



# Department of Justice

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STATEMENT

BY

THE HONORABLE GRIFFIN B. BELL  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP & INTERNATIONAL LAW

ON

THE PAROLE OF 15,000 INDOCHINESE REFUGEES

9:30 A.M.  
THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 1977  
2141 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the proposal to parole into the United States an additional 15,000 Indochinese refugees.

As you are aware, Mr. Chairman, Section 212(d)(5) of the Immigration and Nationality Act states that the Attorney General

"may in his discretion parole into the United States . . . for emergent reasons or for reasons deemed strictly in the public interest any alien applying for admission to the United States."

The law expressly requires that the exercise of discretion be based on facts showing the emergent or public interest reasons for parole. I have given the facts underlying this proposal very careful consideration, and it is my present judgment that parole for the 15,000 Indochinese refugees is, under the circumstances, warranted.

As I told Chairman Eilberg and Congressman Rodino last Tuesday, I am well aware of Congressional interest in these matters. I think it important that Congress have an opportunity to study fully proposals for the exercise of parole such as this and the facts upon which such action is based.

Accordingly, I sent to Congressman Rodino and Senator Eastland, the chairmen of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, last Wednesday, July 27, copies of the correspondence between Secretary Vance and myself concerning his request to me to exercise parole in favor of 15,000 Indochinese refugees. I would like to ask that these documents be made part of the record.

I also submit for your consideration the recommendation of Leonel Castillo, Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, on this issue. To allow an opportunity for Congressional comment, I indicated in these letters that it is my present intention to authorize the parole of these 15,000 refugees on August 11, 1977.

The present parole divides itself into two groups of refugees. One group of 7,000 consists of refugees, mostly Vietnamese, who have escaped their homeland by boat. These refugees are often passed at sea by ships hesitant to come to their rescue because few nearby ports will accept them. Many drown or die of other causes.

Those who reach safety often find themselves restricted to their boats or a narrow strip of beach. Too often, men, women, and children have actually been turned back to the perils of the sea.

I do not believe that this government should ignore such a condition. It presents, in my judgment, an emergent situation, and I believe it is in the national interest to act promptly to alleviate it.

Our granting of parole to 7,000 such refugees, along with the assistance of other countries, will meet the immediate emergency, encourage ship captains and countries of first asylum to welcome future refugees, and give us time in which to plan how to cope with the longer-term problem. Refugees can be expected to continue to seek to escape the new communist governments in their homelands in the foreseeable future.

The second group for parole consideration consists of 8,000 refugees, primarily from Laos, who have crossed by river or land into Thailand. These refugees, too, find themselves in most difficult straits. They are restricted to camps with minimal living standards and few prospects for the future.

Of the some 81,000 such refugees, we propose to select about ten per cent. Those eligible for consideration would be those who can lay special claim to consideration for acceptance into the United States. As in previous parole actions, they would include close relatives of Indochinese already in the United States, those who formerly served the U.S. government in Indochina, and others who were associated with United States programs and policies in their homelands. I consider it both a compelling emergent humanitarian reason and in the public interest to assist these refugees who have special ties to this country.

I am, of course, acutely aware of the committee's concern as to the various safeguards that should be applied in the screening and placing of these refugees. I want to assure you that the safeguards will be taken into account in developing procedures for implementation of this parole. Commissioner Castillo will speak to these procedures in greater detail.

Finally, I share with you a concern that we look beyond this parole action to the longer-term problem. Mr. Holbrooke from the Department of State will discuss with you his thoughts on what the future may hold and how we might address it in the international community. For my part, I would point out to you that the President has directed that an Inter-Agency Task Force be established to develop a longer-term program for dealing with the Indochinese refugee problem. The State Department chaired the first meeting of the Task Force July 22, and Task Force working groups have met several times since.

Clearly, we need such a program. We will be working on it, and the Administration will be working with this committee as we proceed.