

# Statement on refugee assistance in Laos and Cambodia

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From the office of

# SENATOR HIRAM L. FONG

of Hawaii

Statement by U. S. Senator Hiram L. Fong  
To the Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees  
On Refugee Assistance in Laos and Cambodia  
Tuesday, May 9, 1972

I want to welcome you Mr. O'Connor and Ambassador Sullivan, and to thank you for taking the time at this critical period in world history and of crisis in Indochina to come here again to inform the Members of this Subcommittee and the public of the current situation in Laos and Cambodia.

As I have previously stated, with the massive six-pronged invasion by North Vietnam, using troops, tanks, armored vehicles, missiles and artillery, the mask of hypocrisy has been torn from the war in Vietnam.

Not only the people of South Vietnam, but the people in Laos and Cambodia have been the innocent and unfortunate victims of this horrendous aggression on the part of the North Vietnamese.

In Laos and Cambodia, as in South Vietnam, the people are fleeing from their homes. But for this North Vietnamese aggression, there would be no refugees in this area and no refugee problems with which the peoples of the world and this Subcommittee would be concerned.

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I am much impressed with the courage and determination of these people not to fall into the hands or control of the North Vietnamese. Some of these people have been forced to flee not once, but time and time again. Even after they had worked hard and were hopefully being resettled in what they prayed would be a safe area, they have again been faced with the ugly reality of the North Vietnamese Army closing in upon them.

I understand that there are approximately 100,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos -- aiding and abetting the Communist Pathet Lao. Or, are they now called the Lao Peoples Liberation Army?

I am much impressed with what our Government is doing to alleviate the suffering of the quarter of a million or so refugees generated by the North Vietnamese aggressors.

The Follow-Up Review of the Refugee Relief Program in Laos, prepared by the Comptroller General in response to Senator Kennedy's request, showed that AID has increased its pre-Nixon contribution for FY 1969 from \$8,423,000 to \$16,284,000 for FY 1972. That is almost double what AID contributed in FY 1969 to alleviate refugee suffering, to help resettle the refugees, to educate them and to develop their economy!

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Public Law 480 commodity assistance has increased from \$800,000 in FY 1969 to \$1,400,000 in FY 1972. The contributions of other government agencies apparently have also been increased.

Especially in view of the vastness of the problem, I am most impressed with the GAO report as to the AID program.

The GAO report, at page 10, notes "the high priority assigned refugee affairs" by AID and credits AID for many improvements in the program since the previous GAO reports. I should like to hear from you gentlemen on your plans to further improve this program.

I find nothing in this report to substantiate newspaper reports that AID is financing any military activities. The GAO report points out that AID has financed some assistance such as food and medical services for military and paramilitary personnel and their dependents. These people, too, are victims of the North Vietnamese aggressors -- they, too, need help.

I feel the only humane thing, the only moral thing, is to feed these people too and to see that they too receive much-needed medical services. Whether that assistance be with AID funds is not the most important consideration.

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The vital thing is that these people too are human; these people too are hungry; these people too are sick and wounded -- these people too need help. Whether that help comes from AID funds or DOD or CIA funds is a secondary consideration.

In any event, apparently the payment of this needed assistance is being taken over by the other agencies involved.

With respect to Cambodia, the refugee problem seems to be very different from that in South Vietnam or Laos. The North Vietnamese invasions have resulted in Cambodians fleeing from Communist controlled territory, and Cambodians fleeing from combat activity and air strikes. Apparently, the Cambodians return to their homes as soon as possible or are taken care of by their families.

The U. S. has no specific program for assisting refugees in Cambodia. That is solely in the control of the Cambodian government.

I am, nonetheless, struck by the absence of hard data as to the number of refugees and of war related casualties. The GAO report cites data furnished by Cambodian Government officials, but concludes that the number of refugees in Cambodia is largely conjectural and that their investigators found no basis for assessing the reliability of

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any over-all figures on refugees in Cambodia. Nonetheless, I feel the GAO report has served a useful purpose in describing the conditions of the refugee centers which were visited.

The Cambodian Government, according to the GAO report, indicates it is taking into account the Cambodian tradition of families caring for their own in time of need and not counting on government, strangers, or foreigners indefinitely to assume that burden.

This is an admirable tradition -- so rarely found today in the so-called developed or modern parts of the globe.

As long as the size of the burden is not beyond the Cambodians' own capacity to deal with in a traditional manner, I feel we should not rush in and help destroy that admirable tradition of self-reliance. From everything we now know, families and friends do take care of the largest part of these displaced people. That group that cannot be handled in this manner whatever the reason might be, are apparently also receiving some individual assistance as a result of the Cambodian Government's efforts, in keeping with the general standard of living in Cambodia.

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According to the GAO report, apparently the Cambodian Government had not as of October 1971 requested humanitarian assistance from the United States. While the Cambodian Government effort is not fully co-ordinated, I feel that unless requested by the Cambodian Government or the international organizations, we should not interfere with the operations of this independent government's activities.

I see no reason for our having a guilt complex about the refugees -- we have not created them. The United States is prepared to help these people meet their needs regardless of the fact that we did not cause the distress, but only when their Government indicates such help would be useful and necessary.

On the other hand, I am most anxious to learn from you and the field representatives, I understand you were to have here today, exactly what the refugee picture is in Laos and Cambodia as of this time.

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