

Catholic Unit Hits Airlift of Vietnam Babies

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From News Dispatches

An official of the main Roman Catholic relief organization Caritas said Friday that the "mass expatriation" of orphans from South Vietnam was "a deplorable and unjustified mistake." (UAPR)

The Rt. Rev. Msgr. Charles Grange of France, head of the Asian Department of Caritas, said in the Vatican City that his organization had opposed the airlift of orphans in Saigon. Caritas is a federation of Catholic relief agencies.

"Caritas has deplored the mass expatriation of the babies and it has instructed all its regional branches and all Catholic organizations to stay out of the airlift program," Msgr. Grange said at a news conference. "The Catholic Church has nothing to do with this plan.

"We feel the airlift is a deplorable and unjustified mistake which does not solve the problem. It was originated by an unmotivated hysteria, which appears to have fortunately faded."

Msgr. Grange said that according to information received by his office the airlift involved not only orphans, but children turned over to the organization by frightened parents.

"Adoption is contrary to the cultural traditions of the Vietnamese people," he said. "Orphans are generally placed in the custody of other relatives or taken care of by the community in villages or districts, and adoption by strangers has seldom been considered in the past."

"The church and the people of Vietnam are against this initiative, harmful to the country and to the Vietnamese population," Msgr. Grange said. "I know this with certainty from the Catholic hierarchy of Vietnam."

Msgr. Grange said Caritas has collected more than \$1 million for the Vietnamese population.

"Our food and medicine is distributed through the local Caritas, which is working in close contact also with non-Catholic relief

groups, including the Buddhists," Msgr. Grange said.

"We do not base our work on political considerations. Our offices are fully operating in areas controlled by Communist troops."

Meanwhile, a Vietcong leader appealed to Western families not to adopt South Vietnamese children and said Western leaders were guilty of hypocrisy in arranging their evacuation.

"Only now, after years of bombing and napalm that have destroyed our villages full of women and children, are these governments worried about the fate of our little ones," said Phan Thi Minh, representative of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, in an interview with the Communist evening newspaper Paese Serr.

She said she knew that many people who wanted to adopt Vietnamese children were acting in good faith, but added, "I appeal to them not to support this ignoble charade."

In Winnipeg, Canada, the Manitoba New Democratic Party said that on humanitarian grounds alone, the wisdom of transferring young refugees to an alien culture and environment should be seriously questioned.

The party said no one knows for certain if all the airlifted children really are orphans or are just temporarily separated from their parents.

"The airlift amounts to a kidnaping of the population of a foreign country" and should be condemned by the governments of Manitoba and Canada, the party said.

"No democratic government in Canada should be a party to such blatant exploitation of children to score political propaganda debating points," it added.

The Canadian External Affairs department said in Ottawa that a Canadian airplane had flown 69 children out of Saigon en route to Britain Friday.

Another group of 22 children flew to Clark Air Base in the Philippines aboard a World Airways DC-8 jet. The



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South Vietnamese children who died while awaiting evacuation to Vungtau lie on the ground near a Nhatrang dock.

flight continued to Tokyo. The U.S. Airforce flew 267 more children out of Saigon aboard two C141 transport

planes that arrived in the Philippines late Friday.

More than 200 of the children who left Friday were

bound for Ft. Benning, Ga., where they will be cared for until they are adopted by American families. This

was the first group permitted to leave the country without already **being in** the process of adoption.