
of human rights in lowland Laos as well, particularly against the non-ethnic Laotians. An imposed restructuring of the Laotian economy, forced Labour camps and political indoctrination are all part of the picture. It is not surprising therefore that several thousand Laotians continue to leave their country each month.

Vietnam

But the aspect of the Indochina refugee problem that has seized the attention of the international community is the exodus of Vietnamese from their country in boats. It is true that the flight of those closely connected with the former south Vietnamese Government was anticipated after the fall of Saigon in 1975. What has come however as a shock to the international community and a blow to the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries of the region, is the dramatically increasing outward movement which dates from the spring of 1978. Early in 1978 it averaged 3,500 a month. By the end of the year it reached a level of 10-20,000 a month. It is now rising again. The estimated outflow for April was 25,000, and there are few signs that it will diminish in the immediate future. This is no minor phenomenon indicating localized discontent; it is an exodus. When a flow of people reaches these proportions, there must be something seriously wrong in the way in which they are being treated by their government.

Why the Exodus from Vietnam?

The situation in Vietnam is complex. The country has been disrupted by decades of warfare. It has recently suffered serious floods. There is a shortage of basic food staples and for a variety of reasons, the economy is in serious difficulty. Military activity has not ceased; Vietnam is engaged in military activity in Cambodia, and although open hostilities with China were short-lived, the tension on the border continues.

Are these factors the cause of the outpouring of refugees from Vietnam? It is our belief that while they are contributing factors, they are not at the heart of the problem. All evidence available to us indicates that human rights are being seriously disregarded in Vietnam and that there is a deliberate Vietnamese policy to rid the country of certain elements of its population.

The refugees face tremendous hazards in leaving. Many thousands have perished at sea, or as a result of attacks by pirates. It is a telling reflection of the situation in Vietnam that the prospect of such a fate should be more attractive than remaining at home. The precipitate outflow from Vietnam means that the refugees either will perish or will turn up unwelcome on the shores of countries which have their own serious social, political and economic problems.

Humanity demands that the countries of asylum take in the refugees and for the most part the response of the countries of Southeast Asia has been extremely generous. We might ask ourselves how Canadians would respond if thousands of individuals from any other country landed uninvited on our shores. With the increasing burden, and the resulting social and economic tensions, we are seeing an increasing tendency of the countries concerned to react less generously and to seek to discourage refugees from landing on their shores. The refugees then have no choice but to try another nearby country and, once again, to risk being rejected. A rigid policy on the part of
