



A Chronology of the Indochinese Refugee Movement 1975-80

Abbreviations:

E&I - Employment and Immigration Canada (Manpower and Immigration's successor)

DND - The Department of National Defence

UNHCR - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1975

- Khmer Rouge and Pathet Lao seize Phnom Penh and Vientiane. Saigon falls to Communist forces on 30 April. Some 130,000 people flee from South Vietnam and are rescued by the U.S. Navy.
- April: The Canadian visa office in Hong Kong sends Promise of Visa letters to 3,500 families (approximately 15,000 persons) in Vietnam sponsored by relatives in Canada.
- 6 April: Indochinese orphans start to arrive in Canada.
- 24 April: Canadian staff at the embassy in Saigon are evacuated.
- 1 May: E&I Minister Robert Andras announces that Canada will accept 3,000 Vietnamese and Kampuchean refugees beyond those sponsored by relatives: 2,000 from U.S. refugee centres and 1,000 from other countries.
- 7-23 May: A Canadian team arrives in Guam and processes 1,400 Vietnamese refugees evacuated by the U.S. military. Subsequently Canadian officials from Ottawa and from consulates in Los Angeles and New Orleans process thousands more from military bases in the continental U.S.
- May-June: People start fleeing Vietnam in small boats, beginning the "boat people" phenomenon.

1976

- October: The remaining 180 places from the 3,000 Indochinese target of May 1975 are applied to boat people.
- December: Since May 1975, 6,500 Indochinese have arrived in Canada—4,200 sponsored by relatives and 2,300 unsponsored.
- An estimated 5,619 boat people arrive in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong and the Philippines.

1977

- August: Cabinet authorizes resettlement of another 450 "small boat escapees" (SBE).
- December: Heavy fighting between Vietnam and Cambodia is preceded by the expulsion from Kampuchea of large numbers of ethnic Vietnamese.

- An estimated 21,276 boat people arrive in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Brunei and Macau.

1978

- 13 January: Canada announces that it will accept 50 SBE families a month.
- E&I Minister Bud Cullen approves the Private Refugee Sponsorship Program.
- March: Hanoi nationalizes the remaining, mainly ethnic Chinese, private businesses.
- July: The Canadian government launches the Private Refugee Sponsorship Program and releases the E&I pamphlet "Sponsoring Refugees: Facts for Canadian Groups and Organizations"**LINK**.
- September: *The Southern Cross*, a freighter carrying 1,200 refugees, beaches on an Indonesian island. E&I Singapore accepts refugees with links to Canada.
- October: Detailed instructions for selecting Indochinese refugees stress the need to keep extended families together.
- 11 November: Two E&I officers arrive in Bangkok to process refugees in Thailand.
- November: The [Hai Hong](#), a freighter carrying 2,500 refugees (mostly ethnic Chinese), arrives off Malaysia. E&I Minister Bud Cullen announces that Canada will accept 604 of the refugees. The story raises Canadian awareness of the Indochinese refugee problem.
- December: Vietnam invades Cambodia.
- 7 December: The [Indochinese Designated Class Regulations](#) simplify selection rules.
- 11-12 December: A UNHCR-led consultation in Geneva highlights the growing number of Indochinese refugees in Southeast Asia and the need for more resettlement opportunities.
- 20 December: Cabinet decides that 5,000 Indochinese will be admitted under Canada's first Annual Refugee Plan. Refugee charter flights begin.
- Almost 106,500 boat people arrive in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Brunei and Macau.
- Between 1975 and 1978, 9,060 Indochinese refugees are resettled in Canada.

1979

- March: The Mennonite Central Committee signs a Refugee Sponsorship Master Agreement with E&I. Agreements with other faith communities and organizations quickly follow.
- April to May: Some 80,000 Cambodians are displaced towards the Thai border as a result of fighting between the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese army.
- April to June: Boat arrivals increase dramatically in countries surrounding the South China Sea: April—26,602; May—51,139; and June—56,941.

- May: A matching centre is established in Ottawa to match incoming refugees with sponsors.
- 22 May: A Conservative government replaces the Liberals. Ron Atkey becomes Minister of E&I and Flora MacDonald becomes Secretary of State for External Affairs. Both engage immediately on the Indochinese refugee file.
- June: The government increases the target for Indochinese refugees from 5,000 to 8,000 and asks the voluntary sector to sponsor an additional 4,000.
- 28 June: Some 388 private groups respond, sponsoring 1,604 refugees.
- Late June: Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore announce that they have “reached the limit of their endurance and [will] not accept any new arrivals”.
- July: Project 4000 in Ottawa, Operation Lifeline in Toronto, and the Vancouver Task Force, among many others, promote group sponsorships across Canada.
- Some 747 groups sponsor 3,800 refugees.
- 20-21 July: The UN Secretary General calls an emergency conference in Geneva.
- This conference concludes with a three-way international understanding:
 - ASEAN countries will continue to provide temporary asylum;
 - Vietnam will try to promote orderly departures and prevent illegal departures; and
 - Western countries will accelerate the rate of third-country resettlement. Canada announces it will accept 50,000 refugees. This includes the 8,000 announced in June plus 21,000 sponsored privately, matched by 21,000 government-assisted refugees.
- The government charters 76 flights to transport 15,800 refugees by the end of the year
- July to August: 11 DND flights transport more than 2,000 refugees from Hong Kong.
- August: Staging areas are established to receive refugee charter flights at Canadian Forces bases Longue Pointe (Montreal) and Greisbach Barracks (Edmonton).
- 8 and 14 August: The first charter flights arrive in Montreal and Edmonton respectively.
- October: The presence of 800,000 starving Cambodians on the Thai border creates a new humanitarian crisis.
- December: Ministers Atkey and MacDonald announce that the government will no longer match each privately sponsored refugee with a government-assisted refugee; the refugee target will remain at 50,000; the \$15 million in savings will be applied to Cambodian relief. The announcement is met with disapproval from sponsors.
- A total of 23,583 refugees have arrived in Canada: 8,211 sponsored privately; 615 sponsored by family; and 10,043 sponsored by the government. Some 5,456 private groups have applied to sponsor 29,269 refugees, far surpassing the government’s call for 21,000.

1980

- February: \$1.3 million is allocated to the administrative costs of organizations coordinating sponsorship activities.
- 16 February: A Liberal government replaces the Conservatives.

- 2 April: E&I Minister Lloyd Axworthy **LINK** announces that 10,000 additional government-assisted refugees will be accepted by the end of 1980, bringing the total to 60,000.
- 8 December: Flight #181 arrives in Longue Pointe, Quebec from Bangkok, carrying the last of Canada's 60,049 refugees. Of these, 32,281 (53.8 per cent) are privately sponsored; 1,790 (3 per cent) are sponsored by relatives; and 25,978 (43.2 per cent) are assisted by the government.

Source of statistics:

Employment and Immigration Canada: The Indochinese Refugees: the Canadian Response, 1979 and 1980 (1981, Department of Supply and Services)