

Conference on Orphan Aid Bogs Down in Disagreement

By James Gerstenzgang
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A conference to review options in aiding Vietnam war orphans began yesterday with the State Department refusing to take part and participants disagreeing over the best relief available for the war's young victims.

The meeting was called to bring together congressmen, the State Department, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and individuals interested in discussing operations to assist the orphans.

But 90 minutes before the meeting began, its organizer, Rep. Paul E. Tsongas, (D-Mass.) was informed that the State Department would not take part in a public meeting. A private session was arranged later.

Three parents who brought to the meeting the Vietnamese children they adopted several years ago pleaded for new airlifts to carry more orphans out of Vietnam. Other speakers said emphasis should be placed on ending the fighting in Vietnam and helping the children living there.

"You are all in the guilty trip," shouted Nguyen Thi Ngoc Thoa, a Vietnamese social worker, as participants talked about airlifting or-

phans to the United States. "Why not talk about ending the war?"

Jacqui Chagnon, a social worker with a coalition of religious groups opposing the war, said that rather than removing the children from Vietnam, the United States should provide for their care in foster homes among other Vietnamese.

"If we don't do a better job in terms of helping those kids still in Vietnam we will have pulled a tragic hoax," added Rep. William A. Steiger, (R-Wis.).

Bill Cribbs, a member of the staff of Rep. Edward Mezvinsky, (D-Iowa), said no thought was being given to the problems faced by mixed-race children, many of them the offspring of black American and Vietnamese parents, being brought up in the United States.

"Just to dump them off with someone who has a bleeding heart. . . Well, what are you going to do with these kids when they're 17?" said Cribbs, who is black.

Mary Alice Williams of Natick, Mass., said such children would have greater problems if they remained in Vietnam.

"It's a racist society and a sexist society here, but it doesn't begin to approach

the prejudice these children would face in Vietnam," said Mrs. Williams, carrying her adopted daughter, Jessamyn, the child of a Vietnamese woman and a black American.

Tsongas, Steiger and others said the issue of the orphans was in danger of becoming a political football.

A representative of the Immigration and Naturalization Service said the government had admitted 933 orphans into the United States and another 176 were on their way. Participants in the conference disagreed on the total number of orphans in South Vietnam, with estimates ranging up to 1.1 million.