

1972 Said 'Cruellest' for Viets

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Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees, said yesterday that in terms of civilian casualties and refugees, 1972 will prove to be the cruelest year of the war for South Vietnam.

Based on official State Department-AID statistics and five months of Senate hearings and investigations on the problems of Indochina war victims, Kennedy reported a "massive increase" in civilian refugees and war casualties in South Vietnam.

"There were more war victims this year than in any previous year of the war," he said. "And despite today's plans and hopes for an early peace, the flow of refugees and civilian casualties continues at an alarming rate."

As of Nov. 24, the Kennedy subcommittee reported, the 1972 total for newly registered refugees stood at 1,231,800. The highest previous annual total for new refugees registered was 906,000 in 1966.

During the four weeks that followed presidential adviser Henry Kissinger's "peace at hand" announcement, some 23,300 new refugees were officially registered in South Vietnam, according to the subcommittee.

The official figures do not include displaced persons in Communist-controlled areas nor the sporadic movements of Cambodians into South Vietnam. "Estimates from these areas would probably increase the cumulative total by some 300,000 to 500,000," the subcommittee said.

Of the new refugees generated in 1972, some 300,000 are believed to have returned to villages and some 717,200 are currently living in camps. The rest are either living with relatives or are "drifting" in the countryside or urban areas, the subcommittee said.

Of the nearly 8 million South Vietnamese who have been made homeless at one time or another since 1965, the Kennedy subcommittee estimates that the current refugee burden "probably involves a minimum of 2 million people."

"The April offensive brought a near collapse of services," the subcommittee reported, and "over the months refugee conditions have deteriorated rapidly."

"These refugees are now living in squalid conditions equal

to or worse than in the early days of the war," a subcommittee source said.

The number of civilian war casualties officially reported in South Vietnamese hospitals for the first 10 months of 1972 was 43,605 — substantially lower than in previous years.

But the subcommittee said it found that the drop was due to a breakdown in the reporting system rather than to a drop in casualties.

As many as one third of the 56 hospitals in Vietnam were not reporting admissions in 1972, and in many areas medical facilities were completely destroyed. Government control of the countryside has not returned as quickly as it did after the Tet offensive in 1968, and in large areas of South Vi-

etnam there is no official reporting at all.

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker cabled Washington in June that he expected civilian war casualties to be "substantially in excess" of civilian casualty increases following Tet, 1968, and Kennedy subcommittee investigations have led them to conclude that civilian war casualties are now running higher than at any time during the war, except for Tet, 1968, and the period immediately after the Easter offensive this year.

By official count, 25 per cent of the current civilian war casualties are children under 12 and another 33 per cent are women, the subcommittee said.

Over the years of studying the problem, the Kennedy subcommittee has found that "firepower generates refugees."

This year, the North Vietnamese introduced tanks and heavy artillery into the South to an unprecedented degree, and the Americans immeasurably increased the number of air strikes over South Vietnam.

Since the heaviest raids have been in areas from which there has been no reporting, Kennedy said that the official figures were "grossly understated and fail to reflect the full dimension of the deepening tragedy which the war is bringing to the people in South Vietnam and all of Indochina."