earn a living from their farms. Thus, it was reported that almost half of the original refugee families abandoned the project to resettle elsewhere on their own. Surely, this is not an encouraging precedent for future attempts to resettle or RTV an additional 800,000 people who would have far fewer benefits and advantages than refugees at the "model" Suoi Nghe site.

Another area of the LDHB Program which should be discussed is its system of financial accountability. Under the present system, controls over the expenditure of AID-provided funds are practically non-existent, leading to some blatant misuses. Funds are usually sent by the LDHB Office, based on requests submitted by the provinces

(verbal requests are quite common). However, an examiner of records and major functions in the LDHB Office would soon discover that there are no standard procedures for evaluation of requests and fund allocations, and only superficial controls over the expenditure of funds and commodity usage. Dossiers requested by the LDHB Office to substantiate expenditures are hardly ever submitted, and there is very little followup on such

"CIVILIANS" FOR TERRITORIAL CONQUEST

Article 3 of the January 1973 Paris Agreement orders that, "The armed forces of the two South Vietnamese parties shall remain in place." It also says that, "The regular forces of all services and arms and the irregular forces of the parties in South Vietnam shall stop all offensive activities against each other..." (our emphasis) Then, too, Article 2 of the Cease-fire Protocol states that "there shall be no major redeployment or movements that would extend each party's area of control or would result in contact between opposing armed forces and clashes which might take place." Yet, four months after signing of the Paris Agreement, we have a ranking Embassy official in Saigon outlining a strategy for resettling armed personnel in areas that he admits were not controlled by Saigon at the time of the cease-fire. The purpose, he also makes clear, is "security," i.e. expanding and consolidating the power of the Thieu regime. Herewith the appropriate passage:

In order to return refugees and resettle people on abandoned or virgin soil in such large numbers during 1974 and 1975, it will be necessary to improve the security situation in the countryside. This can be done without violation of the cease-fire agreement. A million hectares of arable abandoned or virgin land are not currently considered under GVN control only because the GVN military forces are not present or operating in that area. The GVN cannot deploy soldiers on every hectare in South Vietnam. Nor can the Communist side maintain a significant number of guerrillas and troops on the million hectares under consideration. Thus the Minister of State in charge of LDHB plans to resettle on abandoned or virgin land demobilized soldiers who as civilians will be allowed and able to defend their farmlands and homes against Communist terrorism and attacks. The same can be done by refugees who are resettled or returned to their villages provided they are organized and trained to defend themselves against small Communist forces. This plan seems plausible.

--from draft fiscal year 1975 proposal by R. Fontaine, June 14, 1973.

expenditures. The LDHB Office in most cases relies on the province chief's "discretion" to assure that funds are spent correctly.

Obviously, this is not a very efficient or reliable financial procedure, particularly in a program where Saigon government officials are well known for abusing the distribution system, cheating both the refugees and the American taxpayer. A preliminary AID audit report on the refugee program in South Vietnam discovered late last year that in the LDHB Office, "of the 4.2 billion piasters distributed to 23 provinces only 895 million had been accounted for." Numerous instances of misuse and unauthorized allocations have been identified and brought to the attention of high-level AID officials. To give a few rather conspicuous examples, the LDHB Office provided some 21 million piasters, or \$43,000, out of an AID-financed account to various Saigon government agencies to pay for official parties and gifts during last year's Independence Day celebration. Large sums are allocated to subsidize additional salaries and "per diems" of civil servants, as well as to provide allowances to military dependents who are not the responsibility of the LDHB Office. Expenditures of refugee funds are routinely made for such unauthorized items as installation of telephones, land rental, and even roofing for churches. This type of activity goes on continuously in Vietnam with U.S. money, and American officials do very little, if anything, to stop it.

Perhaps the most expensive refugee program, in terms of the total amounts lost through corruption, has been the support of between 70,000 and 90,000 "ghost" refugees in the Danang camps. These refugees do not actually exist, but are submitted on the camp distribution lists by government officials in order to pad their rolls and thereby gain an additional profit from their normal rakeoff or "tea money" on food distributions. After a period of more than 18 months, during which time numerous high-level AID officials were informed of the situation and several articles were published in the American press, the Saigon government finally admitted to a ghost refugee population of 40,000 in Danang. What makes this situation even more ludicrous is the likelihood that an undetermined number of these "ghost" refugees are now returning-to-village in Quang Tri or resettling in Thua Thien and other places, adding huge sums to the already bulging bank accounts of various Vietnamese officials.

THE LACK OF LAND FOR RESETTLEMENT IN SAIGON-CONTROLLED AREAS

Another topic for consideration is the availability of unoccupied land presently under Saigon control. In Regions I and IV there is a lack of public domain land, and most of the abandoned private land which could be set aside for refugee use is either untillable, unsafe, or would require major reconstruction efforts. During an investigation we made in the Mekong delta to assess a proposal to reserve 55,773 hectares for refugee resettlement, we found that only about 4,000 hectares were actually suitable for resettlement (not counting a proposal, which I consider highly impractical, for using 20,000 hectares on Phu Quoc Island). After talking with a number of province officials in IV Corps, we concluded that most of them would prefer not to resettle refugees in their areas. The available land is very limited, and the best of this has already been set aside for retired servicemen and civil servants. Refugees relocated into Region IV would receive small scattered pockets of land requiring extensive renovation to make them economically viable, as well as the protection of large security forces. As we have come to discover in South Vietnam, if an area has good soil, plentiful water supplies, and is safe, there is inevitably somebody farming or claiming it; if an area has poor soil, few water resources, and the Saigon government would like to make it a buffer zone, then the land is available for refugee resettlement.

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In Regions II and III the Thieu regime has been busy using the resettlement program as an excuse to intrude on land set aside for the benefit of montagnards. Just prior to my leaving Vietnam, I became aware of extensive plans to resettle eth-

nic Vietnamese on land belonging to montagnards. I know of at least one instance, in Binh Tuy province, where such land has already been requisitioned. Saigon officials claim that the montagnards are not able to cultivate all of the

Testimony of an AFSC Volunteer

The following is excerpted from the March 28, 1974 testimony of American Friends Service Committee staff member Diane M. Jones before the Senate Subcommittee on Foreign Operations. Ms. Jones has spent two and a half years in South Vietnam and speaks Vietnamese fluently. She was there most recently from October 1973 to February 1974.

The conditions I found in the Return to Village camps I visited were appalling. In the first place, despite the name, these camps looked nothing like villages, but like concentration camps, some of them totally surrounded by barbed wire or bamboo stake fences, with tall military watch-towers on the perimeters. In camps in Quang Tri, Quang Nam, and Quang Ngai provinces, I learned that people were not allowed beyond the camp boundaries, except during certain hours of the day, for example, between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. The inhabitants of these camps had to register with camp officials when they left and when they returned.

In Xuyen Phuoc camp in Quang Nam province, I talked extensively with a government official, who told me his job was political control of the population. This official was a member of the "rural Development Corps," which is also an American-funded and -advised program. He showed me stacks of pictures, one picture of each family in the camp, posing in front of an anti-communist slogan and a portrait of President Thieu. He said that he had to check daily each family against their family portrait to see if anyone had entered or left the camp without registering with the camp officials. He told me that any resident who desired to move away from the camp must have written permission from the camp authorities and must report again to the local police upon reaching his or her destination. If anyone disappeared without asking permission, he said, the person's family could be arrested.

The political control in the Return to Village camps I visited has a strong impact on living standards. Because inhabitants were allowed outside the camp only between fixed hours of the day, because in some cases they had to walk a long way to reach their farm land, or in other cases had no farm land available to them, they could not support themselves adequately. For example, at Cam Thanh Return to Village camp in Quang Nam province, villagers told me that they could not grow anything because all of their farm land was on the other side of the "cease-fire" line, and that the Saigon government troops guarding the camp would not allow them to go back and farm their land, even during the daytime. At the time I visited, people in that camp were eating chopped banana tree stalk and were fearful of starvation in the coming weeks. We interviewed the village chief of that camp and he acknowledged that the camp residents all wished to go back to their original farm land, but "they cannot," he told us, "because the communists are out there." We asked him why the villagers were brought to such a miserable camp in the first place. His straightforward answer surprised me: "The reasons for setting up this camp were more strategic than humanitarian," he said.

* * * * *

I would like to share with you what was to me an extremely impressive conversation I had with a Buddhist monk in January. I had just been on a visit with two American friends to two of the Return to Village campsites I mentioned above, places where people were living in conditions of near starvation. Returning that evening to the pagoda, which was a center for gathering emergency food supplies for the camps, I said to the head monk: "If these two friends of mine were members of the U.S. Congress and saw the conditions in those camps, they would probably go back to Washington and recommend an increase in U.S. economic aid." The monk became visibly agitated when I said this. He glared at me and asked: "Are you planning to go back to America and ask for more American aid for Vietnam?" I threw the question back to him and asked what he would recommend. "I am a Buddhist monk," he said, "and my first concern must be for the welfare of my followers--the people who live in those camps. If American aid is continued, they will continue to live in those camps. If it is stopped, eventually the government will be forced to allow them to go back to their homes. They will be hungry for a few months until their first rice crop comes in, then they will be all right. The only truly humanitarian thing the U.S. Congress can do is to stop the support that keeps those camps in operation."

land titled to them over the past three years, therefore releasing the government from any previous obligations. Such a rationale completely negates the tremendous efforts of American officers in the AID Land Reform Program, who struggled for years to legalize montagnard landholdings. Thus, we have a situation in Vietnam where destitute montagnard refugees are suffering in non-viable resettlement camps without any land. Yet the Saigon government, with AID assistance, is in the process of requisitioning land originally set aside for use of the montagnards in order to resettle ethnic Vietnamese in the highlands. I can easily foresee the rapid claiming of all montagnard land for resettlement of Vietnam-

ese "refugees" under the guise of programs such as "City to Farm." It is totally unnecessary for us to repeat a tragic era in our own history by paying the Saigon government to open up large tracts of land for "homesteading" -- lands which rightfully belong to the "Indians" of Vietnam.

Exactly where are AID and the Saigon government relocating the 500,000 refugees and 300,000 urban dwellers, for whom funds are now being requested? In order to resettle people on new land or return refugees to their original homes in such large numbers, it is absolutely necessary for Saigon forces to militarily occupy and be able to defend huge amounts of new territory in

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"DURING THE 1973-74 RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES HAVE BEEN FORCED ... AND MISLED ... INTO RELOCATING IN AREAS WHERE THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT WISHES TO ESTABLISH OR RE-ESTABLISH CONTROL."

the countryside. It would be impossible for an occupation of such large amounts of new land to take place without directly violating the cease-fire agreement and without severe consequences for civilians who participate in this scheme.

In an early draft, which I saw, of the AID FY 1975 refugee program, it was argued that a million hectares of arable abandoned or virgin land should be considered for resettlement, despite the fact that the Saigon government did not control these areas and there were no military forces operating in them. The essential rationale of this proposal was that these unoccupied lands could be brought under Saigon control by organizing and training refugees to defend themselves against the VC (very much similar to what was attempted in the ill-fated Agrovilles and Strategic Hamlets). The Thieu regime, then, by placing refugees on the one million hectares under consideration, will significantly widen its territorial base and effectively establish authority over a much larger area than it controlled at the time of the Paris Agreement. All under the very convenient aegis of "humanitarian aid" for the refugees of South Vietnam.

CURRENT RESETTLEMENT POLICY

If there are any who may be skeptical that such a policy could exist that would so utterly disregard the safety of hundreds of thousands of helpless civilians and the sanctity of an agreement signed in good faith, they need only look at the most recent record. During the 1973-74 resettlement program, hundreds of thousands of refugees have been forced (in the sense that once food rations are withdrawn in the camps most refugees have no real choice but to take whatever meager land and allowances the Saigon government offers them, if any) and misled (in the sense that many government promises made before the refugees move are never kept) into relocating in areas where the Saigon government wishes to establish or re-establish control.

As evidenced by the Region III Consul-General's letter to the III Corps Commander, published in a recent document of the Senate Subcommittee on Refugees, the U.S. Mission in Vietnam continues to promote the inhumane policy of moving refugees to "marginal" areas in order to improve "security." In fact, most of the areas proposed by the Consul-General for resettlement in Region III were not even controlled by Saigon forces at the time this letter was written. This policy is in

direct violation of the cease-fire agreement, which states, "The armed forces of the two South Vietnamese parties shall remain in place." Yet, such a policy has been carried out time and time again over the past year, especially in the provinces of Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh. Almost every resettlement established in those two provinces has pushed the Saigon government deeper into contested areas; in many instances, areas where it had no military presence prior to the cease-fire. And once these new areas are occupied, Saigon officials waste little time in seizing this opportunity to utilize refugees for their own counter-insurgency purposes, despite possible hazards to the people involved. For example, I know firsthand that in resettlements in Quang Nam province, children between the ages of seven and 14 are recruited to perform intelligence and detection work within their villages and the surrounding areas.

Simply because the Thieu regime decides to put helpless civilians into areas in order to "secure" them does not consequently deny the PRG's own claims to these areas or limit the PRG's ability to attack at will the military outposts located in many of these resettlements. Within only a ten-week period between July and October 1973, in resettlement sites in Quang Ngai province, 20 civilians were reported killed and 38 wounded. When

Second Thoughts of U.S. Adviser

Let us quickly review the situation. Large numbers of people were moved from vast areas of territory. Moved, it was said, for the sake of security -- and to deny the land from which they were moved to the enemy. Now they find themselves in overlarge sites, having no access to adequate land to support themselves in food. They are moving away in large numbers to work as laborers at 200 piasters a day, sometimes clearing land for prosperous Vietnamese villagers -- land in some instances that had been promised them as their own. They became a labor pool for the established communities around them. Those who remain at the sites find their token of land further encroached upon by these neighboring communities. Furthermore, some of the old, "insecure," buon areas from which they moved are being infiltrated and farmed by these same neighbors. The people cannot understand why they had to move because of insecurity, when their neighbors can move out into the same areas with impunity. The Province Chief promises more land, and to return some of the land that was taken, "next year."

--quoted from end-of-tour report of Irving D. Hamberger, provincial adviser in the highlands minority province of Darlac, February 28, 1972.

I visited Quang Ngai in June of 1973, I found that none of these refugees had volunteered to move to the resettlement sites selected for them. Furthermore, they were both fearful and unhappy about being forced to relocate in a battle zone where there was almost daily military contact between the two sides. On September 26, 1973 in Tu Cung village of Quang Ngai, two civilians were reported killed and four wounded. Tu Cung village is the site of My Lai hamlet. You may wonder, as I do, how much death and suffering these unfortunate people will have to endure before they will be allowed to live in peace.

Although the Saigon government has not hesitated to resettle refugees into hazardous areas, it has done very little to demonstrate any real concern for their safety. As if it wasn't bad enough for the Stieng montagnards of Binh Long province, many of whom barely escaped from the battle at An Loc, to be concentrated for a year and a half in the squalid An Loi refugee camp where they watched more than 300 of their children die like flies. When Saigon officials finally decided to resettle them, a newly-occupied site in Lam Dong province was chosen. This site not only has the advantage of putting a Saigon presence into a strategically important territory, but the possibilities for lucrative contracts to cut down the prime forest preserves in this area must certainly have been an added incentive. But the Saigon government failed to take into account the strength of its enemy, and now these montagnards are subject to continued harassment and attacks by the PRG with no effective protection provided by local forces stationed at the sites. Unknown numbers of montagnards have escaped or tried to escape from these resettlements back into the forests; it is evident that even these normally docile people can take but so much abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus, as always in South Vietnam, the refugees are caught in the middle -- pawns in a political game which the U.S. Mission deceitfully terms "humanitarian aid." I respectfully urge Congress to reduce to zero the funding for the proposed "Refugee Relief" and "City to Farm" programs. With such funds, the Saigon government will continue to resettle refugees in territories it does not control, giving its human cannon fodder a minimal amount of land (none in many cases) and allowances to survive on. Without the U.S. relief funds, however, the Thieu regime will be forced to allow these people, most of whom are from villages in PRG-controlled areas, to return if they choose to their original farms as stipulated in the Paris Accords.

AID officials argue that no refugees have come forth to request their return to home in PRG-controlled areas. This argument might as well be that no refugees have come forth to commit suicide, because Saigon still maintains a policy of shooting or jailing anyone caught moving about in areas outside its immediate control. I suggest that Congress might want to investigate reports

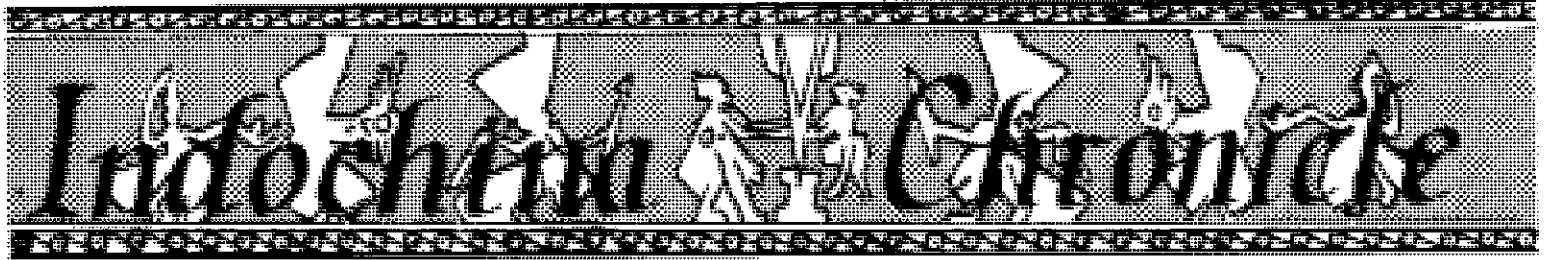
"THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT HAS SET A TARGET OF SIX MONTHS FOR RESETTLEMENT SITES TO ACHIEVE SELF-SUFFICIENCY, AFTER WHICH FOOD AND OTHER SUPPORT CAN BE WITHDRAWN. IT IS A FACT THAT THIS TARGET HAS NEVER BEEN REACHED."

of refugees attempting to return by boat from Da-nang to Dong Ha, a PRG-controlled area in Quang Tri province. It is a poorly kept secret that no one has heard from these refugees since they were picked up last year by the coastal patrol. I do not know, of course, the number of people who have been involved in such incidents. Nor do I know how many refugees would return to their homes in PRG areas if given the opportunity. But the point is that the United States signed an agreement which allows for free movement of the population, yet we are now encouraging the Thieu regime, through support of its refugee resettlement program, to completely disregard this basic right of self-determination--for people to choose where and under which government they wish to live. As long as we continue to pay Saigon for its "humanitarian aid," the victims of war in South Vietnam will never be able to enjoy that right.

Looking briefly at the larger picture, I would further recommend a detailed review, not only of the humanitarian assistance program, but of all AID programs in Vietnam for FY1975. While working in Vietnam, it became painfully obvious to me that our socio-economic programs had clearly failed to respond to the problems in that country. The reconstruction of highways and bridges, the building of schools and wells, the resettlement of refugees have little positive impact on the well-being of the rural peasantry of South Vietnam. This is because such programs are remote from and irrelevant to the basic factors which underly the conflict disrupting their lives. In addition, these programs allow the Thieu regime to ignore the substantive political issues such as land tenure, reform of the military and administrative hierarchies, shifting authority back to local communities, and so on. Our foreign aid has accomplished nothing towards these objectives. Rather, as I have attempted to illustrate, AID funds are being used primarily to enhance the military objectives of the Saigon dictatorship, and to pursue a policy directly counter to the Paris Agreement.

It is apparent that as long as he believes he can rely on American foreign aid, President Thieu will continue to stall any political accommodation with the PRG. And the failure to reach such an accommodation has resulted over the last 18 months in more refugees, more deaths, and more suffering for the people of South Vietnam. On the other hand, a major reduction in foreign aid at this time would likely force President Thieu to make the necessary compromises, which had originally been agreed upon on January 27, 1973. Once this is accomplished, an effective and long-term solution to the refugee problem, as well as many other problems of reconstruction and development in South Vietnam, will be possible.

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A NOTE TO OUR FRIENDS....

The Indochina Resource Center is hanging by its financial fingertips. Actually this is nothing new. In our three and a half year existence we have seldom been able to look ahead more than a couple of months. This time, however, we must face the fact that large donations for Indochina-related activities are practically a thing of the past. Rather, our fate will be determined by the smaller contributions, the sale of books, and the annual subscriptions to the INDOCHINA CHRONICLE. Which is not a bad development--assuming that enough people still care. If they don't, if YOU don't, then we deserve to go under.

Your contribution, of any size, will be timely and deeply appreciated. You can also help us by passing the word to bookstores about our latest book, Nguyen Khac Vien, TRADITION AND REVOLUTION IN VIETNAM. (Bookstores may prefer to order via our national distributor, Book People, 2940 Seventh St., Berkeley, Ca. 94710.) Then there are the local libraries, not only for the Vien book but for the INDOCHINA CHRONICLE. Finally, we ask those of you who have not paid the \$5.00 subscription to the CHRONICLE in the past twelve months to please dig into your pockets for that amount. You wouldn't believe how much printing costs have risen recently!

Forgive the monetary intrusion. Those of you who have been with us for awhile know that we do not do this sort of thing often.

David Marr
Co-Director

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