

Christmas get-together in Ottawa: welcoming Vietnamese refugees from the Philippines

The Vietnamese Canadian Centre, in collaboration with the Vietnamese Canadian Community of Ottawa, has held a Christmas party on December 20, 2008, at the Plant Recreation Centre, to welcome the Vietnamese refugees who recently came to Canada under the *Freedom at Last* Project. This is an initiative undertaken in June 2007 by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation in collaboration with VOICE (Vietnamese Overseas Initiative for Conscience Empowerment) and other organizations and individuals to bring to Canada for resettlement the refugees who had been stranded in the Philippines for almost 20 years.

The Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism -- the guest of honour of this event -- came at 6:45 p.m. He was greeted by the representatives of the Vietnamese Canadian Federation (Danh T. Nguyen, Vice-President; Can D. Le, Commissioner for External Affairs & National Coordinator of the *Freedom at Last* Project), the Vietnamese Canadian Community of Ottawa (Danh Lam Forsythe, President), Ha Quyen Nguyen, Chair of the Organizing Committee, and the representatives of some sponsor groups as well as some refugees. After receiving a bouquet of flowers from 3 refugee children, the Minister was accompanied into the grand hall and introduced to other guests and participants by Can Le.

Following the buffet dinner, the presentation of gifts and entertainment began with the Canadian and Vietnamese (Republic of Vietnam's) national anthems presented by the students of the Tay Son Vietnamese Language School and the refugee children, and then with the greetings by Danh Nguyen and Danh Lam Forsythe.

In his remarks, Minister Kenney welcomed the refugees to Canada on behalf of the Canadian government. He thanked the Vietnamese community for having taken the efforts to help the refugees resettle in Canada. He also commended the community for being able to raise \$700,000 for the Vietnamese Boat People Museum Project (*). Following the Minister's speech, Paul Dewar, Member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre; Yasir Naqvi, Member of the Ontario Legislature for Ottawa Centre; and Diane Holmes, City of Ottawa Councillor for Somerset Ward, all had warm welcoming words for the refugees and compliments for the Vietnamese community.

The program of the evening continued with a presentation by Can Le on the *Freedom at Last* Project. Of 91 families (275 persons) eligible to apply for resettlement in Canada under this project, 82 families (245 persons) have been approved, with 75 families (219 persons) having arrived in Canada. On the financial side, as of October 31st, 2008, the Vietnamese Canadian Federation has received about \$230,000 and spent about \$160,000, including \$125,000 transferred to VOICE's office in Manila, Philippines to help the refugees cover the application, medical examination, and landing fees, and transportation costs in the Philippines and from the Philippines to Canada; \$28,000 refunded to sponsor groups; and \$6,000 on administration.

In the presentation of Christmas gifts, Minister Kenney and other guests talked to each of the refugee families, and gave them gifts consisting of clothes, school supplies for children, kitchen wares, etc. These were donated or purchased with donations from several individuals and businesses in the community. On this occasion, Danh Lam Forsythe also gave to the refugees complimentary admission and refreshment tickets for the forthcoming Vietnamese New-Year festival, donated by the Vietnamese Canadian Community of Ottawa.

The music entertainment was provided by the Vietnamese Alliance Church choir, Tuan Hoa, Duy Vinh, Hong Nhung, Sabine Huynh, Anh Thu, Avery (Viet), Quoc Bao. Sabine Huynh and Thanh Dung served as MCs. Quoc Viet played the role of Santa Claus. The sound system was provided and operated free of charge by Phu Hue.

About 150 people were on hand for this occasion. Also present among the guests, in addition to Minister Kenney, Paul Dewar, Yasir Naqvi, and Diane Holmes, were: Mary Lee of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board; John Meideros of the Ottawa Police Service; Barbara Wright, former Headmistress of the Cambridge Community Elementary School; Tri Q. Le, Chairman of the Vietnamese Canadian Buddhist Association of Ottawa (Tu An Temple), Vice-President of the Executive Committee of the Vietnamese Canadian Senior Citizens Association of Ottawa, and Acting President of the Board of Directors of the Vietnamese Canadian Centre; Pastor Cuong T. Do of the Vietnamese Alliance Church; Minh V. Le, President of the Vietnamese Catholic Community; and Hai T. Ngo, Ottawa Citizenship Court Judge.

(*) Including \$300,000 already received by the project or firmly committed and \$400,000 from the eventual sale of the property owned by the Vietnamese Canadian Centre at 249 Rochester St., Ottawa. The Centre will move to the Museum after it is completed.

*News update provided by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation
www.vietfederation.ca*



*Minister Jason Kenney presenting Christmas gifts to refugee child
(Photo: VCF)*