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Briefing Paper for 1970 Appropriations Hearings

Refugees and Social Welfare

The Refugee Program has entered a new phase.

The influx of new refugees has decreased substantially: from 400,000 in 1967 to 300,000 in 1968 to just over 100,000 in 1969.

The 1969 accelerated Pacification Campaign has sufficiently improved security conditions in the countryside where the refugees originated to induce large numbers of them to return to their home villages: 500,000 in 1969 as against 230,000 in 1968.

The capability of the Ministry of Social Welfare--now staffed by 600 employees in Saigon and over 1,000 in the provinces--has sufficiently increased to speed up the delivery of the services to which the refugees are entitled: over 1 million received the resettlement and return to village allowances for which they were qualified.

The number of refugees in the active caseload --those eligible for temporary relief and various other forms of temporary assistance--decreased from 1,450,000 in February 1969 to 260,000 in February 1970.

However, these statistics tell only part of the story.

Many of those who return to their own hamlets find their homes destroyed, their fields overgrown, essential services lacking. They must rebuild their lives from scratch. Their return to village allowances--7500 piasters, 10 sheets of roofing and a 6 months supply of rice per family, the equivalent of about \$180 -- provide only temporary subsistence. Revitalizing these hamlets requires inputs from all the GVIL Ministries: Social Welfare, Health, Education, Interior, Public Works, Rural Development. (The Dep Corps for I Corps, where 70% of the refugees are, reminded us recently that fields overgrown with elephant grass, covered by jungle, pock marked by bombs and shell craters cannot be cleared by hand but require mechanical equipment.)

Over 400,000 of those who have been paid their resettlement allowances (the same as return to village allowances), and who are erroneously called "resettled", still live in the same refugee sites they formerly occupied. (The total number of refugee sites has only decreased from 900 to 650.) Since most of them, for security and economic reasons, will have to remain there for some time to come, these sites must be upgraded until they can be converted into normalized hamlets. This requires the same inputs as the restoration of the hamlets to which refugees have returned.

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In response to command pressure on US and GVN military forces not to generate new refugees, the MSW has tended in recent months to designate newly displaced persons not as refugees but as "war victims". This reduces the benefits for which they are eligible and tends to distort the refugee statistics.

New Program Directions

For the past two years the MSW provincial services and their US advisers were under constant pressure to provide emergency relief for masses of new refugees - including the one million victims of the 1968 TET and May offensives - and to work off the large backlog of resettlement payments.

With these pressures somewhat relieved, manpower and resources are now being re-directed towards re-establishing the refugees and re-absorbing them into normal community life. Whether the GVN will succeed in accomplishing this task will be crucial for the forthcoming political struggle for the allegiance of this very large population group.

Towards this end, efforts are now being concentrated on

- (a) restoration of the hamlets to which refugees return.
- (b) up-grading of refugee sites which will be continued in use.
- (c) development of community centers as focal points for social welfare and health services in several Quans and Phuongs of Saigon, in Danang, and in some 90 villages with more than 20,000 population.
- (d) expansion of vocational training for refugees.
- (e) vocational rehabilitation of the disabled.
- (f) establishment of additional day care centers.
- (g) improved services for orphans.

FY 1971 Funding consists of three principal items

1. \$3 million for 97 positions for US direct hire technicians; of these 26 are in Saigon and 71 in the field.
2. \$800,000 for contracts with 9 US voluntary agencies, including the salaries of 117 technicians (see attached list)
3. \$3.8 million for commodities, principally roofing and tents.

The two largest items of support for the Refugee and Social Welfare Program are not included in this project budget

1. VN \$3.5 billion (the equivalent of \$30 million) from American Aid Chapter counterpart funds for support of the Ministry of Social Welfare (see attachment) MSW receives only VN \$500 million from the GVN budget.
2. \$15 million for PL 480 Title II commodities.