

U.S. Envoy Said to Welcome Publicity of Orphan Airlift

From News Dispatches

SAIGON, April 6—Opposition politicians made public Sunday a letter from a top South Vietnamese government official saying that U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin had expressed the opinion that the evacuation of orphans will help shift American public opinion to favor the Saigon government.

The politicians, headed by neutralist Tran Ngoc Lieng, called the orphan airlift an "inhumane" propaganda campaign for more U.S. war aid and demanded it be stopped immediately.

The letter, written last week by Dr. Phan Quang Dan, deputy premier for social welfare, refers to a discussion the U.S. ambassador had with Dan.

The letter said that Martin "stressed that this evacuation along with the millions of refugees abandoning Communist-controlled zones, will help create a shift in American public opinion in favor of the Republic of Vietnam.

According to Dan's account of Martin's view, the diplomat felt that "when these children land in the United States, they will be subject to television, radio and press agency coverage and the effect will be tremendous."

A U.S. embassy spokesman, asked for comment on the letter, said Martin "has had as his overriding concern the welfare of the orphans." The spokesman said Dan and Martin met last week on the orphan airlift and that Dan said the evacuation "might also have some effect on U.S. public opinion.

"The ambassador agreed with Dr. Dan's view," said the embassy spokesman, "but this

was not the reason for bringing up the entire matter of the orphans. The ambassador's reason and concern was simply the welfare of the children."

Dan's letter, addressed to then-Premier Tran Thien Khiem, requested prompt clearance for the evacuation of about 1,400 Vietnamese orphans, most of them to the United States. The clearance was quickly granted and the airlift began late Wednesday.

Dan expressed anger at his letter falling into the hands of politicians. While confirming that it was authentic, he denied quoting the American ambassador directly or indirectly.

However, an unofficial translation of Dan's letter, however, clearly refers to the U.S. ambassador and his intervening "directly" with Dan on behalf of the orphan airlift and his "stress" on the evacuation's effects on American attitudes.

Dan said the letter's comment on creating favorable publicity for the South Vietnamese government "was my own opinion and that of my friends in the United States and Australia."

In Hanoi, North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong charged that the American plan to evacuate thousands of South Vietnamese children from their homeland was a "criminal operation."

In Stockholm, about 100 persons protested at the U.S. embassy over the orphan airlift, delivering to embassy officials a resolution describing it as "kidnaping." A Swedish adoption agency also condemned the airlift, saying the orphans were being "used for political purposes."

Agencies also reported these other developments:

- More than 250 Vietnamese orphans, including handicapped children, left for new homes abroad Sunday. Their departure raised to about 1,500 the number of adoptive children flown out of South Vietnam since the airlifts began.

- Three jetliners carrying 745 South Vietnamese children landed on the West Coast late Saturday and early Sunday. President Ford met one of the airplanes in San Francisco and carried a young girl onto American soil. Some of the children who arrived in San Francisco were taken to the hospital with symptoms of chicken pox. About 30 were said to be seriously ill from dehydration.

- Registered adoption agencies operating in Saigon said they will evacuate only those orphans who have already been assigned adoptive parents abroad, said Bob Chamness, director of the Holt Relief Agency:

"We are not going to attempt to empty out the orphanages," of the 18,000 to 20,000 children now in Saigon's institutions, he said. He said the agencies did not plan to transfer children from one orphanage in Vietnam to another in the United States.



Associated Press

Betty Ford beams at a swaddled Vietnamese child arriving at San Francisco.



United Press International

President Ford holds a Vietnamese infant at San Francisco airport. Story Page A15.