

Hong Kong Refugees

October 20, 21, 1982

Visitors: Stephen Lee, Paul F. Peters, John Wieler

Notes by John Wieler

Contacts: Dr. Gordon Barclay, M.D., British Red Cross

D. B. Lasón, Chargé de Mission, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

After applying and now waiting for our China visas on October 20 and 21, we took the opportunity to learn something of the refugee situation in Hong Kong. It was possible to arrange a visit to the Kai Tak Refugee Camp and see the medical work there. Dr. Gordon Barclay is currently the Chief Medical Officer. Later we had a rather interesting and informative visit with Mrs. D. B. Lasón, Chargé de Mission. Mrs. Lasón was acquainted with Mennonites, especially most recently in Somalia, having transferred from the Geneva headquarters earlier this year.

Hong Kong has received many refugees throughout the years. The UNHCR has resettled 94% of all those cases. Currently the refugee problem in Southeast Asia has eased with an overall drop of some 40%. Hong Kong figures, however, are up, creating much concern for the Hong Kong government. In order to combat the influx, a tough, harsh approach is now taken towards newcomers. An important contributing factor as to the continuing influx as well as the attitude of the government is the current interest and restrictive policies of resettlement countries. In order to discourage refugees from coming to Hong Kong there are now 4 "closed" centres with some 13,200 refugees settled in 9 places on 4 islands. This, with the restrictive policies as well as the scattering, makes it difficult for the UNHCR to service the needs of refugees. One camp is for families. Another is for unaccompanied young men. Single, young girls, ages 16-21, are placed in another institution. In still another place, older, single females are placed, separate from the larger family. The closed camps, several of which were former jails or detention centres, remain very close to that definition now. There is no freedom to leave, accessibility is severely restricted which virtually makes these into concentration camps.

In contrast to the closed camps, the Kai Tak camp houses about 6-7,000 refugees who are able to get into the city to work, send their children to school, etc. The barracks that house these refugees were originally erected as accommodations for 700 English service men. Needless to say, that is a bit of crowding. Medical and other services are quite adequate here compared to other camps where conditions are reported highly unsatisfactory to extremely bad.

Through the work of the UNHCR, the Salvation Army has been given access to the closed camps which are otherwise off limits to all other agencies. Since these refugees are virtually prisoners, no resettlement can be effected. It was suggested that any concern expressed or effort made by NGOs, including MCC, to ameliorate the situation could prove to be of great benefit to those now in a rather hopeless situation.

Assessment:

Attention by MCC and Mennonite Ministries could be very beneficial for persons who have few advocates. MCC (Canada) should raise questions about accessibility and also resettlement, especially regarding relatives of Canadians. Concern should also be expressed in Vietnam by our representatives as to the need for persons to continue to leave that country.

of whom are engineers (34); some Afghans and Ethiopians. Another is a group of about 1,000 Khmer who came to Thailand before the collapse of Kampuchea. These have been here since 1975 and are afraid to return, yet no one is accepting them. The current government deadline for tolerating their presence is the end of November 1982. Still another group mentioned were the North Vietnamese army deserters, about 50 of them. They do not qualify to go to the U.S. or to Australia since they came from North Vietnam. Canada is seen as a neutral country and could possibly absorb some. There are other groups as well.

The UNHCR reported an overall drop of sponsorships, greater than the drop in the need. Hardship cases in total number 436. Since this has accumulated over the years, the actual percentage would be but a fraction of 1%. We received a list of the cases, some of which certainly could be absorbed by Canada.

A total of 1,800 Laotian refugees have been voluntarily repatriated. This year the figure alone is 1,000. A very low-key approach is required with no publicity. UNHCR mentioned the need for workers and also suggested that the only ones acceptable would be from MCC or the Quakers at this time. This is due to our record of involvement for which they have expressed much appreciation. Repatriation will continue, but it is very slow. Many persons cannot return and resettlement for those is the only option. This was UNHCR's verdict.

The delegation visited the refugee camp at Phanat Nikhom. This camp holds refugees that have been accepted for resettlement but who still need clearances. The orderly, simple, but well-constructed housing is in stark contrast with the earlier camps. Credit must be given to the efforts of the various agencies that continue to provide many services. Tina Maurer is a volunteer with Youth With A Mission (YWAM), but is working as an MCC staff member in the Canadian Orientation Centre. This was the first visit to the camp by Fred and Shirley Redekop who will also be working here. Vietnamese refugees in that camp have recently been cordoned-off, fenced-in behind barbed wire. Apparently there have been some clashes between the groups, but in addition this action is seen as another step in order to deter others from coming from Vietnam. The fate of these people continues to be rather precarious and uncertain.

The visit with the Buhlers was helpful to understand the MCC program in Southeast Asia. It was very encouraging to see the positive attitude and commitment of our staff. We trust that in the same way our visit was also helpful to staff on whom so much responsibility rests.

Assessment:

1. For the minimal extra expense the visit was a very worthwhile investment.
2. We have a committed, capable staff for which we should be most grateful and for whom we should continue to pray.
3. The shifting of refugee focus from Southeast Asia to other areas has created new problems, especially in resettlement. There is a call for renewed effort, albeit not of the magnitude of the 79-80 period.
4. The attention given by MCC to needs within Thailand is certain to be encouraged.
5. The delegation is very thankful for the opportunity to make this visit.

Thailand Visit

November 5-7, 1982

Visitors: Stephen Lee, Paul F. Peters, John Wieler

Notes by John Wieler

Contacts: Jake and Louise Buhler, MCC representatives
Elizabeth Horsefield, MCC worker
Fred and Shirley Redekop, MCC workers
Tina Maurer, Youth with a Mission/MCC worker
Bob Tunis, Immigration, Canadian Embassy
Lennart Hansson, Chief Resettlement Section, UNHCR
Various persons including Reg Reimer at the CCSDPT meeting in
Bangkok (consortium of service agencies dealing with refugees)

The Bangkok/Thailand trip was arranged primarily to give board members, Stephen Lee and Paul Peters, first hand exposure to an active MCC field operation. The add-on costs to the North America-Hong Kong trip were very modest. This addition to the China trip also gave opportunity for the MCC (Canada) staff member for a first hand update on the refugee situation.

Jake and Louise Buhler had arranged for a very helpful schedule which essentially provided for four activities, namely:

- a. Contact with the Canadian Embassy Immigration staff member, Bob Tunis;
- b. Discussion with four or five of the resettlement staff of the UNHCR, including the chief of that section, Lennart Hansson;
- c. A trip to Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp and Tina Maurer;
- d. Discussions with Jake and Louise Buhler, as well as other MCCers in Bangkok.

Bob Tunis, the Immigration officer at the Canadian Embassy is the person interviewing and selecting refugees for Canadian resettlement. Canadian Embassy staff follow set quotas determined by Ottawa. While logically this should not surprise one, at the local level it becomes somewhat mechanical and arbitrary, not necessarily responding to resettlement needs. It was also interesting to observe that the criteria regarding selection had not changed from earlier days. It therefore follows that in many cases, NGOs are the only ones who will be able to ensure resettlement, especially of the problem cases. Fortunately, the above quota arrangement for NGOs is still in place, but unfortunately there is very little activity. Stephen Lee presented several cases. Tunis immediately reviewed these files with Lee. It is obvious that goodwill exists, that the pressure of selecting refugee candidates "that will make it to Canada" continues to be an underlying qualifier and that the NGO community has an opportunity to respond that is mainly unexercised. There seems to be considerable concern for the announced policy of camp closures especially as it affects certain groups whose only real solution is resettlement. By closing camps, refugees are relocated in non-accessible internment-type camps. The fate of many is grave indeed. The deadline is approaching rapidly. On the other hand, it was observed that the tougher, newer policy, would hopefully put an end to refugees seeking asylum in Thailand and some confidence that over the next years, somehow the refugee problem in Thailand would be eliminated.

The visit to the UNHCR was of even greater interest. Discussions there indicated a far greater concern with the current situation. We were urged to alert the powers-that-be to respond to resettlement needs. Specifically, several groups were mentioned that needed attention. One group is the non-Indochinese including 17 Burmese; 1 Polish; a woman entymologist; Iranian students from Manilla, some



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Mennonite Central Committee in Canada

A HISTORY

Esther Epp-Tiessen

Churches

eagerly applied

to sponsor

refugee families

Welcoming Refugees

In some ways, the development of the Foodgrains Bank harkened back to MCC's beginnings in the 1920s and the feeding of hungry people. As the 1970s drew to a close, another major initiative built on the early foundation of welcoming refugees.

In late 1978 people around the world became aware of Vietnamese refugees fleeing their home in overloaded and decrepit fishing boats. TV cameras captured the images of "boat people" narrowly escaping the raids of pirates or the dangers of the open sea in a desperate attempt to reach refugee camps in Thailand and Malaysia. The plight of these people touched the hearts of many Canadians, including Mennonites and Brethren in Christ. MCC Canada was soon inundated with calls from congregations and groups wanting to help these refugees resettle in Canada.

On 5 March 1979, MCC Canada signed a private sponsorship agreement with officials of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. It was the first of many such agreements between various church groups and the federal

government. The "master agreement" provided a mechanism for congregations and groups of at least five adults to sponsor individuals or families. Sponsoring groups committed themselves to meet the refugees upon their arrival, help them



A refugee mother and baby arriving in Winnipeg from Southeast Asia in 1979. Photo credit MHC.

settle, and provide financial support for up to a year. (MCC Canada, or the respective provincial MCC office, approved groups as legitimate sponsors and also took upon itself liability for any congregations not able to fulfill their obligations.) The federal government committed itself to pay for healthcare, language training, employment services, and to provide interest free loans for transportation to Canada.

Canadian Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches eagerly applied to sponsor refugee families. Some, like Toronto United Mennonite Church, had already submitted an application before the Master Agreement was signed. By the fall of 1979, MCC Canada reported receiving 440 sponsor applications for 2,384 individuals; 437 of these individuals had already arrived.⁹⁴

Some congregations sponsored successive refugee groups; as soon as one family was established, they welcomed another. By the end of 1980, half of all MCC constituent congregations across the country had sponsored one or more refugee households. In addition, 100 churches of other groups, as well as eighty-four non-church groups, sponsored refugees through the MCC Canada program.⁹⁵ The bulk of the refugees, numbering 3,769, arrived in the first two years; by 1985 the total reached 4,651.⁹⁶ The refugees came from Vietnam, Laos, and to a smaller extent from Cambodia.

Why did Canadian Mennonites and Brethren in Christ churches answer the call to sponsor refugees so enthusiastically? Most responded simply out of genuine Christian compassion, remembering Jesus' words in Matthew 25, to clothe the naked, comfort the sorrowful, and welcome the stranger.⁹⁷ Some responded because they, their parents, or grandparents had been refugees, and they now wished to ease the suffering of others. One man told the MCC Manitoba refugee coordinator, when he saw the TV images of Vietnamese refugees fleeing their country, he saw himself as a young boy, clutching the hands of his parents, and trudging along a road in their escape from the Soviet Union.⁹⁸ Many people who had fled the Soviet Union were especially motivated by the fact that the Southeast Asian refugees were fleeing communism, as they had. Some people

simply wanted to be an important witness to those who had active peace.⁹⁹

In response to the levels of satisfaction and the sponsorship they were still giving and Christmas the hospitality of Winnipeg high a refugee history of compassion" that. Some of the new Nickel, a Saskatchewan medical doctor Hung Ha. Nick sponsored him helped him to home, helped n

But refugees not always got receiving information cultural, and re the refugees, so to impose their sponsors present most of whom attend church. Some cut off the refugees who were on foods and of expensive or sponsors house remote or isolated they were lonely. And some special comprehension situation, a refi

simply wanted to repay a debt to MCC. And some felt sponsoring refugees was an important way of taking responsibility for the evils of the Vietnam War. Those who had actively protested the war felt refugee sponsorship was a witness of peace.⁹⁹

In response to a survey conducted a few years later, churches reported high levels of satisfaction with the sponsoring experience.¹⁰⁰ Many of the sponsors and the sponsored became life-long friends—some, even like family. Years later, they were still gathering for meals and special events like birthdays, weddings, and Christmas celebrations. Many of the newcomers were eternally grateful for the hospitality and the assistance given to them. In 2005, Vinh Huynh, then a Winnipeg high school teacher, remembered his boyhood refugee experience at a refugee history conference, saying that he was “humbled by the love, care and compassion” that had been extended to Southeast Asian refugees by Mennonites.¹⁰¹ Some of the newcomers were able to return the gift of compassion. When Martha Nickel, a Saskatoon resident struggled with cancer many years later, one of her medical doctors was a Vietnamese anesthesiologist and pain specialist named Hung Ha. Nickel’s congregation, the Nutana Park Mennonite Church, had sponsored him and his family when he was a 30-year-old physician, and it also helped him to re-license in Canada. As Nickel was dying, Dr. Ha visited her at home, helped manage her pain, and provided much tender loving care.¹⁰²

But refugee sponsorship did not always go this well. Despite receiving information on the social, cultural, and religious preferences of the refugees, some sponsors tended to impose their own values. Some sponsors pressured the refugees, most of whom were Buddhist, to attend church and to be baptized. Some cut off the allowance of those refugees who were spending money on foods and other items considered expensive or inappropriate. Some sponsors housed refugee families in remote or isolated settings, where they were lonely and frightened.¹⁰³

And some sponsors simply lacked comprehension of the emotional trauma the refugees had undergone. In one situation, a refugee was asked to dig a hole for a new septic tank. The terrified



In addition to refugees from Southeast Asia, MCC Canada also facilitated the sponsorship of refugees fleeing civil war in Central America. The Cesar Castellon extended family (so identified) from Guatemala was the first family to arrive from Central America. Photo credit MCC Canada.

man believed he was being asked to dig his own grave—this had been a common occurrence in Vietnam.¹⁰⁴ A great deal of learning happened as sponsors and refugees built relationships.

Nevertheless, the private sponsorship agreement proved so successful overall, that both the government and MCC Canada were eager to renew it after the initial two-year period. MCC Canada also joined the new Inter-Church Committee on Refugees, as a way of working with other denominations on refugee-related issues. By this time, the provincial MCCs had hired special staff to coordinate the sponsorship program. In Edmonton, a group of churches with MCC Alberta support, established the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers to provide resettlement supports. Anne Falk, a Manitoba nurse who had served with MCC in Vietnam, was the first director; since she spoke Vietnamese and understood the Asian context, her work was greatly appreciated by the bewildered refugees who arrived in Edmonton before travelling on to other parts of Canada. Within a few years, the New Life Centre in Toronto and the Calgary Mennonite Centre for Newcomers had been established with the help of provincial MCCs. In Montreal, *La Maison de l'Amitié* adopted refugee support and resettlement as part of its mandate. In the words of historians Royden Loewen and Steven Nolt, by the early 1980s, refugee sponsorship and assistance had emerged as, "a signature expression of service and Cold War peace witness on the part of Canadian Mennonites."¹⁰⁵

But, like the Food Bank, the refugee sponsorship program was also fraught with internal MCC controversy, some of which spilled into the media. MCC workers in Southeast Asia opposed the whole notion of resettlement. They knew many of the people fleeing Vietnam were in fact some of the more educated and well-to-do, and they believed refugee sponsorship contributed to "brain drain." These workers felt it was more important for MCC to strengthen the still-struggling economy of Vietnam through agriculture, health, and other forms of assistance. They also felt MCC should be lobbying the US government to lift the embargo it had imposed on Vietnam at the end of the war. In other words, they wished MCC and MCC Canada would address the root causes of the refugee crisis, rather than simply apply what they saw as a band-aid and reactive approach.¹⁰⁶

Many MCC staff in Akron shared the perspective of the workers. So once again, it appeared that MCC Canada and MCC were at odds, even though J.M. Klassen worked hard to keep the relationship strong. From the MCC side, it did not help matters that MCC Canada's overseas director, John Wieler, sought to intervene in the Southeast Asia program in a way which troubled MCC service workers, as well as Akron administrators.¹⁰⁷ From the Canadian side, it did not help that some of the workers in Southeast Asia seemed too sympathetic to

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Vietnam's communist government. Nor, that these workers were, according to certain Canadians, not doing enough to feed thousands of Cambodian refugees who congregated on the Thai border in late 1979.¹⁰⁸ Three MCC workers resigned as a result of their frustration with MCC Canada and the public criticism levelled at them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On the Visit of the Vietnamese Delegation to Canada, May 1-13, 1983,
for return hosted by Mennonite Central Committee Canada.

The Sending Organization: The four delegates are members of the Solidarity Friendship Committee, which is part of the Vietnam Committee. This is a non-governmental organization, but it is not as separate and independent as non-governmental organizations in western societies. It has had considerable contact with the west, particularly by hosting delegations from western groups and by attending international conferences. It is eager to strengthen relations with the west. Indeed this is its main task.

The Individual Vietnamese: (1) Mr. Do Xuan Oanh, the leader of the delegation is a journalist and a composer. He was born in 1923 and is knowledgeable about the west. (2) Mr. Nguyen Nhu Kim, a physicist, is the director of the National Institute of Scientific and Technical Information. He was born in 1922. (3) Ms. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong, a medical doctor, is the Vice Director of the Tu Du Obstetric Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City. She spent many years in France and born in 1944. (4) Mr. Tran Minh Quoc, a teacher, was born in 1945. He too is quite knowledgeable of the west. All can communicate in both English and French. The three men come from the north. The woman is from the south.

Throughout their stay in Canada they will be accompanied by two Mennonite Central Committee Canada representatives: John Wieler, co-ordinator for Overseas Services; Murray Hiebert, a Canadian who served in Asia under MCC and is now on the staff of the Indochina Project of the Center

for International Policy in Washington, D. C. He has visited Vietnam a number of times. In some cities they will be accompanied by an additional MCC person.

MCC and Vietnam: History and Concerns: We, through Mennonite Central Committee, which represents the Mennonite and Brethren-in-Christ churches of Canada and the United States, have been active in relief and development work in Vietnam since 1954. In the war years, before 1975, we worked mainly in the south but tried to do at least a few things also in the north so as to indicate a concern for reconciliation and peace. Specifically, we sent some medical supplies to the north. Since 1975, we have sent in a range of other things, including medicines, medical equipment for hospitals, food and clothing, material for school furniture, rototillers, vegetable seeds, fishing equipment, irrigation equipment, etc. The total value of MCC's work in Vietnam since 1975 would be about \$2 million. Some relief shipments were supported by other Canadian church groups and for a time there were matching grants from CIDA as well.

We also made a number of visits to Vietnam, often with delegations from Canada and the United States but also with our workers from nearby Asian countries sent in to discuss projects, and with technicians sent in to install equipment. Our visits have helped us to monitor the end use of our shipments. (Unfortunately, Vietnam's policy on resident representation of foreign agencies has not permitted us to station our own personnel there.) Our visits have also helped to build a significant

relationship. We hope, with our continued involvement, to remain in communication with the Christian church there, to respond to the relief and development needs, which are serious and well-documented, and to do what we can for peace and international reconciliation.

With regard to the matching grants from CIDA, these were discontinued after the 1979 Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. We can understand this, but because of the serious needs in Vietnam we have appealed to Canadian authorities for a modification of this policy, so far without success. We do not defend the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, although we believe that a hearing of their concerns might be useful in the effort to resolve the situation. Our concern, here as in other areas, is to respond to the needs of the people regardless of the policies of the governments.

Character and Purpose of Visit: While some of the questions at issue relate to the governmental policy, the visit is not designed to deal with these primarily. Most of their two weeks in Canada will be spent with Mennonite people and institutions and with representatives of other churches and organizations. We hope, in this way, to reciprocate for the times when they have hosted our delegations and permitted us to learn of their country and its people. Generally we want to provide an opportunity in which a deeper understanding can be gained by all parties involved on a broad range of concerns.

MCC Delegations to Vietnam Since 1975

Why Delegations? - The long war which ended in 1975 had caused immeasurable suffering and hardship for the people of Vietnam. MCC was intent upon maintaining the relationship it had established with the people of Vietnam. To begin that process, the first delegation was sent to Hanoi in 1975. It was not possible to establish a resident representative. Somewhat contrary to the usual MCC programming style, the only alternative was to periodically send delegations if relations were to be fostered. The objectives remained fairly constant.

These objectives could be summarized as follows. There was concern to assist persons in need. The country lay in ruins. Reconstruction aid had been promised by U.S.A. but was not forthcoming. The normalization of relationships between Vietnam and Canada and the U.S.A. was seen as crucial and needed to be pursued. The task of "bridge building", the development of friendship to allow for peace and goodwill, was and continues to be essential. And finally, there was a strong desire to reestablish linkages with Christians, who are the church in Vietnam. These were and continue to be the objectives, an expression of love and a desire for reconciliation.

The following is a brief sketch of the delegations. The overall objectives were part of each group's purpose. Specific objectives are mainly an amplification of the former.

November 12 - 29, 1975. A joint Mennonite-Quaker group formed the first delegation to Vietnam. The objectives of this visit were:

- a) to learn and better understand the suffering and destruction inflicted upon the Vietnamese during the 30 years of war, and
- b) to express and interpret in person Christian concern for what the war did and continued to do to the people.

Members: Robert W. Miller, former Asia and Middle East director for MCC and executive director for Vietnam Christian Service in Saigon 1968-1971
Luke S. Martin, Mennonite missionary (EMBM) in Vietnam 1962-1973, director of MCC in Vietnam 1973-1975
Linda Hiebert, MCC worker in Vietnam 1973 - April 1975, MCC Representative in Laos after April 1975
Daniel Zehr, Executive Secretary for MCC Canada
Luis and Eryl Kubicka, Quaker Representatives in Vietnam 1967 and 1969 respectively to 1971, in Laos after December 1974

May 22 - June 9, 1976. The objectives of the visit were:

- a) to see how Vietnam was restructuring after 30 years of massive war destruction,
- b) to gather information on how Vietnam was dealing with its problems,
- c) to discuss specific details on projects underway,
- d) to make contacts, build rapport and establish friendship with Vietnamese people,
- e) to gather stimulation, ideas and information for peace education in North America, and
- f) to visit churches and have contact with church leaders.

Members: Vern Preheim, MCC Asia Director
Larry Kehler, MCC Peace Section Representative
Linday and Murray Hiebert, MCC Representatives in Laos

January 5 - 19, 1977. The primary focus of the trip was to discuss and visit projects MCC was supporting -- medical equipment for hospitals, vegetable seeds for farmers, and cement and transformers for an irrigation project in Danang.

Members: Max Ediger, MCC worker in Vietnam 1972-1976
Harold Jantz, Editor, M.B. Herald
Donald Sensenig, EMBM worker in Vietnam for many years

July 1 - 15, 1978. The objectives of the trip were:

- a) to update information on Vietnam's reconstruction and developments concerning Vietnam's relationship to the U.S. and with Cambodia, China and other nations,
- b) to inspect the projects MCC had assisted in the past, and
- c) to select project(s) for 1978.

Members: Betsy Beyler, MCC Peace Section, Washington
Albert W. DeFehr, Treasurer and Executive Committee Member -
MCC Canada
Takeji Nomura, Representative from the Japanese Mennonite Church
Vern Preheim, MCC Asia Director
James Stauffer, former Mennonite missionary in Vietnam (EMBM)

May 16 - 26, 1979. The delegation focused on:

- a) questions concerning MCC representation and personnel in Vietnam,
- b) ways and means to focus MCC aid (considering short and long run),
- c) the possibility of enlarging the aid for the people of Vietnam, at the same time ensuring end-use accountability for aid given, and
- d) sharing concerns regarding refugees.

Members of this MCC Canada delegation:

John Wieler, MCC Canada Director for Overseas
Murray Hiebert, MCC Washington and Indo-China Project
Reg Toews, MCC Associate Executive Secretary
Albert W. DeFehr, Treasurer and Executive Committee Member -
MCC Canada

April 28 - May 13, 1982. The primary focus of the visit was end-use monitoring of aid sent and negotiation of additional assistance for the remaining months of 1982 and 1983.

Members: Louise Buhler, MCC Southeast Asia Representative
Titus Peachey, MCC Laos Representative
Al Geiser, Water Technician, former MCC worker in Bangladesh
A.C. Lobe, MCC Secretary for East Asia

March 2 - 10, 1983. The primary objectives of this visit related:

- a) to a review of MCC's present aid projects in Vietnam, and
- b) to the exploration and negotiation of contracts for the purchase of Vietnamese handicrafts for MCC SelfHelp shops in Canada.

Members: Elmer Neufeld, Chairman of MCC
Allan Sauder, Assistant Director of MCC SelfHelp
Louise Buhler, MCC Southeast Asia Representative

From 1975 to 1978 all delegations were hosted by the Viet-My Committee. Since 1979, AIDRECEPT has hosted the MCC delegations.

In 1981/82, A.C. Lobe visited Vietnam twice, Louise Buhler visited three times and three short-term technical persons visited for consultations in areas of food technology/solar drying of fruits and vegetables and pump installations.

April 1983.

1975	Condensed milk and canned meat Medicines		
1976	Medical equipment for DMV Medicines for South Vietnam		
1976	Meat, blackbeans, soap, sugar, health, clothing and educational kits	\$100,000	
	Floor	25,000	
	School furniture	100,000	
	Special for wheelchair	10,000	
	Equipment for health education in Quang	10,000	
	Medical equipment	140,437	
	Vegetable seeds	27,000	
		<u>\$212,437</u>	\$212,437
1977	485 tons of cement	\$ 15,000	
	10 transformers for irrigation project in Da nang	10,000	
		<u>\$ 25,000</u>	
1978	Medicines--anti-malarial	\$ 5,000	
	Shoe shipment	10,000	
		<u>\$ 15,000</u>	
1979	Medical supplies	\$ 10,000	
	150 metric tons of flour	52,130	
		<u>\$ 62,130</u>	
1980	25 diesel engines and pump sets and 15 handpumps	\$ 91,000	
	Vegetable seeds	1,100	
		<u>\$ 92,100</u>	
1981	Laundry soap, medicines, clothing	\$ 5,000	
	150 tons of wheat flour (Da nang)	75,000	
	200 tons of wheat flour, 20 tons milk powder, 10 tons laundry soap, clothing, writing materials	143,000	
		<u>\$223,000</u>	\$223,000

Assistance Provided to Vietnam
by the
Mennonite Central Committee
1973 - 1981

<u>Year</u>	<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Shipping Costs</u>
1973	Medical Equipment for PRG area	\$ 20,000	
	Clothing, soap and food	54,291	
		<u>\$ 74,291</u>	
1974	Medical kits for PRG area	\$ 25,000	
	School construction materials and school furniture for DRVN	45,000	
	Clothing, soap, and food	<u>\$160,666</u>	
		<u>\$230,666</u>	
1975	Condensed milk and canned meat	\$200,000	
	Rototillers	75,000	\$10,000
	Medical equipment for DRVN	7,000	
	Medicines for South Vietnam	14,700	
		<u>\$296,700</u>	<u>\$10,000</u>
1976	Meat, blankets, soap, cloth, health, sewing and educational kits	\$340,000	
	Flour	75,000	\$35,000
	School furniture	150,000	
	Steel for wheelchairs	50,000	
	Equipment for health education in Hanoi	22,000	
	Medical equipment	240,437	
	Vegetable seeds	57,000	
		<u>\$934,437</u>	<u>\$35,000</u>
1977	485 tons of cement	\$ 25,000	
	10 transformers for irrigation project in Danang	16,000	
		<u>\$ 41,000</u>	
1978	Medicine--anti-malarial	\$ 5,000	
	Wheat shipment	30,000	
		<u>\$ 35,000</u>	
1979	Medical supplies	\$ 10,000	
	350 metric tons of flour	89,250	\$73,284
		<u>\$ 99,250</u>	<u>\$73,284</u>
1980	20 Diesel engines and pump sets and 15 handpumps	\$ 92,500	
	Vegetable seeds	1,130	
		<u>\$ 93,630</u>	
1981	Laundry soap, medicines, clothing	\$ 6,000	
	250 tons of wheat flour (Kansas)	75,000	\$74,000
	300 tons of wheat flour, 30 tons milk powder, 18 tons laundry soap, clothing, writing tablets	143,000	33,200
		<u>\$224,000</u>	<u>\$107,200</u>

VIETNAM TRIP REPORT
toMennonite Central Committee (Canada) Executive Committee
Mennonite Central Committee Executive Committee

from

Mennonite Central Committee (Canada) Delegation

May '79

PREAMBLE AND BACKGROUND

Your delegation consisted of John Wieler, MCC (Canada) Director for Overseas; Murray Hiebert, MCC Washington and Indo-China Project; Reg Toews, MCC Associate Executive Secretary, Akron; and Albert W. DeFehr, Treasurer and Executive Committee member, MCC (Canada). While this was a delegation from MCC (Canada), it did reflect the wider concerns and interests of both MCC (Canada) and MCC, including Mennonite and Brethren in Christ in both countries. Two members of the delegation had been on a previous visit to Vietnam: Murray Hiebert, 1976 and Albert W. DeFehr, 1978.

The delegation was in Vietnam from May 16 to May 26, and visited Hanoi, the Chinese border, Lang Giang Province Hospital, as well as Ho Chi Minh City and Song Be Province in the South.

This report reflects our collective thinking in summary and while we obviously reacted, perceived and analyzed events and discussions from different vantage points, on balance it describes our general thrust and understanding.

Several critical events took place in Southeast Asia and in Vietnam particularly in 1978-1979 which had a profound effect on the entire areas:

- a. The expectation of a full rice crop in Vietnam was seriously set back by the floods in September of 1978.
- b. Economic and political goals with respect to re-education centers mostly in the South and the new economic zones fell short of expectations.
- c. Border clashes with Cambodia created displaced persons and families with the result that refugee camps sprang up all along the border towns.
- d. Growing tensions with China led to the actual conflict in the northern provinces.
- e. The international community, including the Western press, expressed deep concern over Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia and the refugees which were leaving and have left Vietnam for other countries.

In short, Vietnam was and is now left economically poor with a severe trade deficit, and is caught in what appears to be the beginning of a long and bitter struggle with China. The international community has expressed disappointment, surprise and regret with recent Vietnamese foreign policy measures, not to mention the refugee question which is creating severe difficulties for other countries.

After liberation in 1975 a variety of countries in the world gave of their resources out of compassion for Vietnam and its people. Perhaps some also gave out of sympathy, others out of guilt and even others because there were obvious critical needs brought on by thirty years of war, both psychological and physical. Four years later, however, many of these countries are viewing the situation in Vietnam through glasses less emotional and guilty and perhaps more critical and rational. Vietnam has 40,000 troops in Laos. Vietnam invaded Cambodia to remove the genocide of the Pol Pot regime. And now it is entangled and embroiled in a political and military scrap with China. Once again the political bases are loaded.

Agencies including MCC, who follow the events in Vietnam and Southeast Asia in general, are concerned about the effect this situation might have on future aid and assistance to that country. It is out of this context that the purpose of our delegation arises. More precisely, our delegation focused on questions concerning MCC representation and personnel in Vietnam, ways and means to focus our aid (considering the short and long run), the possibility of enlarging the aid for the people of Vietnam, while at the same time ensuring end-use accountability for aid given.

In addition, our delegation was interested in making contact with church representatives, to clarify the end-use of the flour shipment currently enroute, and to discuss concerns about war, violence and oppression.

SINO-VIETNAMESE CONFLICT

The delegation visited Lang Son Province, seventeen kilometers from the Chinese border and southernmost point of China's invasion. Clearly the thirty-day war had resulted in serious loss of life, massive dislocation of people as well as severe destruction to the economic and social infrastructure along the border. One thousand civilians died in the province and what one official described as "atrocities worse than My Lai." The northern section of the provincial capital had been leveled, while throughout the city hospitals, bridges, schools, the electricity plant, banks and the railroad station had been targeted by the invading army for destruction. Two months after the Chinese withdrawal, many houses in the city were still boarded up. Several hundred refugee families continued living in temporary straw, bamboo, or tin shacks along the road to the south. We passed several ox carts, loaded with furniture, slowly heading back north.

Although peace negotiations have begun, the possibility of renewed war with China is the overwhelming preoccupation of people in Vietnam today. New troops are being drafted into the army, while farmers, workers, and students spend two hours every day in military training. New bomb shelters have been dug in Hanoi, and children, old people as well as the national archives are being evacuated to the countryside. Reports indicate that some government offices and ministries are being moved to Ho Chi Minh City. Pastor Thu, General Secretary of the Protestant Church, asked us to pray for peace.

We spent two hours with Phan Hien, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vietnam's negotiator with China, discussing primarily the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. Hien traced the root of the war to China's desire to dominate Vietnam and the rest of Southeast Asia. Even while assisting Vietnam in the war with the U. S., Hien said, "The Chinese leaders used their aid to try to bring us into their dependence." Through the Shanghai Communique in 1972, the Vice Minister argued, China had agreed with the U. S. to manipulate its aid to keep Vietnam divided

Taiwan. China was opposed to the re-unification of Vietnam, we were told, because "a strong unified, independent Vietnam would serve as a barrier to Chinese expansionism." The Vice Minister explained China's plan for Vietnam as a series of developments: in 1974 China seized the potentially oil-rich Paracel Islands; in 1975 it began waging a proxy war by arming Pol Pot in his border attacks against Vietnam; in 1978 China encouraged the Hoa (ethnic Chinese) to leave and thus disrupt the Vietnamese economy; and in February it launched a direct attack across the northern border.

Phan Hien regarded China's first performance in the first round of negotiations as insincere and unreasonable. While Vietnam's three-point proposal was intended simply to establish a cease-fire and demilitarized zones along the border, he said China's eight-point proposal demanded prior settlement of all of the complex territorial and other disputes outstanding between Vietnam and China. Hien told us that China had unilaterally suspended negotiations the day before our visit with him. "We want peace to rebuild our country after many years of war, but if China wants to teach Vietnam 'another lesson' we are ready to fight for our independence and freedom."

KAMPUCHEA (CAMBODIA) - VIETNAM CONFLICT

Vietnam views its war with the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea as part of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. "Many people can not understand why Vietnamese troops were used in Kampuchea," Phan Hien told us. "China transformed Kampuchea into a colony through its henchmen (Pol Pot and Ieng Sary), who massacred three million people out of seven million. China supported Kampuchea's attacks on Vietnam, built up its army from only three divisions to over twenty divisions, and provided it with heavy artillery." According to the Vice Minister, Kampuchea launched an attack on Vietnam on December 23 with nineteen of its twenty-three divisions. Vietnam counter-attacked, destroying or disintegrating most of the Kampuchean army, allowing the Kampuchean people to rise up and quickly overthrow the Pol Pot regime.

Vietnam sees its involvement in toppling the brutal Pol Pot regime as a responsibility. Vietnamese officials seemed perplexed as to why the international community was so critical of Vietnam's role in Kampuchea, and so sympathetic to Tanzania's role in overthrowing the repressive Amin regime in Uganda. "Today Kampuchea is a society coming from hell to life," Phan Hien said. "A whole infrastructure was destroyed; all officials, technicians, and the intelligentsia were massacred. The identity of the people had been lost; there is no money, no market, no religious life. We must help the Kampuchean people establish a normal family life and a normal society. When the danger (from the Pol Pot regime and from China) is over, we will leave."

On other foreign policy matters and issues, Phan Hien expressed disappointment at Canada's suspension of assistance to Vietnam as a result of the developments in Kampuchea. He hoped Canada and Vietnam could cooperate in the area of agricultural development in the future.

The Vice Minister repeated Vietnam's interest in good relations with the United States. "We propose normalization without preconditions, but now the U. S. imposes preconditions. The U. S. is playing the China card too deeply; it is too fascinated by the Chinese market;" by normalizing relations with

Hanoi, Phan Hien stressed that the United States could play an important role of maintaining "stability, balance and equilibrium" in face of the present conflict in Southeast Asia.

Regarding Vietnam's relation with the Soviet Union, the Vice Minister said, "We cooperate on the basis of maintaining equality, respect and mutual benefit. Either Vietnam must choose to be isolated, attached and subjugated, or it must depend on friends to help defend our policy of independence."

Listening to Vietnamese officials and observing the general level of military preparation, we could not help but conclude that unrest, hostility and perhaps more war, will continue in Southeast Asia. Until there is a major policy shift in either China or Vietnam, it seems doubtful that the conflict can be resolved through negotiations.

Recently China has threatened to teach Vietnam "another lesson," while Vietnam has said it might need to "retaliate" against Chinese "aggression." Vietnamese officials are convincing in their explanation of the Chinese threat to Vietnam's independence, and about the United States' exacerbation of the conflict, minimally by normalizing diplomatic and trade relations with China while holding Vietnam at arm's length. On the other hand, Vietnam's arguments about its involvement in and goals vis-a-vis Kampuchea and Laos being simply to help neighboring people defend themselves against Chinese colonialism and the repressive policies of Pol Pot seemed incomplete. Explanations as to when Vietnam might be able to withdraw from Kampuchea tended to ignore the strong international criticism about Vietnam's presence there and the diplomatic pressure to hold an international conference to "neutralize" Kampuchea.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

In Northern Vietnam, the threat of war with China is the number one problem, but in the south, or at least Ho Chi Minh City, the economy appears to be the major concern. In Hanoi and surrounding areas one sees a lean economy with everyone productive and activity seems well organized. While poor, one feels they will manage. In Ho Chi Minh City, on the other hand, one sees poverty, idleness and senses boredom and dissatisfaction. The Vice President of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City stated that there remained approximately 350,000 unemployed in this city of 3.2 million population. Signs of this and its effects are everywhere: the coffee shops are filled with idle young men; on the sidewalk and lawns, young people sit around in groups. It is readily apparent that much of the traffic in the street seems without purpose. The editor of one of the local independent newspapers emphasized the seriousness of the situation when he stated that there were some refugees leaving because the economy could not produce enough rice or money to purchase necessities. In identifying the major problems facing the South, he listed the economy first, shortage of food stuffs second, and the war with China third.

However, there are also some more positive notes. According to the Vice President of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, over 750,000 jobs have been created in the city in the past four years. The increased emphasis on handicrafts is creating both employment and products for foreign trade. Many items imported before are now being manufactured locally and also produced for an export market. The small businessmen and traders continue

actively in business, responding to a wide range of customer needs. They sell cigarettes, cosmetics, bicycle parts, old bottles and a gallon of gas, to name just a few items. The effects of the March 1978 economic reforms were not readily visible in the streets of Ho Chi Minh City. The Vice President stated, "No one is starving."

In the rural areas of the South, the development of cooperatives is continuing although apparently at a slow pace and with some difficulties. The Vice President of the People's Committee of Song Be Province stated that in his province, fifty-seven per cent of the farmers belong to one of a total of 153 cooperatives. He said that it was difficult for the farmers to transfer from individual farming to cooperatives. The co-ops' production had to be better than the private farms and then they would see the benefit. According to him, farmers could join the co-ops freely and also leave freely. He indicated that they had cooperatives with strong leadership and functioning well, but unfortunately, there were also many co-ops that were not doing well.

The government appears to be having mixed success with their new economic zones. The Vice President of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City said people are reluctant to move to the primitive conditions of these new zones. He felt that as people recognized the purpose of these zones, the government's objectives would be achieved "by and by."

REFUGEES

The refugee situation will get worse before it gets better. Among the officials we talked to, one senses a variety of emotions about the situation: anger, regret, frustration, embarrassment, and good riddance. This last feeling was articulated most clearly by Ngo Cong Duc, a self-professed non-Communist and editor of the only independent newspaper in the South when he said with some emotion that there were thousands leaving who would never understand, who would never accept that a socialist regime is best for Vietnam. They refuse to work or cooperate and so he wished that they would leave and let others work. With sorrow he identified another group of refugees who were leaving because of the poor economy. If the economy would improve he felt this flow would stop and some would return. Mr. Anders Johnsson, a senior official with UNHCR, stationed in Hanoi, stated that of the 1,000 to 2,000 letters he had received in the past months from Vietnamese wanting to leave the country, eighty per cent had stated that they wanted to do so because of economic reasons.

In regards to the Hoa (ethnic Chinese) not surprisingly all the officials denied that there was any oppression or economic discrimination directed specifically at them. The Hoa continued to live, work and contribute at every level of the Vietnamese society. However, all is not well and the conflict with China has caused strains in the relationship between the Vietnamese and the Hoa. We did hear disconcerting comments and reports. Mr. Do Xuan Oanh of the Viet Peace Committee, claimed that the Chinese had used returned Hoa as advance troops against the Vietnamese in the Chinese lesson in the North. A member of the National Assembly described the Hoa who had left or were planning to leave as the "Fifth Column." Mr. Johnsson, UNHCR, confirmed what we had heard from other sources, namely that a significant number of Hoa in northern Vietnam were given the choice to go north, south,

or east: north in repatriation to China, south to a new economic zone (Lam Dong--near Da-LAT) or east to the ocean and some more welcome shores.

Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Phan Hien in our interview identified the refugees as a "product of the war." In response to the charge that the government was demanding exit money from refugees, he did admit that there were some corrupt officials and officers who were taking bribes. He stated that Vietnam was in favor of the re-unification of families and that the government was now cooperating with other agencies and countries to assist refugees to leave in a legal and more organized manner. During the time of our visit, the Deputy High Commissioner for the United Nations on Refugees was in Vietnam to brief the government and to work out the details and plans for the more orderly exit of refugees. Mr. Johnsson from the UNHCR had very hard words of condemnation for the way Canada and the United States were responding to the refugee situation in Vietnam. In his assessment, the two countries were being overly restrictive in their selection of refugees; Canada was making unrealistic demands for medical reports and interviews prior to leaving. The U. S. was demanding that the refugee have unrealistic amounts of cash and generally UNHCR was finding these two countries somewhat less than fully cooperative and Canada too bureaucratic and rigid in its approval or in its approach to the situation.

In regard to refugees from Cambodia, according to the Vice President of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, the ones on the border have returned home while thirty thousand continue to live in Ho Chi Minh City.

Where does the truth lie in the question of why refugees leave Vietnam? Quite likely somewhere between the highly personal accounts of the refugees and the somewhat self-serving statements of Vietnamese government officials.

CHURCH CONTACTS

The delegation visited the Protestant Church in Hanoi, attending a Sunday morning worship service. Attendance was about sixty to seventy people, mostly older, with women making up about two-thirds of those present. Youth and children were absent, other than two young ladies, one being the daughter of the minister. Singing and responsive reading was hearty. The message focused on the new man, including the reading of numerous portions of Scripture (Galations and Ephesians).

After the worship service, the delegation met with three representatives of the northern Protestant churches for discussions. Rev. Thu, the General Secretary, did all the talking and answering of our questions. We heard nothing from Rev. Thu to indicate even the remotest problem in relations to the government. We mentioned that in the USSR the church in some areas was attracting a large number of young people. Rev. Thu then stated that the youth in Vietnam were also showing greater interest in coming to the church although there seemed to be little evidence in the service that we had attended. It was interesting to hear that a delegation from the Protestant Church in Vietnam had been to the Prague Peace Conference and later they visited the USSR. Rev. Thu was a guest of Alexei Stoyan, staying three days in his home. While in Russia, the delegation visited Baptist churches, then returned to Germany via the Scandinavian countries.

The process of re-unification of the northern and southern Protestant churches has been disrupted by recent conflicts with China but the planning continues. We were informed that forty Protestant churches exist in the North with a membership of about 10,000.

The delegation presented a communion cup to representatives of the Protestant churches as a symbol of our unity in Christ.

In the South we were unable to make contact with church leaders. The reasons given were that the Executive Secretary of the Protestant Church (Pastor Huyen) was visiting churches in the countryside and also Archbishop Binh of the Catholic Church was observing a period of religious silence from May 21 to May 26. We asked to see other leaders or representatives of the churches but that also did not work out. While the delegation concluded that our church agenda was not intentionally frustrated by the Vietnamese hosts, the inability to make the proper arrangements seems to reflect a definite lack of priority on the part of the committee hosting us.

The delegation was disappointed with the limited contact as well as the quality of the discussions with church leaders. In a number of conversations freedom of religion was emphasized while at the same time it was also evident that a sharp distinction is made between freedom to worship and what is termed "meddling in politics."

The Protestant representatives asked us to convey greetings and gratitude for both the spirit and the gifts sent to the church in Vietnam.

FOOD NEEDS

Food needs were difficult to assess. The devastation caused by last year's floods and even greater destruction created by the typhoon, have brought severe problems to this country. Because of recent conflicts, manpower as well as other resources have been diverted from food production and agricultural development to military activity. Some foreign observers intimate that Vietnam faces a shortfall of about one million tons of food in 1979. Despite these difficulties, government officials state that there is no starvation. From our vantage point, it appears the Vietnamese have been able to distribute and allocate the limited food resources in the country equitably.

There have been a variety of reports on rations, some indicating no reductions, others that rice had been reduced and supplemented by other foods, and yet others indicated an overall reduction in rations.

In the border province of Lang Son, hard-hit by the most recent clash with China, it was reported that crops were burned and surplus food was hauled across to China and 20,000 buffalo necessary for field work were destroyed. Several sources indicated that silting caused by the floods will however, increase the yield in the South but that an overall shortfall may occur should unfavorable weather conditions prevail. Vietnam will most likely continue on a very meager diet.

The Vietnamese are a proud people and it is not easy for them to speak of their poverty. While we could observe no hunger, it is evident that they are very lean. A UN staff person indicated that the Vietnamese were becoming

even thinner as evidenced by his local staff members. They appear to be prepared to eat less, tighten their belts in order to achieve the national agenda.

FLOUR SHIPMENT

On several occasions the Aid Recept Committee and the Vice President of the People's Committee in Lang Son Province expressed their appreciation for the flour shipment. We were informed by the two committees that the shipment would be going to the Lang Son Province, the area which had been severely affected by the recent Chinese invasion. It appears that the flour shipment was both timely and proper. With only one large flour mill in Vietnam located in Ho Chi Minh City, the system is greatly overtaxed, thus the decision to ship flour instead of wheat was fortunate.

AGRICULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

When asked of their needs, the Vietnamese most frequently responded that agricultural assistance was first priority.

The creation of new economic zones was an attempt to develop some of the more neglected areas for food production. The unemployed from the cities are given an opportunity to either return to their former villages or go to these new economic zones. They are provided with some basic resources such as materials for housing, water supply and food for one year. It is in these areas that outside agricultural assistance is welcome such as the well and pump project which the Aid Recept and Agricultural Committee recommended to MCC.

In other areas such as the rich delta close to Ho Chi Minh City, plans are to increase production as well. Requirements are the importation of the high yielding seed varieties but these require additional fertilizers and irrigation. An agriculturalist from the Ministry stated that they are interested in establishing production centers for the fertilizers and pesticides needed rather than import these. There is little doubt that given proper assistance and political stability Vietnam has all the potential of becoming a major producer of food.

The MCC delegation was asked to consider supplying pumps for a local village which was short of drinking water. A number of districts are sorely in need of this basic equipment. Unfortunately the delegation was given a very superficial tour of one village and saw little of the actual areas where the development was to take place.

It was interesting to meet with Mr. Bradford Morris, the administrator of the United Nations Development Program, and Mr. Joseph, regional director for Asia and the Pacific of UNDP, who came to Hanoi on the same plane with us. The UNDP has committed itself to a five-year, \$50 million development program in Vietnam. This includes regional planning, agriculture and food production, a ground water survey, soil and fertilizer analysis, forestry projects, construction of four dams, and feasibility studies on irrigation. Shrimp production, civil aviation services, airports and cotton development are also on the drawing boards.

In conclusion, the best way of assisting with food problems in Vietnam is to give assistance to agricultural development.

PROGRAM PROPOSAL

Aid Recept initially presented one main project for our consideration. It was proposed that MCC provide pumps for wells in one or more villages in the Song Be Province near Ho Chi Minh City. Water is scarce, both for daily household use as well as for agriculture and the wells need to be deep. The pumps would be used to provide water for household use. While the full proposal consisted of forty pumps at a cost of \$180,000 U. S., they proposed that MCC do as much as we could but they would be pleased if we could provide up to \$150,000 worth of pumps. Information was provided, giving pump specifications, etc.

Later, in response to our suggestion that MCC might be open to considering a broader program response, they suggested MCC might provide up to \$150,000 worth of medical and health supplies and equipment, educational supplies, and children's clothing. They would provide a firm proposal if we were interested.

We indicated that we would present this information to our Board in the context of our total report.

PERSONNEL IN VIETNAM

The delegation diligently pursued with Aid Recept the matter of placing an MCC person(s) in Vietnam. This matter was put on the agenda by us at our first meeting to set agenda with Aid Recept. In the first few days of our visit we spoke to this matter on two or three further occasions indicating our desire to assist with specialized personnel and attempting to explain why staff representation was important and beneficial, both to them as well as to MCC.

As a further effort to try and get some meaningful discussion with Aid Recept on this matter, we submitted the attached document. It attempted to present the matter of personnel in the context of a broader program response. After submitting the paper but before we had received any reaction from Aid Recept, Albert DeFehr mentioned the matter on two or three additional occasions, including the meeting with the Song Be People's Committee where the pump project was being proposed. On this occasion Ms. Phuong Dung indicated we would receive a response in Hanoi upon our return. With this information we did not raise the matter further. At our final meeting with Aid Recept and notwithstanding Ms. Phuong Dung's earlier comment, the delegation still had to persist in getting a response. Her response was clear, at the present time they could not approve MCC having personnel in Vietnam and we would have to continue to relate to Vietnam as in the past and that was via delegations and follow-up reports on any aid provided. Additionally, she said Aid Recept had forwarded our request to the government but had not yet received a reply. In response to our request they agreed to inform us as soon as they received a reply from the government.

Unfortunately, the Aid Recept officials were not willing to dialogue with us on this matter and so we could not test various variations or possibilities. At the moment it would appear that we broke no new ground on this matter.

OBSERVATIONS

1. Vietnam clearly perceives itself to be seriously threatened by China and alienated by much of the international community, both economically and politically. Vietnamese officials feel that because of the larger business market in China, the U. S., Japan and Western European countries are siding with and implicitly supporting China in its pressure on Vietnam. Increasingly alienated, Vietnam is being forced to turn to the Soviet Union for military, economic and political support which in turn further exasperates the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. Should the U. S. normalize diplomatic and trade relations with Vietnam, it would appear that the conflict in the region would tend to be less polarized along big power lines, allowing greater potential for peace and stability.
2. Of great concern was the matter of refugees and considering this aspect carefully and consulting as wide a spectrum of sources as was possible, we felt perhaps the Western press was not highlighting the complexity of the situation as it relates to Vietnam. The Vietnamese freely admit that some of their people are leaving; however, it is to be clearly understood, particularly in the light of the national agenda, that the day starts at 5:00 a.m. and ends at 7:00 p.m. and the pay is some cash, a little food, but mostly the right to be "independent and free." Not everyone (particularly in the South) is prepared to make that kind of sacrifice. On the other hand we do not believe that all the stories of the refugees are without basis. But when it is a choice of hard labor for low returns, high unemployment in the South, rumors of wars involving big powers, it is little wonder that some other pasture is considered greener.
3. Non-government sources confirm the difficulty in obtaining the approval for resident MCC personnel. Other agencies, both large and small, have made that request and have also been gently and politely turned down. Our conversation with the UNHCR representative, Mr. Johnsson, helped focus things for us. He indicated that they had diplomatic status and still could only accomplish very small space in the very old Re-unification Hotel in the center of Hanoi, which space served as reception area, work office, kitchen, washroom and sleeping quarters.

The Vietnamese point out that it takes someone to act as host for foreigners, transportation costs are high, housing and food is scarce. Our delegation felt confident about the answers given by both government officials and non-government sources whose experience was visibly evident.

SUGGESTIONS

1. We need to indicate clearly and precisely our desire to see the church and the church in daily life and action, both in the North and South in future visits. The present forum is less than informative and productive.

2. While we are disappointed that we could not achieve resident MCC personnel for Vietnam, our delegation suggests that MCC continue to relate to the people of Vietnam and to consider innovative and imaginative ways to achieve such a relationship. Without a significant level of assistance projects, it appears unlikely that MCC (Canada) or MCC could expect a continuation of our present visitations by delegation.
3. Perhaps at this point the Executive Committees might consider employing other forms of visitation other than delegations (options might be: Vietnam representative in Bangkok or giving the Laos representatives responsibility for Vietnam).
4. We suggest that the Ottawa office and more particularly the Washington office continue to pay special attention to the events in Southeast Asia in the light of strained and tense relationships between China and Vietnam and the spillover into Kampuchea, Laos and even Thailand. It is now evident that in assessing conditions in Southeast Asia, particular care should be taken to approach our personal "judgements" with less passion and in its place substitute more realistic and practical assessments. It appears that most of the truth in Southeast Asia lies somewhere in the middle. After all, as Mr. Namura pointed out to our 1978 delegation, "In Asia, yes means perhaps maybe."
5. MCC should consider re-evaluating the present overall strategies for Southeast Asia as distinct from only dealing with each country separately and further consider realistic and practical administrative structures to deal with the complex political, economic and social threads which overlap and connect all countries in Southeast Asia. This might avoid the necessity of "Yes, we can here, no, we can't here" policies.

May 1979

AWD:ad

PEOPLE MET IN VIETNAM - MAY 1979

Ms. Ha thi Phuong Dung

Ms. Mai Phien

Mr. Ngoc Ky

Mr. Nguyen Van Tham

Mr. Do Quoc Hieu

Mr. Do Xuan Oanh

Dr. Pham Dinh Phung

Ms. Le thi Tao

Ms. Van

Dien Quoc Tien

Dr.

Mr. Phon Hien

Rev. Hoang Kim Phuc

Rev. Bui Hoang Thu

Mr. Phan

Mr. Do Thanh

Mr. Le Quang Chanh

Mr. Muoi Chanh

Ms. _____

Ms. Nguyen Ngoc My

Mr. Thanh

Mr. Ngo Cong Duc

Ms. Ngo Ba Thanh

Mr. Pham Dong

Mr. Anders Johnsson

Mr. Tony Verwey

Mr. Chea Soth

Mr. Bill Dickens

Ms. Helen Argyviades

Mr. Nguyen Duc bat

Jackie Chagnon

Mr. Dang Kien

Vice Chairperson, Aid Recept Committee
Hanoi

Aid Recept

Translator

Aid Recept

Aid Recept

Viet-Peace Committee

Representative Ministry of Agriculture

Rep. Ministry of Agriculture, Engineering Dept.

Rep. Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Rep. Long Son Provincial Committee

Director, Lang Giang Hospital

Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs

President of Protestant Church, Hanoi

General Secretary, Protestant Church, Hanoi

Member of Protestant Church Committee in

Charge of External Affairs

Rep. of Foreign Affairs, Ho Chi Minh City

Vice President, People's Committee, Ho Chi
Minh City

Vice President People's Committee, Song Be
Province

Directress, School for Restoration of
Human Dignity, Ho Chi Minh City

Vice Directress, Orphanage, Ho Chi Minh City

Staff, Drug Rehabilitation Center, Ho Chi
Minh City

Editor Tin Song newspaper, Ho Chi Minh City

Rep. of National Assembly from Ho Chi Minh City

Rep. of Ministry of Public Health

Rep. of UNHCR, Hanoi

UNHCR

Kampuchean Ambassador to Vietnam

Rep., UNDP, Hanoi

Rep. UNICEF, Hanoi

President of Aid Recept, Hanoi

AFSC, Laos representative

Vietnam news agency (Vientiane), stationed
in Laos.

May 19, 1979

Attachment 1

To: Madame Phuong Dung
Aid Reception Committee

From: Mennonite Central Committee (Canada)

Subject: Some Thoughts Concerning Aid to the People of Vietnam

Following our meeting with representatives of the Agricultural, Foreign Ministry, and Aid Reception Committees, we have thought carefully about several ways in which we could be of assistance to the Vietnamese people, taking into account your needs and the way in which MCC (Canada) can best meet those needs through a strong collective and supportive constituency, both in Canada and the United States.

We wish to suggest for discussion an aid proposal which we believe reflects a broader scope and might cover a time frame of approximately 3 years duration with mutual review from time to time.

Proposal for Aid:

1. An increased assistance program of approximately 3 years duration, with analysis, implementation, and evaluation 1 year at a time;
2. Appropriate medical aid supplies and equipment;
3. Immediate and long-range material aid;
4. Personnel (representation) - technical specialists such as an agriculturalist or a medical or teaching specialist. This person could serve as liaison and representative for the aid assistance for the Aid Reception Committee on the one hand and MCC (Canada) on the other.

A staff person in Vietnam would assist MCC (Canada) to a broader North American audience and give MCC (Canada) greater ability to solicit assistance for the People of Vietnam from our Canadian constituency and other charitable organizations.

5. Agricultural Assistance - Tools, seeds, pesticides, insecticides, and water pumps (suggested by the agricultural representative for a project in the South);
6. Food Aid could also be considered.

*We would be pleased to hear your response to all items (1-6) suggested as well as any additional comments or ideas which you may have.

*Please consider these suggestions and we will await your reply.

On behalf of the
MCC (Canada) Delegation

Signed: Albert W. DeFehr

SOUTHEAST ASIA REFUGEE REPORT
May 27-June 9, 1979

PURPOSE

The purpose of the visit to Southeast Asia and the consultations there, was to review the present refugee situation and the appropriate MCC response to the same.

BACKGROUND

The review was largely prompted by the action of MCC (Canada) in signing a special agreement with the Canadian government, allowing the Canadian Mennonite constituency to sponsor above-quota refugees. Whereas Mennonites in Canada were ready to respond, there was some uncertainty as to what the response might be. Should MCC provide direct relief aid to refugees in the camps? How desirable, necessary or appropriate is the resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees in Canada? And how responsive is the selection system regarding the need from a refugee perspective?

In contrast, Mennonites in the U.S.A. respond to the established program of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), cooperating with CWS, one of the member agencies of IRC, by accepting their sponsorship cases. The IRC works in cooperation with the federal government and follows the criteria for selection defined by the government.

Additionally, temporary arrangements made with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Thailand to represent MCC interests in refugee matters, needed to be reviewed. Priorities for resettlement needed to be established or confirmed and selection criteria agreed upon.

PARTICIPANTS

The team reviewing the refugee situation, writing the report and making the recommendation included John Yoder, MCC representative in Laos, Vera Isaak, MCC worker with refugees in Thailand, Max Ediger, MCC worker in Thailand, and John Wieler of MCC (Canada).

ITINERARY

The assessment of the refugee resettlement program, and the broader refugee situation in Thailand, covered a period of ten days, Sunday, May 27 to Tuesday, June 5. Contact was made with embassies, UN officials and voluntary agencies as well as with Thai government officials responsible for refugee concerns. Three refugee camps were visited as well as one transit center. In addition, the group spent a day taking a look at MCC's present involvement in Thailand, i.e. community organizational work in the slums of Bangkok.

The group also attended a meeting of the CCSDPT, Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand. This coordinating body of vol ag representatives meets monthly to share information and concerns in its efforts to assist refugees. Unfortunately, the AFSC representatives had already completed their study of the refugee situation and had left Thailand.

Persons Met (Individually or as a group):

Canadian Embassy - Murray Oppertshauser, First Secretary (Immigration)
- Robert Shalka, Second Secretary (Immigration)
- Sean P. Brady, First Secretary (Political)
U. S. Refugee Section - Lionel Rosenblatt (State Department)
Joint Voluntary Association - Bill Sage, Director in Thailand
UNHCR - Pierre Jambor (Deputy Representative)
- Claudine Smets (Resettlement Officer)
ICRC - Francis Amar, Head of Delegation
World Vision in Thailand - Paul Jones, Director
- Jeff Atkinson, medical doctor
CAMA Services, Inc. - Reg Reimer, Director
Church of Christ in Thailand - Executive Committee

Camps Visited:

- Nong Khai Camp and Soloko Reception Center (Lao and Lao-Hmong)
- Surin Camp (Cambodian)
- Sikkui Camp (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao)

Transit Center Visited:

- Suan Plu (Immigration) and Detention Center

Slums Visited:

- Soi On-Nhut
- Klong Toey

GENERAL REFUGEE SITUATION

Since 1975 refugees have continued to leave Indo-China in growing numbers, causing serious problems for the Asian countries which receive them. Figures on the total number are confusing and contradictory. But sources here say the total may be over 900,000. As of April 30th the United Nations has registered nearly 300,000 in their camps in Asia, including 160,000 in Thailand, 73,000 in Malaysia, 30,000+ in Hong Kong (with an additional 40,000 illegal aliens in hotels in Hong Kong), 12,000 in Indonesia and 4,000 in other Asian countries. Generally overlooked were the 300,000 Cambodian refugees that fled to Vietnam during the reign of Pol Pot. Most of these have returned to Cambodia. Additionally, it has been reported that approximately 200,000 ethnic Chinese from Vietnam have gone to China.

The Asian countries of first asylum are feeling hard pressed with the problems that the refugees create. This situation threatens the political stability of countries such as Malaysia as well as Thailand. They are demanding third country resettlement and unless this happens, they are threatening to close their borders and in fact use violent means to deter the influx.

12
In Thailand the refugees are aggravating the already existing internal problems. They want all the refugees out as soon as possible. The Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees are especially unwanted as it is feared that they are going to assist in the final collapse of Thailand. However, these refugees provide the Thai government with a convenient scapegoat for its present internal problems. As a result of the dislike and the blame that the refugees are receiving, there is a good chance that violence may soon break out against them. There have been a number of anti-refugee demonstrations already. There is also a feeling of anger that the refugees are getting so much attention. In many cases, the refugees in camps are better off than their Thai neighbors and the Thai people as well as the Thai government do not particularly appreciate this. One of Thailand's serious problems is the inadequate distribution of its wealth. Because of this, thousands of farmers in the Northeast have fled to the cities in hopes of getting jobs. About 500,000 such economic refugees now live in three hundred slums throughout Bangkok. These are the people that feel especially angry that the refugees sit in camps without having to work and are receiving so much international attention and aid while the slum dwellers and Northeastern farmers must work so hard and receive barely enough to live on. Including the Northeastern farmers, there are about eleven million people in Thailand living below the poverty level. This situation can create serious violence, either against the refugees or between the Thai people.

WHO ARE THE REFUGEES?

The Indo-China refugees can be fitted into six categories. Each group has its own reasons for leaving and its own special needs. Each has a history which predates the 1975 revolutions leading to their refugee status and each group faces different prospects for future settlement. The groups are the following:

1. Vietnamese - These people continue to leave Vietnam in small boats. They cite a variety of economic and political reasons for going. Most remember the wealth and consumer goods of the American era. They face dangers from unseaworthy boats, sea pirates and a hostile reception when they attempt to land. It is estimated that thirty to sixty per cent die enroute. The conditions in the "boat camps" are generally poor and crowded. Until recently, these people were processed quite rapidly (approximately six weeks). With the recent influx, however, the camps are overflowing and the Thai officials now make some refugees wait offshore in the boats until they are ready to leave for a third country.
2. Ethnic Chinese - The ethnic Chinese from Vietnam face the same dangers as the Vietnamese "boat people." The ethnic Chinese have been caught in the middle of the China-Vietnam feud. Vietnam feels they are potential trouble makers and so has "invited" them to either go back to China, to go to the new economic zones, or to leave Vietnam in boats. Approximately one-third of the one and a half million Chinese in Vietnam have already left. Many more are expected to follow. Presently these Chinese are in a most difficult position. Vietnam wants them to leave, China will not take them, and other Southeast Asian countries are afraid of adding to their Chinese population.

3. "Old" Cambodians - These are the 15,000 refugees who fled the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia for camps in Thailand. Many of these people are still stunned by the experiences in Cambodia. Many fled without their families. This will make resettlement difficult. The U. S. has agreed to resettle all of these people but is now waiting for new development in Cambodia to see if repatriation or family reunification is possible. Already some men have returned to Cambodia to look for their families.
4. "New" Cambodians - These refugees have arrived after the 1979 overthrow of Pol Pot. They are not in camps but are clustered on the border between the Thai troops on the one side and the Cambodians on the other. The 100,000 Cambodians on the border include Khmer soldiers and their accompanying civilians as well as refugees that are fleeing. Thailand does not recognize these people as refugees and has not officially allowed any aid to be given to them. The Thai threaten to force them back into Cambodia and in some instances have done so. However, at least one international organization has given blankets, tents and food to these people and 1,200 have been accepted for resettlement in western countries. An official from an international organization urged immediate action in order to "save as many lives as possible" by resettling these people before the Thai send them back. He felt that this would be certain death for many. Some of these "New" Cambodians have illegally found their way into the "Old" Cambodian camps where their friends give them shelter and food and hide them.
5. Lowland Lao - These refugees leave their country for a variety of economic, social and political reasons. Seventy thousand Lao crowd into two camps at Nong Khai and Ubon in Thailand. These camps are busy centers of commerce and activity. Most Lao refugees are healthy and their camps are in relatively good condition when compared to rural Thai villages or other refugee camps. The main problem of the people in these camps are that they are very crowded, there is a shortage of water and a hopeless boredom from waiting in the camps for three to four years with little hope of resettlement. However, many Lao could follow the lead of the few who have returned voluntarily to Laos, if they could forget their dream of western affluence and accept the economic realities of Laos today.
6. The Hmong (Meo) - These hill tribe people were a part of the secret army used by the U. S. during the Vietnamese war to fight the Lao communists. While many Hmong live peaceably and support the present regime in Laos, those trained by the U. S. continue to resist. They generally come to Thailand only when they face defeat or when their supplies run out. Sometimes they rest in the refugee camps, then return to fight in Laos. They usually arrive in Thailand with serious medical and nutritional problems. Because they are fighting the Lao government, they are understandably afraid to surrender and accept resettlement in Laos. However, they live in mountain refugee camps which resemble their native villages. Although the Thai refuse to discuss the option, these camps could easily become permanent villages if the flow of refugees would stabilize.

WHY THEY LEAVE

Although varied and complex, each refugee has his or her own reasons for leaving. Generally, they fit into one of the following categories:

1. Politically implicated - Officials and soldiers of former refugee regimes often leave to avoid possible retaliation.
2. Fear - Before the new governments took over, most people received a heavy dose of anti-communist propaganda which made them fearful.
3. Economic difficulties - The abrupt cut-off of American aid; the implementation of a new economic system, and natural disasters, produced economic dislocation and food shortages in Indo-China.
4. Rejection of the system - Some refugees cite excessive social and political control from the government.
5. Hope of a good life - Westerners in Indo-China were generally affluent and brought in consumer goods. Refugees feel that they also will be affluent if they go to these countries.

REFUGEE CAMPS

When they reach Thailand, new arrivals are detained at the Thai police stations for questioning. They are then transferred to reception centers to be registered for the camps by the Thai authorities. These reception centers are incredibly crowded and unsanitary. The ration is a thin soup and rice which is poured into any container the refugee can find--usually a used plastic bag. The length of stay can vary from two days to two months, usually depending on the amount of money a refugee or his relatives can give to the Thai authorities. Until they enter the camps, the refugees are the responsibility of the Thai authorities. Abuses during this period have been reported.

Once the refugee enters the camp, the UNHCR takes responsibility to provide food and shelter. In addition, a number of volunteer agencies assist the UN in providing schools, hospitals, supplemental funding, water supplies and sanitation facilities.

Apart from basic needs, the greatest problem in the camps is boredom and the lack of purpose. In some camps a few people can work for surrounding farmers but most have no work. Those with the necessary resources and initiative have set up handicraft shops to produce silvercraft, cloth and embroidery. To encourage this, some voluntary agencies provide material and marketing services as well as training. They also teach English in some camps. Unfortunately these programs fail to reach the majority of the refugees who remain idle.

PRIORITIES FOR MCC SPONSORSHIP

Rather than placing priority on resettleeability or skills, sponsorship should be extended to those who have the most pressing needs for resettlement. All MCC-sponsored refugees should meet the following conditions:

1. Repatriation is impossible.
2. They can not be settled in Asia.
3. They are not eligible for any other program.

Within this field, the following persons should be given priority:

- Those facing danger in their present situation.
- Those with close relatives in North America (but do not qualify for government programs).
- Disqualified from other programs by technicalities.
- Those waiting the longest in camps, especially those families with school-age children.
- Hardship cases such as a family where a handicapped member has prevented resettlement.
- Special cases of compassion.

Individuals from each ethnic group will fit into the fore-going criteria. It should be noted, however, that the ethnic Chinese are viewed as foreigners in Indo-China and that resettlement locally or in their countries of origin is impossible at this time. Additionally, as a group the new Cambodians are in danger of being pushed back into Cambodia unless resettlement relieves pressure on the Thai government.

RELATIONSHIP TO SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAMS

The emphasis of the current MCC program in Thailand is to seek out those Thai people who are actively working on justice, non-violence and reconciliation issues and given moral support and encouragement to them. The approach is to assist the church in identifying the causes of poverty and injustice. Specifically the work relates to rehabilitation of drug victims and those caught in the slums of Bangkok.

There is concern about working on the refugee issues in isolation and ignoring Thai problems which could prevent us from recognizing the political nature of the refugee problem. MCC needs to maintain a unity and balance in its work in this country.

The MCC Laos program provides agricultural and resettlement assistance as well as promoting reconciliation between Laotians and North Americans. Laos is attempting to influence people not to leave and to attract refugees to return. MCC Laos has assisted persons who returned and hopes the trend will grow. A high profile approach to resettle Lao refugees in third countries could have a negative effect on MCC involvement in Laos. But a coordinated approach which seeks to assist repatriated persons in Laos while resettling others in North America could enhance the Lao program.

In Vietnam as well, MCC must continue to show compassion and assist those who stay as well as those who go. It is quite possible that Cambodia will be requiring substantial aid in the near future. All of this demonstrates the need for an overall Southeast Asia strategy.

REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS

1. Generally, the basic needs of the refugee camps are adequately looked after with the UNHCR taking prime responsibility. It does not seem necessary for MCC to become involved in sending supplies or otherwise developing an aid program at this stage.
2. It is apparent that many refugees will not be able to return to their countries of origin, that the Thailand situation is tense and that resettlement in North America should be pursued.
3. It is also apparent that there are certain groups who may be integrated locally and are not under the same pressures and that the urgency or even the desirability of resettling in a third country is not a priority at this time.
4. The work of Vera Isaak is appreciated by those agencies dealing with refugee resettlement. MCC received encouragement to continue assigning a person to Thailand who would assist in facilitating the sponsoring of refugees for resettlement.
5. As the team consulted with various international and church agencies, it became very apparent that MCC should not become integrally linked with any one but rather maintain an independent role, and work in close cooperation with the various agencies.
6. While it was agreed that a person should be assigned to the refugee work, it was also agreed that Max Ediger and John and Beulah Hess-Yoder be part of the consultative team to guide the program and assist in monitoring a changing situation. ?
7. After consultation, the group agreed upon the following priorities regarding resettlement strategy.
 - a. First priority would be to assist refugees who wish to return to their homeland. This may have implications for the MCC program in Laos.
 - b. Secondly, any possibility of local resettlement, either in Thailand or in this Southeast Asia area, should receive MCC assistance if that becomes an option.
 - c. Resettlement in North America is the third priority and currently the only viable option.
 - d. Other countries closer to Southeast Asia in climate and development should be assessed for resettlement possibilities.
8. It was agreed that the work with refugees be part of the overall MCC Thailand program. Max Ediger is willing to assume the role of country representative to facilitate administrative matters.
9. It was observed that handicrafts being produced in the camps provide valuable employment. It would be of great help if MCC could assist, both with marketing as well as innovative suggestions to increase this activity.

10. The refugee situation is extremely complex and fluid. This must be kept in mind as MCC responds, both in North America as well as Southeast Asia and that changes in the MCC response must be expected.
11. Because of the vast cultural differences, orientation to prepare both refugees and sponsors is of vital importance. This aspect can not be over emphasized.
12. It has been observed that the complex and chaotic situation in Southeast Asia goes back many years and stems to a large extent from foreign intervention in the region. MCC, its constituency, and especially refugee sponsors should see the refugee program as an opportunity to facilitate reconciliation.
13. Observing the various ethnic groups of the refugees, the inter-relatedness of the problems and the historical ties, it becomes apparent that MCC needs to develop an overall strategy to respond to the needs of Southeast Asia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that MCC assign a person or couple to take on responsibility for the refugee program, and this person(s) to be administratively responsible to Max Ediger. The assignment is to be reviewed periodically. Because refugee selection will be primarily for Canada, consideration should be given to a Canadian appointee.
2. It is recommended that MCC produce materials to educate the constituency and sponsors of the historic origin of Southeast Asian refugee problems and the effects the exodus has on Southeast Asian countries, and to encourage sponsors to help refugees to work through possible hate feelings towards the rulers in their former homeland, becoming reconcilers.
3. It is recommended that:
 - a. MCC encourage the Government of Canada to creatively pursue policies aimed at reconciliation and peace-making, relating to both the refugee producing countries as well as the world powers and,
 - b. That MCC encourage the Government of the U. S. A. to reconsider its stance on the recognition of Vietnam and,
 - c. That both governments be encouraged to give the kind of aid to both the refugee producing countries as well as the countries of asylum in order to develop bridges of friendship and understanding necessary for peace and well-being in Southeast Asia.

JW:ad

FOLLOW-UP ON THE MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE VISIT
June 6-8, 1979
John Wieler

John Yoder and I went to Kuala Lumpur after the Thailand visit. The Canadian UNHCR as well as the UNHCR office in Bangkok had alerted the Kuala Lumpur office of our intended visit. When John and I got to that city in the evening of the 6th, we discovered that the next day was the king's birthday, a national holiday. That fixed the agenda for us since visiting any camp was out of the question. We managed to see both UNHCR where we chatted with Cliff Carpenter as well as visit the Canadian High Commission where we met with the High Commissioner, J.R. Francis, as well as External Affairs representative, Rod Hay.

THE REFUGEE SITUATION IN MALAYSIA

The problem is growing. While the numbers are not as large as in Thailand, a sharp upward swing of people landing at its shore suggests an extremely serious situation. Since the end of 1975 the total number of refugees equal 114,000. To date 40,000 have been resettled, leaving 74,000 of which 17,000 came in May alone with an additional 10,000 being towed back to sea. These 10,000 we were told, were landed in the Anambus Islands.

These people are truly the people from Vietnam. Because there has been so much publicity, movement in the past has been relatively fast with an average time lapse of only six weeks before people were moved. The problem is also much newer than in Thailand. Before 1978 there were no refugees in Malaysia. The influx here has been basically since last year, before that only very few were present. With the camps becoming crowded and a rapid increase of arrivals, the estimated time now to move them is perhaps two years. Currently there are many more ethnic Vietnamese coming out than previously. The mix is now approximately fifty per cent Vietnamese and fifty per cent Chinese from Vietnam.

Malaysia is very nervous about these people coming. Internally the large Chinese minority making up approximately forty to forty-five per cent is the rather well-to-do and somewhat privileged group in Malaysia. The majority of the Chinese are found in the cities. The provinces, especially on the eastern coast, are strongly Muslim and ethnic Malaysian. In short, the political stability of the country is seriously threatened with any new arrivals.

The situation in the camps is very difficult. On one of the dry islands, Pulau Bidong, approximately 41,000 are encamped. There is a treacherous shoal that surrounds this island, creating a real problem for the barges which need to bring in fresh water. Two such barges make that trip daily but need to pump this water across the reef which is difficult at good times and impossible during storms. All food and water has to be supplied to this island, making permanent settlement an impossibility. There are a number of other small camps on the mainland. While no more people are allowed into the camp, a number of these newly arrived refugees are simply squatting and settling on beaches right along the eastern coastline. It is estimated that there are close to 9,000 persons in that category.

The idea that these refugees might find a haven on some uninhabited island is unrealistic. It is exactly islands like Pulau Bidong that are uninhabited for the simple reason that there is no groundwater. UNHCR has taken responsibility for refugees who are registered in camps. There are no other agencies operating in Malaysia since the government forbids this. It would perhaps be possible for an agency engaged solely in resettlement to pay regular visits to camps for the purpose of selection if that is found to be necessary.

The Canadian High Commission in Malaysia does not get involved in camp work or in selection or other immigration matters. This is all handled out of Singapore. The CHC office, however, gets the necessary permits and makes travel arrangements for persons travelling in Malaysia. The High Commissioner, Mr. Francis, and Mr. Hay were both very interested in our experience in Vietnam as well as in Thailand. It is obvious to me that if we are sensitive, MCC may well play a positive role in relating concerns that we might have regarding Southeast Asia. There is quite a variation of attitudes among government officials. Some are rather open to consider various points of view while others are very "fixed" in their view and attitude. We have a very definite role here to play in at least raising a few questions. I should quickly add that we were well received in all of the offices we visited.

In conclusion, it becomes very obvious that resettlement is the only option to assist refugees and it seems that a stepped up policy would help ease the burden in some of these countries which are being forced to display their humanitarianism.

copies to: John and Buelah Hess-Yoder
Max Ediger
Art Driedger
Vern Preheim
Don Sensinig

EXHIBIT 13

REPORT ON THE VISIT TO SINGAPORE
John Wieler

On Friday, June 8th, I spent part of a day in Singapore. Here I visited the Canadian High Commission to discuss our Refugee Assistance Program with both the First Secretary, Mr. Ian L. Hamilton, as well as Dave Ritchie, in charge of the sponsorship work. Mr. Thompson, the High Commissioner, also expressed interest and arranged to meet with the representative of the Mennonites.

Currently, our unnamed sponsorships are being handled by the Bangkok office. However, there are a number of named cases which are coming under the sponsorship that are handled by the Singapore office. There is little question that the named categories will increase as more refugees are settled in Canada and as these become aware of relatives and friends in the camp whom they would like to see coming to Canada or the U. S. A.

Earlier, the Canadian officials found few people interested in coming to Canada. Most of the people were holding out to go to the United States and, as one of the men said, "The U. S. A. seems to be the bottom line." It is presumed that eventually it will be the U. S. who will clean out the camps. In some respects the U. S. A. has a more lenient policy than Canada in that it assumes a larger degree of responsibility and is not as selective, especially when it comes to minors. The Canadians do not accept groups of minors or individual persons unless there is one person over 18 years of age. This at times becomes a problem. However, there is good rapport between the Canadians and the Americans. The Canadians alert the Americans to their problem cases and the Americans tend to pick them up. One of the problems the U. S. agency has is that resettlement and movement to the U. S. A. is very slow. The lack of funds has temporarily eliminated all of one of the categories under which the U. S. A. accepts refugees. The Canadians, on the other hand, have stepped up their program so that it takes only six weeks from time of registration to moving the refugees. This has resulted in many more people desiring to go to Canada.

It was felt that the boat people are continuing to receive a lot of attention. This means that those people coming to Malaysia really get first chance whereas people in Thailand, some of whom have been in the camps since 1975, are being overlooked. Therefore it seems to be the right decision that MCC has placed a prime emphasis on Bangkok.

The selection criteria which we developed in Thailand was shared with the staff in Singapore. We also suggested that if some of the hardship cases such as large families or physical disabilities becomes a problem and there is a desire to look to Canada for placement, that Singapore staff should feel free to forward these cases directly to the attention of MCC (Canada) in order to investigate the possibility of matching these with Mennonite sponsors. This was the same suggestion that was made to the staff in Bangkok.

It will be of interest to note that L. Lukie, formerly of the Winnipeg CIC, will be coming to Singapore shortly. Mr. Ian Hamilton will be returning to Canada.

Meeting with Mr. Thompson, the High Commissioner, was really very interesting. He had very little knowledge of Mennonites and therefore wanted to get to know the group. People had been questioning him whether the Mennonites lived in colonies, i.e. whether we were the Hutterites. It seems that some objective reporting on who the Mennonites are, would be a help to the Canadian constituency. We had a delightful visit. I found Mr. Thompson a person who could appreciate Vietnam's position in a far more objective way than most of the persons we have been talking to. He has also had much experience with refugees having been in the foreign service for some thirty years, in places such as Pakistan and India and therefore knows the Asian scene. He congratulated the Mennonites for picking up on the refugee concerns.

In conclusion, without exception, all of the officials we met confirmed the need for resettlement, some in very strong terms (expletives deleted) and others simply being thankful that somebody is responding to the need of the refugees. This sentiment was expressed against a background knowledge that not all refugees should be settled in North America and with confirmation that our program priorities were in the correct order, i.e. first repatriation to their homelands, secondly, attempting to resettle in Southeast Asia and only thirdly resettlement in North America.

All of these experiences confirmed that we are moving in the right direction. One concern remains. It was felt by some of the individuals that the plight of the refugees had not really gotten across to the Canadian nation. Other nations also should become more involved in the act of resettlement. One suggestion was made to attempt to get a television crew or all reporters down to the camps in order that the response from Canadians particularly could be stepped up.

JW:ad

copies to: John and Beulah Hess-Yoder
Max Ediger
Vern Preheim
Arthur Driedger
Don Sensenig

OVERSEAS SERVICES

To the MCC (Canada) Executive Committee Meeting
September 28-29, 1979

Since the last report to the Executive Committee, activity in some programs, notably in the Refugee Assistance Program, has been strong, at times at the expenses of others. During this time a visit was made to Vietnam and Southeast Asia which has already been reported in June.

During this time a significant number of events have taken place which involved staff in this department. MCC (Canada) was instrumental in initiating a CIDA - NGO sponsored evaluation of milk powder use in Third World countries, resulting in the endorsement of the programs and continuing availability. The ICFID consultation with Third World participants resulted in a strong plea being made by those invited from overseas, to share prioritizing and decision making, with representatives from the Third World rather than make unilateral decisions here in Canada. MCC might do well to heed this voice. A number of meetings also took place with inter-church representatives on the refugee question. A seminar on development issues dealing with economics held in Minneapolis was attended by one of the staff. After the Asia visit there was an avalanche of phone calls, interviews, requests for information, to address groups, and meetings such as we have seldom witnessed.

With the appointment of a full-time business manager for the Food Bank, Laura Loewen will now give full attention to concerns of the Overseas department. We will now be able to give more attention to development education, a somewhat neglected area.

MEDA AND MIBA

Plans are to amalgamate MEDA and MIBA (Mennonite Industry and Business Associates). Attached is a copy of a MIBA brochure. Because members of both organizations are often the same or come from the sector of our constituency, this move might be described as joining word (MIBA) and deed (MEDA) into one integrated entity. These plans will be ratified at the annual meeting in October. We agree with this move.

BAPTIST FEDERATION - RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

The MCC (Canada) was invited to attend the Tri-Annual Assembly of the Baptist Federation of Canada. Mary Burkholder and John Wieler attended. MCC (Saskatchewan) had a good display of Self Help and informational material. There was considerable interest in refugees in the Relief and Development seminar. A number of Baptist leaders expressed their appreciation for MCC, especially referring to past meetings and specifically to the Believers Church Conference. The adopted guidelines (attached) and the establishment of a Relief and Development committee will be of interest to MCC. What has not been established is an agency or organization to be specifically responsible for implementation.

EAST-WEST

The aborted AUCECB Mennonite World Conference delegate visit to Canada last summer is now scheduled to take place in November 1979. Communication has been sparse. A letter last fall, a telegram in April in response, and a

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VISITOR EXCHANGE PROGRAM

On August 19-20 twelve VEP participants entered Canada. They were placed as follows: B. C. - 5, Alberta - 3, Manitoba - 2, Ontario - 2. Blanca Duque is being sponsored by MCC (Canada). She is working as a secretarial assistant in the Overseas Services department.

This is the first time that trainees entered Canada, having obtained visas prior to entering Canada. Five of the twelve entered with complete documentation. The others, particularly those from South American countries, had been unable to complete documentation in their home country. All but three obtained the working visa in New York. The others had to get final clearance and visa after arrival in Canada. This was all expedited because of the interest and cooperation of the Foreign Branch Liaison officer, Mr. Wayne Hammond.

A request has been received from Poland regarding the possibilities of placing Polish agricultural trainees in Canada. The request is being studied and considered together with staff in Akron, which may lead to a proposal to be presented to the December Executive Committee meeting.

IMMIGRATION - KANADIER

Some contacts were made with Kanadier Mennonites as opportunities became available. A trip to Ontario provided opportunity to visit with Minister Cornelius Quiring, bishop of the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Ontario. This church is beginning to contribute to MCC projects.

Two families recently arrived in Manitoba from Mexico. In each case part of the family had Canadian citizenship or a claim to same while the other had no claim. Both families have been assisted with their documentation at Citizenship and Immigration. As a result of this assistance by MCC staff, these families will be able to stay in Canada and have the possibility of becoming permanent residents of Canada rather than being here as visitors with the fear of being deported.

The work of investigating the possibilities of land settlement for Mexican Mennonites in northern Manitoba has not moved forward in the past months due to lack of staff time. It is fairly certain that some Crown land would be available to an immigration movement from Mexico. What is needed by the Crown Lands people is a concrete or specific request which would include the number of families to be settled, kind of land, etc., date of beginning. We hesitate to make such concrete proposal prior to checking with the Mexican leadership regarding concrete interest on the part of a specific group.

REFUGEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

From the time that the first meetings were held with Immigration and External Affairs officials in February and the signing of the agreement with the Ministry of Employment and Immigration Canada on March 5, much of our staff time has been spent on the implementation and development of this program. From the outset it was agreed that we would take a decentralized approach to administering this program. The provincial offices agreed to this

approach and have worked with us in a most cooperative way. The actual work of sponsorship of course is being picked up by the local congregations and groups within the congregations.

Provincial Involvement: Resettlement Centers - Both Ontario and B. C. are involved with full-time staff in a refugee resettlement program which is geared to helping all refugees arriving in Toronto and Vancouver respectively. Cost for these projects are shared between MCC (Canada) and the provincial MCC's. Some financial support is also anticipated from federal or provincial governments.

Three provinces have appointed personnel to promote and coordinate this work:

Manitoba	John Doerksen
Saskatchewan	Sid Derksen
B. C.	Mabel Paetkau
Alberta	Anne Falk

Statistics: As of September 7, 1979 our records reveal the following:

	Cases Applied For	Persons Applied For	Cases Arrived	Total Persons Arrived
Alberta	35	206	9	46
B. C.	88	419	6	24
Manitoba	158	813	36	165
Ontario	103	611	27	156
Saskatchewan	56	335	10	46
Total	440	2,384	88	437

Cooperation with other agencies: MCC (Canada) was the first of the private groups to enter a national agreement for sponsoring of refugee immigrants. Most other church groups now have national agreements. We have attended a number of inter-church meetings in Toronto and through these contacts have given leadership in this new area of service. Much more there continues to be a need for leadership in the area of coordinating the Canadian church response to the refugee ministry, both in Canada as well as abroad.

Budget: Some groups have responded by giving cash. Our project is carrying a fund balance of \$12,629 on September 1. One area where some of these funds may be applied would be in the area of follow-up and constituency education. What may well be needed is a program similar to earlier programs of MCC in Europe such as "Umsiedlerbetreuung" or "Fluechtlingsbetreuung." Much of this of course will be done by the local congregations, but with 2,500 - 4,000 Indochinese under Mennonite sponsorship within the next year, and many more under government sponsorship also having needs, someone will need to give direction to this ministry, perhaps for the next several years.

Ottawa contacts: The working relationship with the refugee policy division of Employment and Immigration Canada in Ottawa, has been very helpful both in coordinating the applications and information sharing on movement of refugees to Canada, as well as in assisting us in arranging for our staff in Bangkok to become involved in the selection and matching process. We have made several visits to Ottawa and are in contact by telephone on a regular basis.

Another person who has been most helpful in understanding the refugee problem is Mr. Raymond Terrillon, UN representative for Canada. His office has provided audio visual and written informational materials, as well as overseas contacts and travel arrangements. We have also cooperated with UNHCR in placement of specific refugee cases which they referred to our office.

Canadian MCC representation in Bangkok: Since the signing of our agreement we have insisted on some involvement in the selection process. With MCC being present in Thailand we requested that all Mennonite sponsored cases be taken from Thailand. Ottawa agreed to this with the understanding that we would have direct involvement in the selection process. Vera Isaak assumed this assignment for two months terminating June 17. Max Ediger filled the position until the arrival of Bruce and Virginia Taylor on August 10. The Taylors were sent for three months enroute to their assignment in India. In the meantime Arthur and Leona DeFehr became available and were invited for a broader and expanded role as refugee coordinators for Southeast Asia, but due to the reluctant acceptance of this new assignment by the field personnel, MCC (Canada) staff, with the DeFehrs, agreed that MCC should not proceed with their Bangkok assignment, and the DeFehr's withdrew their availability.

Hopefully a new plan will emerge acceptable to all parties involved, which will give us the leadership in the field to give direction to the broader concerns in this part of the world, as well as assure our Canadian sponsors of our direct involvement in the decision making process regarding refugees coming to Canada.

Since the Wieler visit to Southeast Asia, many shifts have taken place. Pressures during the summer increased considerably with a very large exodus of refugees from Vietnam. Instead of the original 5,000 refugee figure for Southeast Asian refugees, Canada very quickly increased this to 50,000. Additional pressure on MCC and other agencies resulted in that the government now suggested a 1:1 match, which really put the onus on the agencies to produce. In spite of the large popular appeals and support that has become evident in Canada, the ability and preparedness by agencies to actually receive refugees is very weak. The earlier focus on Thailand now needed to be shifted somewhat to the wider scene. Most recently strong appeals are being sent to churches in Canada from Hong Kong. Many are looking to MCC to give some leadership in dealing with the refugee problem. Problems such as lack of adequate transportation continues to severely restrict movement of refugees. It was this rapidly shifting scene, and the problems, that prompted MCC (Canada) to suggest expanding the earlier recommended role for placement of a representative in Thailand.

VIETNAM

After attempts by MCC Akron failed, MCC (Canada) was asked to assume the responsibilities to negotiate and send a delegation to Vietnam. Upon return of the Canadian delegation, responsibility for Vietnam concerns again reverted to MCC Akron. In the meantime, MCC (Canada), through its numerous contacts through staff in Ottawa and Winnipeg, has developed good personal relations with Vietnam Embassy staff, particularly Mr. Tuan. Because we have no independent mandate to pursue this relationship, uncertainty as to direction results. Perhaps we should have retained our role in the area

for a longer period of time. While it is rewarding to note that good relationships exist, it becomes frustrating not to follow through in a responsible manner.

FUNCTION OF OVERSEAS SERVICES

The establishment of a "Development Desk" as the Overseas Services department was first called, was to facilitate Canadian resources availability. Since that time the volume of financial resources has greatly increased. MCC (Canada)'s involvement on the Canadian scene has been greatly enhanced. One result has also been the "conscientization" of MCC (Canada) as well as the Mennonite constituency. The result has been that greater expectations have been placed on MCC (Canada). The appointment of additional personnel is evidence of this. The involvement of Canadian staff in limited overseas activities has certainly been of value as this pertains to the Canadian constituency and in generating response. How useful this has been from an overseas perspective must be assessed by others. There is a feeling that the time has come to do a major evaluation of this sector of MCC activity.

Submitted by,
John Wieler
Arthur Driedger
Laura Loewen

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Two members of the Canadian Embassy staff, Bill Lundy, the acting First Secretary in place of Murray Oppertshauser, and Bob Sh lka, met with members of the consultation. There are now eight Canadian persons working in selection along with thirteen local staff. The emphasis of the Embassy in relation to immigration is:

- a. Refugee selection. This is by far the largest activity.
- b. Family reunification. This is a relatively small effort at the moment, taking place in Vietnam but is very significant and has potential for increase.
- c. The normal immigration program which is very small.

The staff sees the next fifteen to eighteen months as a time when refugees will be moved. The Embassy staff sees the role of MCC as unique and the kind of work that has been established in the office, mainly because the Mennonites asked for it and were in it early. Now the Christian Reformed are here and there is some uneasiness. From a strictly legal standpoint, there is some question as to whether it is permissible for the Canadian Immigration to turn over files to agencies such as MCC. Since, however, we have been given office space right in the Embassy, there is of course complete control of the files. The role of MCC currently is complementary. The Taylors go through files and alert staff to such matters as split families or neglected cases and also endorse the more difficult ones and generally there is a good feeling. Five days before the flights to Canada, information on content goes to Ottawa. Bob Shalka when questioned about the health of the movement of refugees, stated that he is quite optimistic. The first generation will have difficulty settling in; the second generation will adapt and the third generation will be Canadian like it was with the people from the Ukraine from where his people have come.

Copy of "Notes on Asiatic" . . .

Oct 6-10, 1979

John Weller

situation. It is clear to me in that the need for MCC to participate in Cambodian feeding efforts is highly questionable because of the tremendous attention that the situation is receiving. Our role should be to continue to foster the relationship to Vietnam and Cambodia which will enable us to respond to the internal Cambodian situation if other arrangements fail. Here we are again caught with some of the original problems since Vietnam is a very key element in this whole matter. Unfortunately, every country, including Vietnam, is using the situation to their own advantage.

I have a final note here that Doug feels that a staff person in Bangkok could be helpful (referring to Vietnam) but feels that it becomes rather useless unless some project work can be pursued.

MCC's Refugee Response and the MacGregor Laotians.

Intro: (Brian to introduce me? Or why is John Wieler here? Some explanation needs to be given.)

Matthew 9, vs.35, Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field.

We have been ^{asked} explain a. MCC's decision to help the refugees and 2. when and how they started the process.

In 1975 the terrible war in Vietnam ended. The pictures faded from our TV screens. Our country's attention turned to other events. But then '78 the boat people, the refugees fleeing Vietnam suddenly reminded us that the aftermath of the hellish conflicts had not ended. The media brought the images into our living room. As followers of Jesus, we are ever reminded that the suffering of humanity is not only a grave sin but also a challenge to those who carry His name.

In short, a number of leaders decided to do something about this. But what and how? It was not an altogether easy struggle for MCC. There were many consultations, investigations, and explorations by staff and authorities and finally with the MCC Executive committee and Board, but the overwhelming conclusion was that MCC must respond. The decision to do so harkens back to another era, to the very birth of an organization called the Mennonite Central Committee.

Some 90 years ago, an extremely desperate situation developed in the former homeland of the so called Russian Mennonites. A violent and terrible bloody revolution, anarchy and upheaval took place in Russia that took the millions of Russians including thousands of Mennonites who had found a home there. My mother's grandmother lost her husband and all of her sons and sons in law. In the Bergmann family, there was not a single male over the age of 18 alive when they fled to Canada. A terrible famine and sickness swept through the land. To help these brothers and sisters, the Mennonites in North America got together and formed a **central committee** to send aid. My grandmother told me that without that help from this new organization, MCC, she and her family of 6 children would not have survived. That was the first part of the history.

The second major challenge to MCC came with the end of WWII, when thousands of Russian Mennonite refugees were stranded in Europe. Through the tireless efforts of persons such as CF Klassen, the prayers and financial support of the brothers and sisters in North America, by the grace of God who allowed miracles to happen, these refugees found homes in the safe places of Paraguay, Canada and the United States. Time is too short to give details, but the preparation of the Mennonites, through suffering, through faith and through commitment to follow Jesus, a mind set developed that led to further involvement.

All of this, and other events of similar nature set the stage to respond to South East Asia. What

was the sequence?

1. Development of Awareness
2. Exploring the options
3. Developing a proposal
4. Decision of the MCC Board
5. Writing and submitting the "Refugee Sponsorship" program to Government
6. Signing agreement with Government
7. Preparing the constituency, the churches.

As the person in charge of the Overseas Desk, I was very much involved in the development of the program. In dealing with the Canadian Government, we not only had to deal with Immigration but also with Foreign Affairs. In Thailand we had an ex Vietnam MCC worker present, but he was really not involved with refugees. In Laos, MCC had a couple of volunteers. We were fortunate in getting Vera Isaak, who was on her way home from working in Bangladesh, to go to Thailand where she visited a number of Refugee camps, talk to the Canada Immigration officials and generally was able to give us first hand information on the situation there.

Back in Canada, MCC was able to get the provincial MCCs to take on the active role of finding sponsors and generally supervise the resettlement process.

I want to emphasize that the basic reason for our response was that of obedience to Christ's command to love and to look after those in need. Jesus was and continues to be the motivating force. The Lord answers prayers. And he continues to call his people to faithfulness, even as we celebrate, and currently see what is happening in our world. .