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President 'Saddened' By Tragedy

President Ford said yesterday that the tragic crash of the giant C-5A U.S. Air Force transport with its cargo of Vietnamese orphans "must not deter us from offering new hope for the living."

In a statement issued while Air Force One flew toward San Francisco, the President said he was "deeply saddened at the loss of so many lives."

"I wish to convey my heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the victims, many of whom were coming to new homes in the United States, and to the volunteers who were caring for them on the flight."

The President pledged that despite the tragedy, "our mission of mercy will continue."

Most of the youngsters killed in the crash came from an orphanage operated by Friends of the Children of Vietnam, an adoption agency with headquarters in Boulder, Colo., and the terrible news rocked its personnel here and in Colorado.

"Oh, God," said Richard Blanchfield, the agency's orphan evacuation coordinator.

"This is heavy. We are in a state of shock."

White House Press Secretary Ron Nessen said the President and Mrs. Ford had been planning to meet the ill-fated orphan flight at Travis Air Force Base Monday on their way back to

Washington, D.C.

The C-5A — the world's largest airplane — was one of 36 that are based at Travis with the 60th Military Airlift Wing.

A spokesman said the 18 members of the crew lived in homes at or near the big airbase in Solano county.