

STATEMENT ON VOICE'S REFUGEE PROGRAM

4 November 2019

In response to a news program aired by a media outlet, CBC in Canada, on October 10, 2019 concerning 'a special program to resettle Vietnamese boat people' as well as false and defamatory accusations made against VOICE by others regarding our role in assisting this group since 2006, VOICE wishes to reiterate and confirm as follows:

1. VOICE staff helped implement the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Government of Canada and the Vietnamese Canadian Federation (VCF) on December 19, 2012 with utmost integrity and respect for the program. None ever charged any of the applicants any money for our assistance and service starting from 2006 when we first advocated for the group's resettlement until 2017 when the last case was resettled in Canada.
2. None of VOICE staff who worked on the caseload has any family, personal or business links with any of the boat people in the group assisted by VOICE since the start of the program.
3. VOICE, its affiliates, the VCF, sponsors and supporters around the world helped raise the needed funds for the entire group. None was left behind despite the high costs required by Canada (see Table of Costs attached) including medical expenses incurred by some in the group over a long period of time.
4. To date, Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. As such, all refugees, stateless or otherwise, recognized by UNHCR or not, are considered illegal and subject to arrest and deportation. Under Thai laws, they are not allowed to work, to travel, and their children are not entitled to education.
5. Despite the difficulties and their non-legal status, all strove to make a living using all means to survive. For most it was just enough to get by, a few died as a result of hardship and neglect over the years, while some might have done better than others. This should not and does not make them ineligible for the program. Once verified and referred to Immigration Canada by Fr. Peter Namwong who first introduced VOICE to the group and found to be eligible for the program, then we helped the applicants submit their applications for adjudication by Immigration Canada. See attached Fr. Namwong's Affirmation confirming the same.
6. Further, the fact that during their decades of statelessness, some of them might have been arrested, assaulted, deported (they are usually dropped at the border of Thailand and Cambodia) and then returned to Thailand seeking refuge does not make them ineligible for the program. In fact, it was precisely because of their stateless predicament

that we spearheaded our campaign over a decade ago to resettle them in a safe, third country.

7. As pro bono lawyers working on the caseload, VOICE staff only paid attention to the specific criteria set out under the MOU which are for 'persons who are Vietnamese residing in Thailand without status and who:
 - Left Vietnam between 1984 and 1991,
 - Were named by the VCF in correspondence with CIC in 2008'. (See MOU attached)
8. Consequently, it was not VOICE's job nor did VOICE have the capacity or the authority to investigate the applicants' economic standing, what they might have owned, whom they got married to and their spouses' economic standing, or specific instances of their exact whereabouts and how they got there. Our main task was to help them with logistical matters, find sponsors for them, raise enough funds to pay for all the costs, and work with VOICE Canada to ensure their smooth transition and resettlement per the MOU requirement.
9. As already confirmed with CBC in July 2019, it is therefore unreasonable to suggest that the few who might have fared economically better than most are not eligible to apply. In fact, we should celebrate it, that despite their statelessness, despite their living in fear, despite them not being allowed to travel or work under Thai laws, the refugees were able to survive and support their families and children. It is both unrealistic and inhumane to expect all of them to stay put in one place, desperate and hungry, waiting to be rescued during decades of statelessness in Thailand.
10. VOICE therefore welcomes further research, assistance, and investigations if needs be, by all so that the issue can be explored in details and the full and whole truth comes out.
11. At the same time, we believe that this last group of Vietnamese boat people deserve better treatment and those who are still stranded in Thailand seeking asylum deserve much more. As such, VOICE stands by its staff exemplary conduct and compassionate record in assisting this group and others throughout the past decade. We are proud of our pro bono service given to refugees and ready to defend and honor the sacrifices made by them, be it now, later, legal, or otherwise. Attached is our legal notice already sent to one of the accusers demonstrating our commitment to truth and justice for all.

Manila, November 4, 2019



Hoi Trinh
Founder & Executive Director