

**Trung Tâm Người Việt  
Canada**



**Vietnamese Canadian Centre  
Centre vietnamien du Canada**

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Charitable Organization Registration No. 0772350-59-10

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Twenty-nine years later:  
A book on the 1979 Project 4000 in Ottawa**

***Gift of Freedom: How Ottawa welcomed the Vietnamese,  
Cambodian, and Laotian refugees* by Brian Buckley**

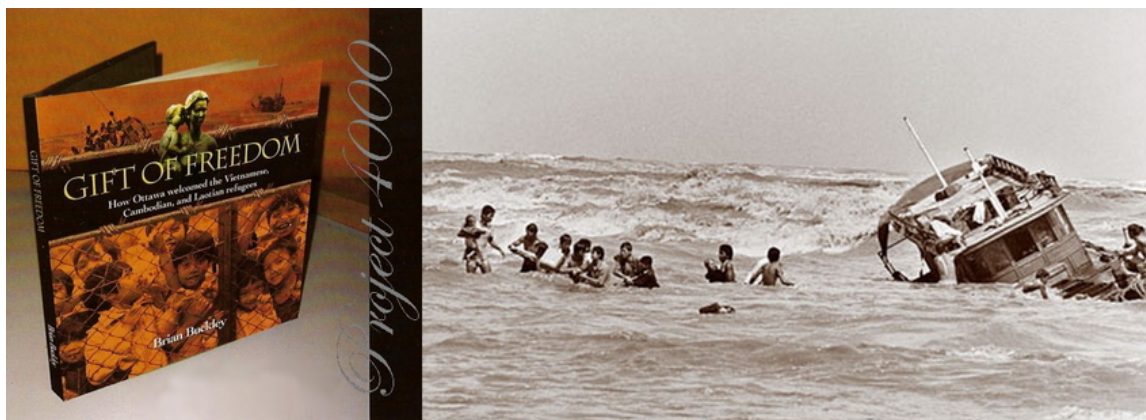
### **Book Launch**

**Location: Jean Piggot Hall, Ottawa City Hall**

**Date: May 3rd, 2008**

**Time: 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm**

**Sponsor: Vietnamese Canadian Centre**



The Vietnamese Canadian Centre will sponsor the launching of the book *Gift of Freedom: How Ottawa welcomed the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees*, in conjunction with the Vietnamese Cultural Day to be held jointly with the Vietnamese Community of Ottawa, Saturday May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 at the Ottawa City Hall. While the Vietnamese Cultural Day will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., the book launch will take place between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.

Written by Brian Buckley, the book is published with the financial support of the City of Ottawa and the Community Foundation of Ottawa.

**Project 4000** was a historical event, not only to the Vietnamese community, but to all the citizens of Canada, since it shows that private citizens can work together to deal effectively with

a major humanitarian crisis. It was a model to other cities and set a shining example of grassroots involvement and participation in civic initiatives for future generations.

*Gift of Freedom: How Ottawa welcomed the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees* is published by General Store Publishing House of Renfrew, Ontario. The Vietnamese Canadian Centre is selling it at \$20.00 a copy to raise funds for the Vietnamese Boat People Museum Project, to be built in downtown Ottawa. The book is also available at most bookstores.

For more information please contact the Vietnamese Canadian Centre, 249 Rochester Street, Ottawa, ON K1R 7M9; tel. (613) 230-8282; fax (613) 230-8281; e-mail: [vietfederation@bellnet.ca](mailto:vietfederation@bellnet.ca); website: [vietfederation.ca](http://vietfederation.ca).

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For immediate release  
April 30, 2008

## **PROJECT 4000: AN OVERVIEW**

Following the fall of South Vietnam on April 30, 1975, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, who either worked with, or were supporters of, the government of the former Republic of Vietnam, or simply did not support the newly imposed Communist regime, were put in concentration camps (officially called *Re-Education Camps*) or sent to the *New Economic Zones* in remote areas. In addition, ethnic Chinese Vietnamese were forced to relocate or expelled from the country due to the political conflict between China and Vietnam.

The flow of refugees from Vietnam reached a critical phase in late 1978 due to the refusal of some neighbouring Asian countries to admit what were then called “the Boat People” because most fled in small, leaky boats in the perilous South China Sea. Thousands are believed to have perished at sea by drowning or starvation, raped or killed by pirates. Dennis McDermott, President of the Canadian Labour Congress at the time, summarized this situation as follows: “*It is crystal clear to us that the Vietnamese refugee problem has ballooned into a humanitarian crisis of global proportion and the only human way to react to such a situation is through decisive and immediate action.*”

In response to the plight of these refugees, Mayor Marion Dewar of the City of Ottawa called a meeting of community organizations, church groups, and social service agencies in the city in her office to find out how to help them. As a result, **Project 4000** was formed with the objective of campaigning for the admission of up to 4000 Boat People to the City of Ottawa through private sponsor groups. Similar community initiatives followed elsewhere in Canada.

Subsequently, the federal government under Prime Minister Joe Clark decided to accept 50,000 refugees, mostly Vietnamese, but also including Cambodians and Laotians who fled the newly established Communist regimes in their countries.

**Project 4000** was Ottawa's response to the Boat People crisis of 1979. Canadians from across the country were quick to offer help, but nowhere were volunteers mobilized so rapidly and in such enormous numbers, as in Ottawa.

Little more than two weeks elapsed from the initial meeting of church leaders, ethnic community representatives and immigration authorities in Mayor Dewar's office on June 27, 1979 until the rally at the Ottawa Civic Centre on July 12, and yet it was in this short period that the structure for one of the largest social movement organizations in Canada's history was formed.

Within a month of that rally, which attracted close to 3,000 people, most of the 347 sponsoring groups had been formed and registered at the local Immigration office.

The first meeting of the Board of Directors of **Project 4000** was held on August 2, 1979, and within 4 days of that event the first wave of 200 refugees arrived at Ottawa International Airport.

Among the many dates and events of interest that summer, was the appearance on July 7th of the first of a series of sponsorship request forms on the Ottawa Citizen. These advertisements, generously offered free of charge by the newspaper, continued daily for several weeks and allowed the project to match potential sponsors with others in the same neighbourhood. As a result people who had no more in common than a wish to help were moved spontaneously to make a legally binding commitment to one another for a full year. According to Immigration authorities, these commitments were upheld without exception.

**Project 4000** was able to bring in close to 2,000 refugees. A further 1,638 arrived under government sponsorship.

According to Immigration authorities, the support systems fostered by **Project 4000** and the social climate in the area have made Ottawa one of the best places in the country for refugee settlement, whether under Government or private sponsorship.

**Project 4000** was a huge risk, for both refugees and sponsors. It required a leap of faith on both parties but, in the end, Ottawa emerged greatly enriched from the experience.