

Aid Group Says U.S. Curbs Export of Items to Vietnam

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WASHINGTON, July 25—The American Friends Service Committee disclosed today that it had been denied a license to ship agricultural and fishing equipment to North or South Vietnam and charged that the action represented a change of policy on the part of the Government.

An official of the Treasury Department, which grants licenses for purchases and shipments of this type, denied that there had been any policy change, but admitted that shipments of such materials to Communist-controlled areas of Vietnam had been permitted in the past.

The action with respect to the American Friends Service Committee was the second of a similar nature with respect to Vietnam within a month.

In June, the Internal Revenue Service ruled that contributions to the Bach Mai Hospital Emergency Relief Fund would no longer be tax-deductible, although such contributions had been permitted to rebuild and resupply the bombed-out North Vietnamese hospital while the war in Vietnam was still going on.

The ruling disallowing deductions for contributions to the hospital fund was withdrawn this week, after the Bach Mai case was publicized. Internal Revenue said that it was giving the matter further study.

Canvas, Nets and Farm Goods

The denial of the American Friends Service Committee's application for a license to ship "tent canvas, fish nets, cord for fish nets and certain agricultural equipment" to Vietnam was issued by the Treasury Department's Division of Foreign Assets Control last Friday.

Licenses to send similar or identical items to areas of Vietnam governed by the Communists had been granted in 1973, according to the committee and also to a Treasury official.

The official, Stanley L. Sommerfield, director of the Foreign Assets division, said in answer to questions that the denial of the license last week "was not intended to be any change in policy."

"Fundamentally, I gather,

somebody looked at it this time and said it was economic aid and last time they looked at it and said it was humanitarian," he said.

The United States has a current policy of not giving economic aid to North or South Vietnam.

Mr. Sommerfield said that he had checked with the State Department before making his assertion that there had been no change in policy.

Role of State

He said that it "would be going a little too far" to say that the State Department "calls the shots" on licensing of shipments to Communist-controlled countries, but that "generally speaking, we [Treasury officials] realize that this is part of our foreign policy, and we work very closely with State."

"Generally speaking, we'd be guided largely but not exclusively by what they thought," he added.

There have been reports of disagreement within the Ford Administration over whether economic aid to Vietnam by private organizations should be permitted and that Mr. Ford himself decided that it should not be permitted. According to these reports, Secretary of State Kissinger had tentatively suggested that private aid should be permitted.

The denial of tax-deductible status to contributions to the Bach Mai Hospital fund had caused considerable concern among tax-exempt organizations because the revenue service's now-withdrawn ruling in the case appeared to deny deductibility for any donations that went directly to a foreign government.

When disaster relief and other kinds of aid are given by such organizations as the Red Cross the aid goes directly to governmental entities in countries where there are few or no private relief agencies.

Whether there was any connection between the initial denial of tax deductions to the Bach Mai fund and the refusal to relicense American Friends Service Committee export program could not be ascertained. Both actions, however, were a crackdown on activities that had been permitted while the war in Vietnam was being fought.