

U.S. to Let 1,600 Return To Vietnam

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President Ford has agreed to permit about 1,600 refugees to try to return to South Vietnam from Guam, on a ship they will sail themselves.

There is no certainty, however, that Communist authorities in Saigon will allow them to land.

This is a "human dilemma," said Julia V. Taft, Vietnam task force director, in announcing the long-debated decision yesterday.

About 128,000 refugees have been resettled by the United States, she said, but the 1,600 or more wanting to go back to South Vietnam have reached "violent proportions" in their demands to be returned, and the United States cannot hold them "against their will."

If South Vietnam refuses to accept the people on the ship, there could be a stormy propaganda battle between the Vietnamese Communists and the United States, over who is responsible for the impasse. That possibility has troubled many American officials for months.

President Ford made the decision Monday night, with the concurrence of the National Security Council, Taft said, to meet the "adamant desire" of the refugees to sail back to Saigon.

"This cannot be a 'Flying Dutchman' situation," said one U.S. official, referring to the legendary ship condemned to sail the seas forever. "We will receive them back at Guam" if they cannot land in South Vietnam, he said.

Most of the refugees involved never intended to leave

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South Vietnam. They thought they would be landed at another port in that country when they left in confusion as South Vietnam fell under Communist control last April. They are confident they will be allowed to land, on the basis of radio broadcasts and reports reaching them from North and South Vietnam, although there is no official assurance of that.

The United States has agreed to recondition a ship that brought many of them to Guam, the 487-foot vessel Vietnam Thuong Tin, a 6,275-ton cargo ship. It will take about two to three weeks to equip the ship for the two-week voyage from Guam to Vietnam,

officials said. It will carry provisions for a round trip.

"We are not 'sending them back,'" Taft said. "We are allowing them to repossess the ship they brought."

The number of potential returnees has fluctuated. Now, in addition to 1,541 on Guam who want to return home, Taft said, there are 47 Vietnamese in camps in the United States who want to join them, plus about 50 persons so far who have been resettled and have been resettled and

Taft said "tensions have peaked in the last few weeks on Guam with a series of outbursts and demonstrations." Four U.S. marshals were hospitalized in an Aug. 31 riot.

The decision on letting them sail, U.S. officials said, came after the United Nations High Commissioner, Prince Sadru-

din Aga Kahn, failed to get "any concrete word" from Communist authorities in Hanoi during a trip to North Vietnam last week.

According to Sadraddin's deputy, the North Vietnamese authorities reiterated their "policy of receiving those Vietnamese desirous of returning to their homeland," and said: "Such return will take place as soon as possible after the individual applications for return have been examined."

Taft said those applications were turned over to Communist authorities in July.

Other sources said the Ford administration concluded that the prince "struck out" for any refugee return in the near future, and that the United States would be in an impossible situation if it delayed any longer.

The U.S. veto of U. N. membership for both North and South Vietnam, unless South Korea also is allowed to enter the United Nations, clearly "has complicated this problem," one U.S. source acknowledged.

In addition, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger is reported to have put South Vietnam and Cambodia on the list of nations where American passports are invalid without specific approval, against the recommendations of subordinates in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

The formal notice of that action, published in the Federal Register, cited "severe hostility" of those governments toward the United States since the Communist takeover in April.