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Fact Sheet

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

Washington, DC

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Refugee Admissions Program for East Asia

Background

Since 1975, over 1.4 million Indochinese refugees have been resettled in the United States, either from first asylum countries or through in-country processing programs. The majority (some 900,000) came from Vietnam, but the number also includes significant numbers of Highland and Lowland Lao and Khmer. Although the major resettlement programs for Indochinese refugees have ended or are coming to conclusion, the United States continues to process refugees in the region, including Burmese and cases referred to the United States by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Comprehensive Plan of Action

The Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Indochinese refugees was established in 1989 as a multilateral framework to resolve the outflow of thousands of people, primarily from Vietnam, to other countries in Southeast Asia and to Hong Kong. It preserved the principle of first asylum and provided support for regular departure programs in an attempt to save lives by discouraging further clandestine and unsafe departures from Vietnam and elsewhere. The CPA concluded in Southeast Asia in June 1996 and in Hong Kong in June 1997.

Orderly Departure Program

The Orderly Departure Program office in Thailand was closed at the end of FY 1999. Since 1979, the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) had provided a safe and legal alternative to illegal departures from Vietnam by boat or overland through Cambodia. The program, which had operated from the American Embassy in Bangkok and at a site in Ho Chi Minh City, successfully processed over 523,000 Vietnamese for admission to the U.S. as refugees, immigrants, and parolees. It reunited nearly 249,000 family members in the United States and provided resettlement to some 4,600 former U.S. Government employees. More than 89,700 Amerasian children and accompanying family members have been admitted to the United States since 1988 in a special ODP subprogram, along with some 167,000 former re-education camp detainees and their immediate family members under another special program begun in 1989. Only a small number of ODP cases remain to be processed. With the closure of the ODP office, responsibility for processing these cases was transferred to the Refugee Resettlement Section (RRS) at the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), which opened in August 1999.

In addition to processing refugee cases, ODP also issued immigrant visas to qualified applicants with the requisite relative in the United States. As of August 1999, visa services are now provided by the Consulate General in HCMC.

Resettlement Opportunity for Vietnamese Returnees

In March 1996, the Vietnamese Government agreed, in principle, to cooperate with the U.S. Government on a new resettlement opportunity for certain Vietnamese migrants. This initiative, known as the Resettlement Opportunity for Vietnamese Returnees (ROVR), was designed to offer a final chance at a U.S. resettlement interview to eligible Vietnamese who were then still in first asylum camps in Southeast Asia, or who had recently returned to Vietnam. Under ROVR, certain Vietnamese could register for consideration for a resettlement interview with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Fewer than 20 ROVR cases remain to be processed.

FY 2004 Admissions Program

In FY 2003, 1,724 refugees entered the United States from East Asia. The majority of FY 2003 admissions were from Vietnam. Other nationalities resettled included Burmese, Cambodians, Chinese, and Indonesians. The ceiling in FY 2004 for refugees from East Asia is 6,500. Interviews of the remaining ODP and ROVR applicants should be completed in 2004.

In December 2003, the USG authorized the processing of a group of some 15,000 Lao-Hmong in Thailand who have been living at Wat (a Buddhist temple) Tham Krabok for more than a decade. Some 5,000 of this population are believed to have previously been in refugee camps, but left the camps of their own accord in the early 1990s and moved to the Wat. The USG plans to begin accepting applications from this group in February 2004. Though we expect that the majority of the Lao-Hmong approved for U.S. resettlement will arrive during FY 2005, we currently anticipate that up to 2,000 will arrive in the United States during the final quarter of FY 2004.

In addition, the USG is in discussions with the Government of Vietnam (GVN) about reopening the In-Country Program for Vietnamese (VICP) closely associated with the USG prior to April 1975. GVN officials have agreed in principal to this proposal, and we are currently beginning discussions on the modalities for opening the program. We anticipate that refugee admissions under the VICP would not begin until sometime in FY 2005.

We also have under consideration the possibility of opening a resettlement program for 1,400 Vietnamese who remained in the Philippines after the CPA ended in June 1996.



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