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## **Press Release**

### ***Community parade in celebration of the Asian Heritage Month and the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Project 4000 Dedication of the future site for the Vietnamese Boat People Museum***

**May 31, 2009**

In celebration of the Asian Heritage Month and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Project 4000, the Vietnamese Canadian Federation, in collaboration with the Vietnamese Canadian Community of Ottawa and several Vietnamese organizations in Ottawa and other cities, will hold a community parade on Sunday, May 31, 2009. This parade will be followed by the dedication of the future site for the Vietnamese Boat People Museum, located at the intersection of Preston and Somerset Streets. A subsequent celebration reception will be hosted at the site.

Scheduled to start at 1:30 p.m. at the Vietnamese Canadian Centre, 249 Rochester St., the parade, led by the Ottawa Firefighters Band and with the participation of members of the Vietnamese communities in Montreal, Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo, will proceed along Gladstone Ave., Bronson Ave., Somerset St., and will end at the future site of the Museum.

Over the last three years, the Vietnamese Canadian community in the National Capital Region has teamed up with the Ottawa Asian Heritage Month Society and other Asian communities in the region to carry out a number of activities in celebration of the Asian Heritage Month. The parade will conclude the community's program of activities.

2009 also marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Project 4000*, an initiative spearheaded in 1979 by the late Marion Dewar, then Mayor of Ottawa, to rescue the Indochinese refugees – the majority of whom were Vietnamese boat people – who fled from the Communist regimes following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Thousands of these refugees were, at the time, stranded in Southeast Asia since they were not yet accepted for resettlement by Western countries.

Similar initiatives were undertaken across Canada, such as *Project Operation Lifeline* in Toronto, for the same purpose.

More than twenty years after the Vietnam War ended, there were still Vietnamese refugees living in limbo in the Philippines. Close to 300 of them were finally resettled in Canada under the *Humanitarian and Compassionate Program* that the government announced in May 2007.

Through the *Freedom at Last* Project undertaken by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation in collaboration with SOS VietPhi, a non-profit organization founded in 2005 to help bring the Vietnamese refugees in the Philippines to Canada, VOICE (Vietnamese Overseas Initiative for Community Empowerment, based in the U.S.), and many other Vietnamese organizations in Canada, the U.S., and Australia, 266 out of 274 people eligible for application for admission under this program have been approved so far; 254 of them have arrived in Canada since March of last year. All of those who have come were quickly helped by their sponsor groups which made arrangements for their accommodations, employment, and other basic tasks in rebuilding their lives in Canada.

The memories of the Vietnamese boat people's saga will be retained in the Vietnamese Boat People Museum, a project launched in December 2005 by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation with the following purposes:

- **To present the historical facts of the quest for freedom of Vietnamese refugees, the majority of whom were the boat people, and their reception worldwide;**
- **To showcase the contribution of the Vietnamese community to the resettlement countries.**

With an estimated budget of \$2 million, this Museum -- to be located at the Northeast intersection of Preston and Somerset Streets, opposite the Vietnamese Commemorative Monument that was erected by the Federation in 1995 -- will include exhibit areas, an auditorium, offices and meeting rooms totalling about 10,000 sq ft. In addition, it will have retail business space on the ground floor to generate operating fund and secure its long-term viability.

With over \$750,000 that has been raised or firmly committed to the project, the Federation has been able to purchase the land for the Museum. The agreement to purchase this land was concluded on April 30, 2009, exactly 34 years after the fall of South Vietnam which led to the exodus for freedom of 2 millions of Vietnamese refugees.

*Project 4000* was a historical event which shows that private citizens can work together to deal effectively with a major humanitarian crisis. It set a shining example of grassroots involvement and participation in civic initiatives for future generations to come.

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For immediate release  
May 23, 2009