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**Sponsoring Vietnamese refugees in the Philippines:
*Project Freedom at Last***

Announcement #1

Summary

The Vietnamese Canadian Federation (VCF) is campaigning for the formation of sponsor groups to help Vietnamese refugees who have been stranded for close to 20 years in the Philippines resettle in Canada.

In a truly voluntary spirit, these sponsor groups will provide basic resettlement assistance to the refugees, for example, by arranging for accommodations, medical insurance, employment, language or training courses for adults, and children's school enrollment. **Sponsors will not be required to sign any legally-binding agreement with the government.**

The VCF will work with SOS VietPhi and VOICE (Vietnamese Overseas Initiative for Conscience Empowerment), a U.S.-based non-profit organization, to raise funds to help the refugees cover pre-arrival expenses (including the application processing, medical examinations, permanent residence fees, and transportation costs), and the sponsor groups will do the same for the resettlement phase, both based on the financial situation of the specific cases.

1. Background

After 5 years of lobbying by the Vietnamese community in Canada, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) announced on May 10, 2007 that the government will facilitate the immigration of the Vietnamese who remain in the Philippines based on humanitarian and compassionate consideration. The applications of those who don't qualify for admission to Canada under the Family Class or the Federal Skilled Worker Class will be assessed based on this consideration.

At present, there are 161 persons (31 families and 68 individuals) who need resettlement in Canada.

2. Application Process

CIC indicated that it would start to accept the applications for admission to Canada after it has received the list of these refugees from the VCF. In addition to basic biographical information, such as the applicants' names, ages, and family composition, CIC needs to know whether they have relatives in Canada, and the province of their intended destination. This last item is required since CIC must inform the Quebec government if there are people who plan to resettle in Quebec – because it has its own immigrant processing procedure.

Those who apply on humanitarian and compassionate consideration have to show that they have the potential for successful resettlement through their linguistic and professional skills, their work experience in the Philippines over the last 20 years or so, and especially by showing that they have sponsors in Canada who will be available to help them upon their arrival. This is why it is important for the Vietnamese community to form sponsor groups to help these refugees.

The VCF sent CIC an initiative list on June 15. Therefore, the refugees can now submit their applications. VOICE's office in the Philippines – set up by lawyer Hoi Trinh – is currently providing assistance to the refugees to assist them with this task.

3. Role of Sponsor Groups

At the meeting with the VCF's representatives on May 18 held to discuss the implementation of the government's new policy, CIC officials indicated that sponsor groups **don't have to sign any legally-binding agreement with the government**. Sponsors are expected to provide to the refugees – on a voluntary basis -- assistance on basic resettlement tasks, such as arranging for accommodations, medical insurance, employment, language or training courses for adults, and children's school enrollment.

4. Financial Requirements

From the time the refugees submit their application to their arrival in Canada, there are a number of expenses to be covered. The following estimates are given in Canadian dollars.

a/ Pre-Arrival

- Application processing fee: about \$570 for adults and \$150 for dependent children (under 22 years of age).
- Permanent residence fee: \$490 for heads of family and spouses.
- Medical examination (in the Philippines): approximately \$100 for adults, \$50 for children (14 years of age and under).
- Transportation to Canada (by air): \$1,100 for adults and \$900 for children (3-11).
- Transportation to Manila for application submission and interviews (from \$100 to \$500, depending on the distance from the refugee's residence to Manila)

b/ Post- Arrival (including the initial costs of setting up the household)

- Rent: \$400 for individuals, \$800 for a family of 4 (husband, wife, and 2 small children)
- Food: \$400 for individuals, \$1,000 for a family (defined as above)

- Miscellaneous expenses (including medical insurance, telephone/cable/internet, transportation): about \$400 for individuals; \$700 for families.

Normally, for those who are in good health and willing to work right away, sponsor groups may need to help them from one to three months after their arrival in Canada, at the following costs **(if they can't support themselves)**:

- Individuals: from \$1,200 to \$3,600
- Families: from \$2,500 to \$7,500.

The VCF has written to the Honourable Diane Finley, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, to ask her to waive the application processing fee for the refugees, and to give them transportation loans. We're currently awaiting her response.

5. Fund-Raising Strategy and Division of Responsibilities

The VCF, SOS VietPhi, and VOICE will raise funds to help cover the refugees' pre-arrival costs, while the sponsor groups will do the same for their post-arrival costs, in both cases to help those **who don't have the financial means to support themselves.**

If any money is left after the pre-arrival expenses, it will be used to help sponsor groups cover the resettlement costs.

6. VCF's Role and Its Relations with Sponsor Groups

The VCF will take on the following tasks:

- Establish the *Coordinating Committee for the Sponsorship of Vietnamese Refugees in the Philippines* (CCSVRP – the Coordinating Committee) to carry out this project, called *Project Freedom at Last*;
- Open 2 bank accounts (in Canadian dollars and U.S. dollars) through the Vietnamese Canadian Centre (VCC), its charitable affiliate, for the project;
- The Coordinating Committee will: (i) serve as the contact with government departments and agencies, organizations, and the media; (ii) coordinate with the VCF's member associations, SOS VietPhi, VOICE, and other organizations in the formation of local sponsor groups and in fund-raising activities; (iii) liaise with local sponsor groups to provide information and assistance if required.

Local sponsor groups will:

- Provide assistance to the refugees in their applications.
- Raise internal funds for the sponsorship if required.
- Provide resettlement services upon the refugees' arrival in Canada.

In the case where a sponsor group doesn't have the means to provide tax receipts for the donations, they can be forwarded to the Coordinating Committee. The Committee will then refund the sponsor groups for their expenses and issue tax receipts to the contributors. If a sponsor group doesn't need all the funds that it is able to raise, the remaining money will be used

to help other groups which may need it, or for other charitable activities, based on the provisions of current Canadian tax laws.

7. Financial Management

All financial records of Project *Freedom at Last* will be kept separately from those of the VCF or the VCC. The financial statement of the project will be subject to an annual audit similar to those of the VCF and the VCC. Welch & Company LLP is the current auditor of both the VCF and the VCC.

The Coordinating Committee will provide regular updates of its financial situation.

8. Experience with Past Sponsorship Projects

In 1982, with a fund of \$3,000, the Vietnamese Canadian Community of Ottawa was able to sponsor 3 young men and a family of 4 (husband, wife and 2 small children). The reason why it cost so little to sponsor this group was that within a month after their arrival in Canada, the adult members were able to work to support themselves. Between 1988 and 1992, the community sponsored another 100 refugees. At this time, all of the refugees who were sponsored by the community are doing very well; most of them work in the high-tech sector, own businesses or work as self-employed professionals.

Also during the period 1988-1992, the VCF, together with its member associations and other organizations, sponsored about 1,000 refugees who were facing forced repatriation.

9. Forthcoming Tasks

- The VCF will:
 - Establish the *Coordinating Committee for the Sponsorship of Vietnamese Refugees in the Philippines* to carry out Project *Freedom at Last*. The Coordinating Committee will start the fund-raising activities right away.
 - Work with its member associations and other Vietnamese organizations in the formation of local sponsor groups.
- VOICE will prepare synopses of the refugees for forwarding to the VCF. These documents will be sent to sponsor groups for consideration in the determination of the families or individuals to be sponsored.
- Sponsor groups will contact the sponsored refugees directly to provide the information necessary for their applications and to give them a preliminary orientation about their forthcoming resettlement in Canada.

It may take several months for the processing of the applications and for medical and security checks to be completed. It is therefore expected that the admitted refugees will arrive in Canada, at the earliest, between 6 months to one year after the submission of their applications.

10. Financial Contributions

All donations to Project *Freedom at Last*, in cheques or money orders (cash to be avoided), should be made payable to “**Vietnamese Canadian Centre / Project *Freedom at Last***”, and sent to the following address:

Vietnamese Canadian Centre
249 Rochester St., Ottawa, ON K1R 7M9 CANADA

Donations of CDA \$5 or above will be issued a tax receipt which can be used in either Canada or the U.S.

In order to avoid possible misdirection of the donations, contributors are asked to send them directly to the above address or through reliable local organizations. Donations from the U.S. or elsewhere can be sent to Ottawa or to VOICE’s office in Washington, D.C., c/o its representatives, lawyers Hoi Trinh or Lisa Nguyen (1802 S St. N.W., Washington D.C. 20009 U.S.A.)

After the termination of this project, the VCF will consult its member associations, VOICE, SOS VietPhi, sponsor groups, and contributing organizations on the disposal of the remaining funds, if any, based on the provisions of current Canadian tax laws.

11. Contact

For further information, please contact the ***Coordinating Committee for the Sponsorship of Vietnamese Refugees in the Philippines*** at the postal address, telephone or fax numbers, or email address shown above.

12. Conclusion

The Canadian government has shown its generosity in its willingness to facilitate the immigration of the Vietnamese refugees who remain in the Philippines. As Thoi Bao (the largest Vietnamese newspaper in Canada) said in its recent editorial (June 22, 2007), “Now that Canada has opened its door, the whole Vietnamese community, for the sake of its honour, needs to ensure that the refugees are able to resettle in this country.”

In this spirit, the VCF calls upon all religious organizations, Vietnamese associations and news media, and benefactors, not only in Canada but also around the world, to support this project to provide the unfortunate refugees who have lived in limbo in the Philippines for the last 20 years the opportunity to finally rebuild their lives in peace and freedom.

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