

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



(R - Kansas)

2213 Dirksen Building, Washington, D.C. 20510

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CONTACT: BOB WAITE, BILL KATS
(202) 224-8953, 8947

DOLE URGES IMMEDIATE ACTION TO AID REFUGEES

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Senator Bob Dole (R.-Kansas) made the following statement at a press conference at the Capitol:

"On June 18, the National Coalition for Refugee Resettlement held an all-day meeting to report to Congress on the refugees in Southeast Asia and in Europe. The meeting sought to highlight the situation, to identify the problems, and to exchange views. If it could not add to our already acute awareness of the tragedy that is unfolding before our eyes, it did, however, point to the urgency of the problem that is confronting the world and needs to be addressed by no less urgent measures.

"As of September 30, 1978, approximately 144,000 Indochinese refugees were in first asylum countries, while waiting for resettlement. The figure is now up to 330,000 in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines. The number is expected to reach half a million or more by September, 1979.

"As we know, Thailand has refused to accept any more boat people. Malaysia and Indonesia are following suit. How much longer before Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines decide that they too have reached their saturation point? The problem is expected to be further aggravated by the anticipated expulsion of about one million ethnic Chinese in Vietnam, who are considered by the Hanoi government to be a dangerous element of the population because of alleged sympathies with Peking.

"When a building is on fire, one does not call for a meeting to determine the cause of the fire. Instead, one calls the fire department for help, and all efforts are deployed to try and save the people trapped inside the building. While legislation designed to help refugees in the future is in order, the problem before us cannot wait until legislation is passed and laws are enacted. We must act now. Each moment that goes by means more lives lost. We are dealing not with issues but with human beings, men, women and children, who are forced back on boats, with no place to go and limited supplies of food and medicine aboard. It was reported that 80,000 Cambodian refugees were forced back across the border with Thailand.

"We are all too familiar with the painful remembrance of ships loaded with European Jews seeking refuge, during the Nazi period and in the aftermath of World War II. I do not need to remind you of the fate of many of these ships, nor of the ultimate fate of the people they carried towards hope. Instead, many found death after being herded from one port to the other. The tragedy of the unfortunate passengers of these ships is irreversible. The fate of the Indochinese refugees being shuffled from one shore to the other is not. It is my hope that we have learned from the past a lesson that we shall apply to the future.

"Pending legislation that is designed to address the issue on a long-term basis, and in an attempt to deal with the problem immediately, I am introducing today, along with Mr. Solarz, my colleague from New York, a concurrent resolution to express the sense of the Senate to direct the President to use all influence at his discretion, to persuade the international community to increase its assistance and resettlement of refugees by the United States. It also asks that the Attorney General provide for a substantial increase in the number of refugees paroled into the United States in conjunction with consultation with the appropriate committees of the Congress. The United States in the past has done more than its share in this effort, although this does not lessen the need we address now. All nations must respond to it.

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"I am not unaware of the potential sources of opposition to an increase in the number of refugees we are prepared to accept in the near future. I do believe, however, that an increase in our assistance would be in keeping with our human rights policy, and with the obligations created by an international tragedy. Let us not be hasty in condemning the first asylum countries for declaring that they would no longer accept more refugees attempting to land on their shores or cross their borders. Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia are already straining their resources with the refugees they have now. Other nations must accept the responsibility to shift the burden. The United States is third in the number of refugees it has accepted and resettled, behind France and Australia. Canada, Sweden and Israel have already announced an increase in the numbers they are willing to accept. The President is expected to address this issue in Tokyo today, as part of the economic summit with the Japanese government. By introducing this resolution, it is my hope that the Congress will go on record urging the President to use every power at his discretion in order to get our allies and other nations around the world to accept their fair share of these unfortunate refugees.

"Human decency dictates that humanitarian concerns transcend all else for the United States and other nations who will join their efforts with our own. Our nation was built upon the labor of generations of refugees and immigrants, and their descendants. They have enriched the economic tapestry of the United States, as much as they have enriched its cultural heritage.

"By allowing waves of immigrants and refugees to swell the populations of the United States, we have time and again invested in the future of our country. That investment, born of the ethical principles of freedom and justice has paid off. Let us not allow the spirit of compassion that has permeated our history to dry out. Instead, let it be fortified by the example of our forebearers who found a haven on these shores and were willing to share it with all those in need. Let us not forget our own roots. Let us not betray our past.

"Before concluding, I should like to let it known that so deep is my commitment to what I consider a gesture of justice as well as of compassion and duty, that it is my intention to not miss a single opportunity to bring my message to the Administration and to my colleagues in Congress, by introducing this resolution as an amendment to legislation as well."