

Saigon Starting to Resettle 100,000

NYTimes MAR 22 1973

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 21 — The Government has begun moving the first of a planned total of 100,000 refugees from the northernmost provinces to unsettled land near Saigon, more than 300 miles away, a ranking South Vietnamese official reported yesterday.

Dr. Phan Quang Dan, Minister of State in charge of refugees, who made the report, said that the plan was part of an ambitious program to resettle permanently as many as possible of the 660,000 refugees in camps around South Vietnam.

The people to be moved south originally lived in areas of Quang Tri, Quang Nam and Quang Ngai Provinces occupied by the Communists during their offensive last year and are therefore considered by the Government to be unacceptable for resettlement.

Some 150,000 more refugees, from parts of Quang Tri that have been recaptured by the South Vietnamese Army, will be sent back to their native villages or nearby sites in a related part of the resettlement plan, according to Dr. Dan. Last Saturday the first 2,000 were taken from refugee camps in Da Nang to Quang Tri.

Dr. Dan and American refugee officials here, who are keenly aware that earlier attempts to resettle large numbers provoked outcries against "forced migration," insist that all the refugees who will make the long move will do so voluntarily. Vietnamese peasants have always had a deep emotional attachment to their land.

Many Were Volunteers

A tour of several new resettlement sites east of the capital Monday suggested that, in fact, many of the 7,000 people moved in the last two weeks were volunteers.

"It is better for us to stay in this place and make a new life than to go home again even if we had the chance," said Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thuy, a refugee from Quang Ngai who arrived last week at Ba Gieng, a clearing in the dry scrub jungle 70 miles east of Saigon in largely unpopulated Binh Tuy Province.

"Here we have land," she said, gesturing at the expanse of jungle and low, broken mountains that stretched as far as the eye could see. "And the security is excellent. We have not been shot at since we arrived."

Mrs. Thuy and the 3,000

other settlers there will be fed for six months at Government expense while they burn away the jungle to clear the 7.5 acres each family is supposed to be awarded. Already living in neat rows of Government-supplied tents, they have been cutting wood for more permanent houses and digging wells in the parched earth.

With Government-supplied seeds and tools, they hope to have a crop of corn and perhaps of upland rice by the end of the year, with bananas, papayas and soybeans coming later.

Priest Favored Move

"It was the village priest who advised us to come," said an elderly neighbor of Mrs. Thuy, explaining that the priest made a preliminary trip to inspect the site. A simple church—an open-sided tent and old United States Army ammunition crates—stands in the middle of the settlement, reflecting the continuing strength of Catholicism among Vietnamese.

Mrs. Thuy's neighbor held a 4-year-old boy with light brown hair, brown eyes and Occidental features. "My daughter's son—she worked in a place that sold beer to Americans," the woman said delicately, avoiding the word "bar." "Now the Americans have all gone, and soon my daughter will come to join us here."

Dr. Dan, who negotiated with the priest to bring the group to Ba Gieng, said he had a long waiting list of applications from other officials of refugee villages, priests and Buddhist monks to inspect proposed sites in the jungle east and northeast of Saigon, including parts of Binh Tuy, Phuoc Tuy and Long Khanh Provinces.

"We will bring about 100,000 refugees down here from the north this year, mostly by Vietnamese Navy ship," Dr. Dan said in an interview. A short, energetic man with a reputation for persuasive powers, he has the official title of head of the Interministerial Committee for Resettlement and Return to Villages of War Victims.

"The main objective is to get them out of the camps," he explained. "We just can't have them stay in the camps forever. After a year the people become listless and apathetic and lose their will to take care of themselves."

It is also expensive to support those in the camps. The cost of food alone, American officials say, is \$4-million a month, almost all of which is paid by the United States.

The movement of such large numbers to areas far from their homes raises several questions.

"Shouldn't these people have the option of being allowed to go back to their original villages even if they are occupied by the Communists?" asked Jerry Tinker, a staff aide to Senator Edward M. Kennedy's Senate Subcommittee on Refugees. Mr. Tinker and three other subcommittee aides have been making a tour of refugee camps.

"It is also apparent that Dr.

Far From Home

Refugees Fai

Dan is putting pressure on t refugees to get out of t camps, but how much pressu constitutes force?" Mr. Tink asked.

"What bothers us is that t refugees are still being used pawns in the political struggle," he added. He said it appeared that the Governme was thinking in terms of usin the refugees to increase i areas of control and their vot to defeat the Communists in t proposed elections.

Whether or not the 100,00 refugees from the norther

provinces are finally resettled near Saigon, there are 60,000 already in camps around the capital for whom there seems little prospect of starting new lives.

These are the rubber-plantation workers and Montagnard tribesmen who lived around An Loc before the fighting there last year. Since they were not farmers, they have resisted the idea of clearing the scrub jungle for farms, and they have remained in the squalid camps. There is no plan for resettling them.