

Pirates on the gulf of Siam

Pirates on The Gulf of Siam: Report from The
Nhat Tien // Duong Phuc, Vu Thanh Thuy

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Pirates On The Gulf Of Siam

Nhat Tien, Duong Phuc Vu Thanh Thuy

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Second Edition

Pirates on the gulf of Siam

REPORT FROM THE VIETNAMESE BOAT PEOPLE
LIVING IN THE REFUGEE CAMP IN SONGKHLA-THAILAND

NHAT TIEN • DUONG PHUC • VU THANH THUY

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introduction

Dear Reader,

Contained herein is a number of documents concerning the outrage of piracy collected, edited, published and distributed by the Boat People S.O.S. Committee.

The charges brought forth in these pages are those made by the writers Nhat Tien, Duong Phuc and Vu Thanh Thuy, who speak of their own personal sufferings, as well as those of their friends and compatriots. Thus, all the matters discussed in these documents are completely genuine, with legitimate witnesses and which the victims themselves have allowed to be made public.

Our committee feels it is necessary to bring this book before the public because the cruel and agonizing atrocities committed by the pirates against the Vietnamese boat people crossing the sea in search of freedom, never before seen in the history of the world, continue to occur in Thai waters .

In the face of these atrocities, our committee and our compatriots all over the world, while sickened by the terrible fate of the victims, their brothers and sisters, have patiently carried on activities on behalf of the refugees in a manner both conciliatory and in accordance with the law. We have tried neither to negate the noble efforts of the Royal Family of Thailand towards the Vietnamese people, nor to speak ill of the wonderful traditions of the Thai people. But we also wanted to raise the alarm to the Thai authorities in the hope that they would empathize with the suffering of the victims and make use of those means within their power to eliminate piracy in their waters within a reasonable period of time.

Our committee has formally presented this material concerning the piracy problem to the Government and Royal Family of Thailand through their envoy in Los Angeles, California, on March 5, 1980. At the same time, these documents were also sent to the offices of the

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the then President of the United States, Mr. Jimmy Carter, the American ambassador in Thailand and other individuals with international prestige and influence in hopes that they might intervene on our behalf and transmit the documents to the authorities in Thailand.

Alongside the work of our committee, around the world nearly every Vietnamese organization, many compatriots and university students and others sent thousands of letters to the Thai monarch in order that the tragedy not be forgotten and the necessary means be taken to put an end to it. In May of 1980, a hunger strike was organized in front of the Thai embassy in Los Angeles with the same purpose.

Despite the tragedies and the activities designed to bring this to attention, the Thai authorities have still not responded in a concrete, positive way to resolve the problem at the source. The Thai courts see the victims merely as witnesses, without having the status of plaintiff. Those trials that have been conducted have been prolonged beyond necessity with excessive bureaucracy, causing the victims to become discouraged, and this does not even mention the threatening pressure that was applied to sabotage the proceedings.

For these reasons, after nearly a year of waiting, our committee has determined to make this book available to the general public with the following goals in mind:

1) to bring before the conscience of all, the horrible barbarity of the piracy in Thai waters that was and is committed against that Vietnamese crossing the sea in search of freedom and the indifference and lack of responsibility of the Thai authorities in dealing with this problem.

2) to ask all international organizations to seek every concrete means to rescue the boat people by:

– requesting all nations with ships passing through the South China Sea to officially permit their ships' captains to rescue boat people they come by.

– asking the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to establish a special refugee camp as a haven for those refugees picked up by merchant ships in order to prevent their rescue attempts from causing any undue problems.

– petitioning the Pope, other religious leaders all over

the world, the Secretary General of the U.N. and the various heads of State of the free nations to do any and everything they can to intervene with the Thai king so that the government of that country develops serious and effective means of putting an end to piracy.

3) to ask the international news media to assist our committee in describing to all the people of the world the atrocity of piracy.

4) to point out that the paramount source of this tragedy is the brutal and deceitful policy of the Communist government in Hanoi. Therefore, it is necessary for the United Nations and the free world to take this as evidence of one more of the sufferings the Vietnamese people must endure since the takeover of their country by the Communists.

Our Committee, in the name of all our compatriots, wishes to express our sincere gratitude to the governments and people of those countries which have helped and are still helping the boat people. We would especially like to thank those Thai people who have been helping us and continue to do so by housing thousands of Vietnamese refugees.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nguyen Huu Xuong". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the middle of the name.

San Diego, California

April 15, 1981

Nguyen Huu Xuong, Ph.D.

University of California at San Diego (UCSD)

Chairperson, Boat People S.O.S. Committee

This White Paper consists of two parts. In the first part are the reports of atrocities committed by pirates in the Gulf of Siam. The second part contains letters and petitions written on behalf of the boat people.



Author Nhat Tien
Former Vice Chairperson
of the Vietnamese Pen Club



Reporter Duong Phuc



Reporter Vu Thanh Thuy

PART 1

REPORT FROM KO KRA ISLAND

Ko Kra is a deserted island in the Gulf of Siam 80 kilometers from the town of Nakhorn Sri Thammaraj. Lately the island has become a haven for Thai pirates. The Thai government is aware of this fact, but is apparently unable to do anything about it.

It is impossible to relate accurately the stories of all the boat people killed on or around the island, but we shall report to you here some of the most recent events.

*First Incident: 87 People killed

Witness: Ms. Nguyen thi Thuong, 36, a graduate from an American university who took further training in Paris and prior to 1975 was an instructor at the Polytechnical Institute in Thu Duc. She left Vietnam with her husband, mother, uncle, two younger brothers, two sisters-in-law, four other young relatives and her three-year-old daughter. She and her daughter are the only survivors of the family.

Their boat, #SS0640 IA, 13½m. in length and carrying 107 people, left Rach Gia on Dec. 1, 1979. On the third day of its journey, as they were nearing the Thai mainland, they encountered pirates in the following manner. Two Thai boats came up alongside the refugee boat and pirates charged aboard with guns and knives. Because of the crowded condition of the boat, the pirates took some of the refugees onto their boat in order to search them for valuables. 27 were released.

The remaining 80 were searched and robbed of what valuable items they had. The pirates then tied a cord to the refugee boat and towed it behind them. They made sport of running at full speed in a circle so that the refugee boat tipped and sank. The refugees screamed and wept, begging for mercy as the boat went under while the pirates cut the rope and drove off, leaving the 80 people to flounder helplessly in the ocean and the 27 on their boat to weep in great distress as they watched their relatives go under.

The pirates went straight to Ko Kra, but as they approached the island, they shoved the men overboard,

forcing them to swim ashore. 7 men drowned in this manner.

The other 20 were taken to the island and summarily searched and handled on all parts of their bodies to see if they might be hiding any valuables on them. Ms. BTD, 26, who had a four-year-old child, was taken into the bushes and raped, despite the fact that she was exhausted and unable to stand because of hunger, thirst and terror.

During 8 days on the island, the refugees were tortured and questioned as a number of pirate gangs landed on the island each day. The women tried to hide in the jungle or on the mountain, but they were still unable to escape the pirates. One woman, Ms. D, was being attended to as she lay unconscious due to exhaustion, when pirates came, chased everyone away and four of them raped her there where she lay. When they left, she was still at that spot, unable to move.

On the third day on the island there came a boat with the inscription POLICE #513. As the pirates fled out to the ocean, the police boat anchored off shore, but did not come any nearer. The refugees believed they were going to be rescued and one youth carrying a letter written in English to be delivered to the U.N High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs swam out toward the boat. Before he could reach them, however, the police opened fire on him and in terror he swam back to shore. A teenager was nominated to swim out with the letter and he was taken aboard the police boat, given a few packs of noodles and sent back to the island. Finally, the boat left and as we now realize, the crew never sent word to the authorities of the refugees' plight.

The next day after the Thai police left, the pirates returned and the atrocities continued. On the fifth day a Thai navy boat passed by and the refugees waved it in. This time, the boat allowed representatives of its crew to come ashore to talk and take the letter for the U.N Commissioner in Thailand. On the 8th day, Mr. Schweitzer, the U.N representative came to take the refugees to the mainland.

Prof. Nguyen thi Thuong had left home with her husband, Tran Quang Huy, 41, professor at the Faculty of Letters in Saigon before 1975, and the relatives mentioned above. The other relatives were among the 80 left to drown by the pirates and Mr. Huy had died when he was unable to make the swim to the island. Ms. Thuong gave birth to a

baby girl in the refugee camp in Songkhla and now lives there with her daughters and her husband's sister and brother. She had been nine months pregnant when she left Vietnam and this kept her from being raped by the pirates.

As Ms. Thuong told the story, she sobbed quietly and said, "My husband and I tried to take into consideration the terrible things that might happen to us when we took to the sea. We decided that leaving was preferable to living under Communism. But what I've suffered now exceeds anything we had imagined."

***Second Incident: 70 People Killed**

Witness: Vu Zuy Thai, 44, who left Vietnam with his wife, aged 40, his four children and two young relatives. He is the lone survivor.

The junk VNKG 0980, 14m. long, 2.2m wide, carrying 120 people, left Rach Gia on Dec. 29, 1979. It encountered a pirate ship on Dec. 31. The pirates' boat was orange-red in color with the number 128 on the bow. The 12 pirates aboard were armed with guns and knives, hammers, and hatchets. The pirate ship ran into the bow of the refugee boat and put a crack in it. The pirates then leaped aboard the refugee boat and began wrecking the engine and enlarging the size of the crack so that water began to flow in. They searched the refugees and took watches, gold, rings, etc. while water continued to pour into the boat. In an hour the boat had sunk and the women and children clung to each other crying in fear. The pirates themselves drove off, taking with them the pretty girls. By the time the pirates were fifty meters away, a number of men and youths had managed to swim to the boat and hang on. Although some were pushed away by the pirates, 50 survived drowning by hanging on in this manner. These people had seen their friends drown, watching helplessly as the waving hands finally dropped beneath the surface.

Mr. Vu Zuy Thai had grabbed his wife and one child during the confusion and brought them to the pirate ship. The other 5 members of his family drowned. The wife and child had swallowed too much water, however, and couldn't move when pulled on board the pirate boat. Before he could apply artificial respiration to revive them, the pirates tossed

them overboard.

Mr. Pham Viet Chieu, a boat pilot, related how he and some others managed to pull some people out of the water in hopes that they were not dead yet but only unconscious but the pirates forced them back into the ocean.

After that, the pirate boat headed straight for the island of Ko Kra where they held the victims for five days until the U.N. High Commissioner came to rescue them.

On the night of Jan. 1, 1980, a Thai navy boat numbered "18" came to the island armed with guns. Again the refugees thought they were going to be rescued, but the sailors only looked them over, forced them to remove all their clothing and stand naked—including the women and children and then they went on their way.

On Jan. 2, another navy boat, #17, came to the island. The sailors rushed ashore and they, too, searched the refugees. The women were publicly stripped naked while the Thai sailors felt them for weapons or other objects. The sailors then retired to their ship and sat anchored off shore until Jan. 4, when they left.

While the sailors had been busy with the refugees, the pirates were not to be seen, but as soon as the navy boat left, 4 pirate boats came back to the island. The pirates searched the refugees, although by now there was nothing left to steal. They took turns raping the women right on shore, without seeking a secluded spot. 5 girls, K.H., 15 years-old, B.T., 17, A.H., 12, H.Y., 11, and M.T., 15, were gang raped in front of everyone's eyes.

This would have continued but Mr. Schweitzer's appearance brought it to an end when he arrived on a police boat and rescued the suffering people.

*Third Incident: the pirates force girls into prostitution

Witnesses: Miss Nguyen Thi Anh Tuyet, 17, who left home with her sister Nguyen Thi Nam, killed by pirates, and Cong Huyen Ton Nu My Kieu, 17.

An unmarked junk, 10m. long and carrying 78 people, left Nha Trang on Dec. 8, 1979.

After three days at sea, they ran out of fuel and food and their boat drifted for ten days on the high seas. During this period 12 children died of hunger and thirst and

their bodies were thrown overboard. On Dec. 21, they met with 2 pirate boats. The pirates tied the junk to their boat and using weapons forced all the refugees onto their boat to be searched. Ms. Nguyen thi Nam, 33 years old and five months pregnant, had left with her husband, Le Van Tu, and three children, ages 9,5 and 3. The three children had died during the 10 daysadrift at sea. Ms. Nam was in great pain and exhausted, consequently she was not able to climb aboard the pirate ship. The pirates lifted her on by the armpits, but she lay still where she was. One pirate then took a shovel and beat her repeatedly on the head. Her skull was cracked and she died. The body was thrown overboard. The remaining refugees on their junk clambered aboard the pirate ship in fear while the pirates searched the junk, tearing things apart and prying up planks where they thought a likely hiding place for valuables might be. Meanwhile, the refugees on the other boat had their clothing and bodies searched. Following this, the men were locked in the ice hold, the storage compartment for fish on the boat. The women were left on deck for the pirates to handle as they wished. Then the refugees were herded back onto their wrecked boat. One man eventually died from the cold in the ice hold. The refugee junk drifted on in intense despair.

The next day two more pirate boats came to the area of Ko Kra island to rob and search. This time, the three prettiest girls were taken away on the boats. The refugee junk was left with its engine dead, no food or drinking water and the boat partly filled with water because the men hadn't the strength to bail it out. To this day, we do not know the fate of that helpless band of refugees.

The 3 girls who had been taken away were put on the two boats. Miss Anh Tuyet and Miss My Kieu were put aboard the boat whose skipper was named Samsac. Miss Lan went with the other boat and no one knows what has become of her.

Samsac took Tuyet and Kieu to the mainland where they were kept in a hotel in Songkhla. Tuyet was held under guard by a man named Biec. Kieu was kept in another room with Samsac.

According to Miss Tuyet's account, she screamed when Biec tried forcibly to have sex with her. This disturbed persons staying in adjacent rooms (mostly Westerners) who

rushed in to see what was the matter. Biec fled. Samsac fled with My Kieu in the midst of the commotion and took her to another hotel in the town of Haadyai (30km from Songkhla). When the police came to the first hotel, Miss Tuyet led them to the dock where Samsac's boat was still moored. Eventually the crew was arrested, including Samsac himself, who was found in Haadyai with Miss Kieu.

At the police station, the pirates confessed that they had intended to sell the girls on the street in the red light district of town.

In the preceding pages, we have recounted for you only a handful of examples of the events that occurred in December of 1979, making mention of only a few boats whose common characteristic was their having been taken to Ko Kra island by Thai pirates to be robbed and raped. During that same period of time and within the broad area of the Gulf of Siam, who can tell how many others were victims of pirates and drowned at sea?

But we feel we can safely say that countless other boats were set upon by pillagers and robbers where no one survived to tell the tale.

We wish to remind the reader that the spread of pirates is not confined to just this time period. During the last few years, the Vietnamese have left their country in waves, seeking freedom by boat. They have become attractive bait for pirates. Newspapers all over the world have described the appalling conditions the "boat people" have had to endure. But it was when the Thai fishermen realized that the economic potential of robbing refugees was greater than that from catching fish that the ranks of the pirates swelled as more and more fishermen joined each day with the result that the refugees are being trapped in the great net the pirates have spread across the Gulf of Siam.

The question we would like to ask is this: what is the attitude of the Thai authorities to this situation and what are they doing to put a halt to it?

In order to answer this question, we would only like to point out one incident which is still taking place right now in Thailand.

For 21 days, from Oct. 29 to Nov. 11, 1979, 157

Vietnamese refugees were held by pirates on Ko Kra Island. These people were robbed, raped, tortured, pushed into the sea, until finally they were discovered by the U.N. High Commissioner and taken to the mainland. Because of the efficient action by the High Commissioner and the determination of the refugees, seven pirates were identified and charged with crimes to be judged by the Thai courts.

The prosecution began shortly after the arrival of the refugees to the mainland when complaints were made at the police station at Pakpanang on Nov. 18, 1979. At the time of this writing, two long months have passed and the trial is not yet over. The 157 boat people are still being kept in the temporary settlement camp at Songkhla awaiting the trial's outcome before they can be resettled permanently in a third country. In this time, much evidence has come forth showing that the refugees, especially the girls and women who stood up and identified the culprits, had been pressured to withdraw their charges by such means as attempted bribery, threats of death, and threats to prolong their stay at the camp indeterminately to weaken the spirits of the victims wishing to be resettled soon.

It is too early to make any serious conclusions about the trial at this stage. But we wish to express our hope that the use of these coercive devices is not the policy of the Thai government with regards to the boat people. We do not believe that a nation with a long cultural tradition, a people who love peace and respect the preachings of Buddhism, can support a central government that accepts the protection of pirates who have perpetrated numerous terrible atrocities that have not only hurt their country's reputation, but have also grievously afflicted the conscience of all humanity.

By making this report public and by relying on real eye-witnesses who are now staying at the camp in Songkhla, we believe we have brought to light a part of the suffering of the boat refugees and that their tragedies will, first of all, move the hearts of the people in high places in the Thai government and, secondly, cause human rights organizations, as well as other groups, governments and the people of the world as a whole to stand up and take notice of this alarming situation with full understanding so that they may more quickly and efficiently find the means to put a stop to the atrocities committed on the boat people by the Thai pirates.

Actual victims of the Thai pirates, being among the 157 people kept for 21 days on Ko Kra island, and now living in the camp at Songkhla where we may communicate directly with other victims, we have collected these stories with permission to use the names of the people involved. We accept complete responsibility for the veracity of the stories related above.

Songkhla, Thailand

8, Feb. 1980

Vietnamese Refugee Camp P.O Box 3
signed: Nhat Tien, Duong Phuc, Vu Thanh Thuy

FROM KO KRA ISLAND TO THE COURT AT SONGKHLA THE SECOND INDICTMENT

We are a band of boat people from four junks who share the similar fate of having been kidnapped by Thai pirates and held on Ko Kra Island for 21 days, from Oct. 29, 1979 to Nov. 19, 1979.

When we were rescued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs and taken to the town of Pakpanang in Nakorn Srithamaraj province on the Thai mainland, we signed statements charging certain pirates who could be identified (after they dared move to near where we were being temporarily resettled) with atrocities they had committed along with other pirates on Ko Kra, which crimes included robbery, rape, torture (such as hanging people from trees, throwing them into the sea, thrusting their heads into fire, choking with cords from fish nets, wrenching out teeth to get the gold, and other inhuman deeds).

The Thai police captured some of the culprits inside of eight days, then released them (the reason was not given, but presumably the criminals had posted bail) and afterwards the trial was sent to the court at Songkhla, the place where we are currently resettled.

Since the day we signed the charges against the pirates at Pakpanang on Nov. 19, 1979, we have awaited the light of justice in Thailand, not with the intention of mere satisfaction of a court sentence for a handful of pirates, but more importantly in hopes that the Thai government would see more clearly the horrible atrocities that the Thai fishermen have been perpetrating against the refugee boat people and through this will take some active measures to prevent any similar tragedies from occurring in the future.

More than three long months have gone by.

The court is still calling up each of the nine women who came forward to name the pirates for examination. But there has been no lawyer for the plaintiff. Nor have there been any defendants present to confront their accusers. None of the witnesses was allowed to finish testifying in one turn, but all have been called in again after waiting a month to continue the examination.

This waste of time and other things we have experienced have revealed to us this bitter truth: the court is deli-

berately drawing out the trial in order to discourage the witnesses from continuing their testimony. At the same time, the women are being made victims of a second Ko Kra Island – this time in a more painful and degrading procedure, the torment of the spirit.

We would like to point out a concrete example:

One of the women who signed the charges was Miss Tr. Th. H.V., 28 years old, who had been raped repeatedly on Ko Kra and identified two pirates who frequented the police station at Pakpanang. She was called up for examination the first time on Jan. 5, 1980. The interrogation continued through the next day also. According to Miss H.V., each witness was questioned separately by the court with no other boat people present, with no defending attorney, with no defendant to face the charges. The witness was made to stand up 8 hours each day without being given a chair. During the questioning, she was put to humiliation in every possible way—being forced to answer vulgar questions that could have been worded more politely or which were inessential, being made to describe in detail every action and gesture of the pirates when the crime was committed, falling under the derisive gaze of strangers who had no place in the court but who came by one band after the other to point and mock. She was also blatantly offered bribes and threatened, being told she would be paid if she withdrew her complaint, if not the trial would be continued so as to delay the permanent resettlement efforts of the boat people involved.

It was not enough that a woman should have to suffer through the atrocities on Ko Kra for 21 days, but before she could emotionally recover from the experience she had to be subjected to court interrogations in an atmosphere of humiliation and degradation. After leaving the court, Miss H.V. suffered a mental breakdown. When friends and relatives asked after her, they were answered only with tears falling from eyes that had already lost their life. The witnesses who followed her suffered in like manner.

Perhaps the women could have stood through this if the court had come to a conclusion quickly. Instead, the trial goes on until who knows when without a verdict due to

the court's delay of the proceedings. As Miss H.V. experienced it:

—the first time she was called to court she was examined for two days, from Jan. 5-6

— the second time, Feb. 28, she was called in and sat waiting nearly all morning before she was told her testimony had been put off until Mar. 21. During the time she sat waiting outside, she was the object of ridicule for strangers who came simply to look at her, point and mock, jeer at her and otherwise act in a deplorable manner—as public humiliation for a woman who had already been shamed.

Other women also went through the calling up, waiting and being sent back for another month.

Now the women are in a psychologically and emotionally weakened state, looking tired and distressed, wandering alone out to the shore, some of them thinking of killing themselves to end the offence to their dignities at the courthouse where they are being treated like animals without recourse to help.

And so another Ko Kra Island is taking shape before our eyes in the just and fair land of Thailand, where the victims are those who have the courage to accuse those individuals who have shamed the wonderful traditions of the Thai people.

From the Island of Ko Kra to the court at Songkhla, we've come nearly to the end of our rope. Some of the victims have already begun talk of giving up, of withdrawing their suits as a means of protesting the trial. We do not see the trial and a fair verdict to be a means of revenge, but instead we have been hoping for the light of justice and righteousness to illuminate the fate not only of ourselves but of all those drifting helplessly in the Gulf of Siam. Now as our hope appears baseless, the withdrawal of our charges may have a new significance in its denunciation of the proceedings as they are being carried out. And yet we are not yet ready to withdraw the suits, but are willing to give the Thai court at Songkhla further time in which to prove its impartiality.

While we are abandoned on the mainland of this country and as we publicize this letter, the condition of our safety becomes more and more tenuous, even more so than after we published the first letter (the report from Ko Kra Island, dated Feb. 8, 1980). But we have left our homeland

and crossed the sea in search of a life worth living, a society that honors the right to be human and refuses to countenance actions that trample on the dignity of others—this is the ideal we are going after— and we are prepared to accept the consequences of raising our voices faithfully.

We see the horrible fate of our 157 boat people to be a painful lesson and agonizing example of the brutal violations of the bodies and souls of human beings which darken the conscience and sense of justice of all Mankind. With this feeling we wish to speak up before every group, every organization, government and people of the world to say that in the midst the twentieth century, in the midst of the great civilization that glorifies the capabilities of Mankind, there are still places in the world and people who treat others with viciousness and barbarity no worse than that which colored the darkest times of our history.

We wish to send to people the world over our urgent and desperate call for help.

Songkhla, Mar. 6, 1980

THE TRAGEDY CONTINUES FOR THE BOAT PEOPLE IN THE GULF OF SIAM

Further tragedies have been occurring for the boat people in the Gulf of Siam following those which we reported in earlier letters. Below are a few examples that we have recently recorded.

***First Incident: Refugee Women Kidnapped and Taken to the Mainland.**

Witness: Nguyen thi Ngoc Tuyet, 19, graduate of the Center for Modern Language with the State Dept., who left Vietnam with her brother, Nguyen Hong Tuan, and was kidnapped at sea.

The boat "Minh Hai 2101", 14 meters long and carrying 70 people (40 men and 30 women and children) left Ca mau at midnight, Jan. 13, 1980. Shortly after entering international waters it encountered a Thai pirate boat. We now know this was one of those boats called fishing vessels, but in fact specializing in piracy, waiting outside the Rach Gia-Ca Mau area to compete for the Vietnamese refugee boats coming into their grasp.

It was a rather large pirate vessel with a crew of 15. It was equipped with a gun and loudspeaker and an English translator. The number on the bow of the vessel was covered from view by a cloth.

The loudspeaker was used to call the refugee boat to come near and to transfer the passengers onto the pirate boat in an orderly manner. The pirates cooked rice for the refugees and gave them all the drinking water they wanted. It was when everyone was feeling strong that the pirates went into action. They divided the refugees into two groups: the men were taken to the bow and the women were driven into the cabin. They inspected each person without omitting any possible place and took all the gold, silver and jewelry and they degraded the women.

The very pretty Miss Nguyen Thi Ngoc Tuyet, a specialist in the English language, was taken by the pirate leader. This was a man called "Phil", about thirty years old, who spoke to everyone through an English interpreter telling them that if they gave up all their gold they would be set

free, except for Miss Tuyet. If not, the boat with all the refugees aboard would be sunk.

Tuyet's older brother, Nguyen Hong Tuan, 23, and some other youths discussed fighting the pirates, but they realized that this would be suicide since the pirates kept their weapons ready to use at all times.

There were also on the boat 6 other refugees from another junk, 2 men, 2 women and 2 children, who had already been on the pirate ship for several days. These were the survivors of a group of 35 refugees whose boat had been sunk by a different pirate boat after having been plundered and the women raped in an exceedingly barbaric manner 18 times. The 6 had been ordered rescued by Phil as they floundered on the sea, but the 2 women did not escape being raped by the pirates in this band.

According to Miss Tuyet, the situation on the boat grew very tense. In the end, she agreed to go with the pirate boss to save the other refugees.

The pirates herded the remaining 69 refugees and the 6 from the other boat onto the Minh Hai, cut the cable binding them and started their engines. Miss Tuyet stood on the bow weeping. Her brother on the Minh Hai shouted for her to jump into the sea and swim to him, with the intention of going in to save her himself. However, he was held back by the other refugees and Tuyet was held tightly by the pirates, who meanwhile pointed their guns threateningly at the refugees.

The pirate boat raced off with Tuyet, who was kept in the cabin day and night. After 6 days they reached the mainland. Tuyet was taken ashore and kept in a locked room in an uncertain location. Phil continued to use her in a degrading manner. Whenever she resisted, she was beaten.

On the third day of this, by a lucky chance, Tuyet found the door unlocked and Phil gone. Tuyet ran out into the street after a brief struggle with a woman guard.

Eventually she was taken to the American embassy and it was then she discovered she was in fact in the center of Bangkok. The American staffer was amazed and incredulous at the story told by the girl suddenly appearing in his embassy. Miss Tuyet was introduced to a Mr. Denis, the man in charge of interviewing for the American delegation at the refugees camps in Thailand. He helped Tuyet find the

remaining members of the Minh Hai 2101. That boat had fortunately been rescued and the Vietnamese taken to a camp in Malaysia, where they verified her story.

At that point Tuyet was officially recognized as a refugee in Thailand and was taken to the Lumpini camp near Bangkok.

But the sad story of this woman was not yet over.

Lumpini is the transfer camp for all the refugees in Thailand (ie., Vietnamese, Cambodian as well as Lao). It is there they are concentrated for the completion of the formalities before being resettled into a third country.

The Thais at Lumpini would not permit Tuyet to stay with the other refugees, but kept her outside with 2 Thai policemen watching her. She shared a room with 5 other Vietnamese women: Nguyen thi My, 23, Chung Thi My Van, 19, Nguyen Thi Anh Nguyet, 12, Ngo My Dung, 22, and Ngo My Hanh, 17.

The story of these girls is another tragedy. We can not interview these girls directly, so we can only summarize what Tuyet has told us.

These five girls had been kidnapped on the high seas in a situation similar to that of Tuyet. 15 people on their boat had been killed by the pirates before their junk was set adrift toward the Malay shore. The girls were taken to land and sold to a brothel. The house was raided and those inside were arrested and taken to court. The girls had to remain at a refugee camp until the conclusion of the trial, but because the trial was being deliberately prolonged, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs had to agree to let the girls be resettled in West Germany after a request was made by that country's embassy. In this way, the trial of the five girls was thwarted.

According to Miss Tuyet, all the time she was kept at Lumpini, she was treated in a shameless and insulting manner. The 2 Thai policemen guarding the room performed every type of vulgarity on the women short of outright rape with their suggestive remarks and obscene caresses.

The two policemen were entirely in charge and Tuyet, totally helpless, could only resign herself to the situation, not daring to raise her voice in protest.

When once Mr. Denis came to the camp to do interviews, Tuyet asked to leave that camp and firmly requested

to be placed with her fellow refugees. She was finally taken to the Songkhla camp and is there now, waiting to be resettled in the U.S.

***Second Incident: The Boat People Are Treated Like Animals.**

Witnesses: Nguyen Cong Bien, 32, Second Lt. Artillery, who left with his wife, Vu Thi San, 25, and a child of 7 months. His younger sister, Nguyen Thi Nhuong was kidnapped by pirates.

The junk No. KG00226, 10 meters long and 1.8 meters across with 46 passengers (15 children, 8 women and 23 men), left Rach Gia at 3:00 a.m., Jan.28, 1980. They traveled without incident for three days.

At 6:00 a.m. on Jan. 30, they encountered a Thai pirate boat. This boat, No. 1214, was unlike the usual type of fishing boat, which are wood, for this one was made of iron and was equipped with a radar. Its 20 pirates drove all 46 refugees on board the Thai vessel and began inspecting each person, taking away all the gold, jewelry and good clothing. They then forced four youths back into the junk and beat them, trying to get them to tell where more gold was hidden on the junk. After prying up planks and searching everywhere but finding nothing, they stole two motors from the junk (the boat was powered by Jama F-8 motors with two spare motors, a PS 16 and Kohler 4).

The pirates then drove off with the 46 refugees, towing the junk behind with a cable. Before midnight, they came to a spot replete with pirate vessels—in all 12 boats sailed around this vessel and their pirates clambered on board. The scene that took place at this time was described by the witnesses with all its barbaric details. The women were taken out on the deck and raped in every conceivable manner like animals. The 23 men, 15 children and one woman, Do Thi Minh, who only 20 days before had borne the child in her arms, were taken away and forced to sit in one place to witness the horrible scene before them. The 7 other women, including Ms. B.T.X., who was six months pregnant, were degraded by the pirates.

Mr. Bui Doan, 26, told us that he counted at least 50 pirates from the 12 boats that had pulled up alongside the 1214, which number added to the iron boat's crew meant

that the women were attacked by 70 men. The pirates did not rape in any orderly manner, but pulled all the women out on the floor, turned on the lights and gathered around, laughing and joking raucously as they waited their turns. Bui Doan reports his clear recollection that the band of pirates from the boat #1544 were the most vicious. Their faces were painted, leaving only the white eyes exposed and their stripped bodies were tatooed in strange designs; one man's face was tatooed as well. These men wore various kinds of unusual medals. One even wore his pistol at his side.

The women screamed in terror. The pirates, too, roared out. The barbaric debauchery lasted all night, until daybreak. No one could count how many times each of the women had been raped, but each of the pirates had performed the act at least once. In the end, all 7 women lay on the deck motionless and unconscious. Among the seven were two girls, Miss Dinh Thi Hong, 16, who had left with her brother Dinh Van Tien, and Miss Nguyen thi Nhuong, 20, who was with her brother Nguyen Cong Bien. The other five women had husbands and children. All the victims were given back to their families for care. Then the pirates returned to their boats and sailed off. The pirates from the 1214 drove the refugees back onto their junk carrying with them 6 of the rape victims. The pirate leader kept Dinh Thi Hong to take with him.

At around 7:00 a.m. on Jan. 31, the Vietnamese junk continued its journey with only 45 people aboard. But soon the 1214 returned and threw Dinh Thi Hong back on their junk. The girl was barely breathing and perhaps the pirates were afraid she would die on their boat.

The junk sailed on for another 15 minutes or so when the 1544 sailed up behind them and demanded Miss Hong. She was apparently liked because she was the youngest and the prettiest woman. The refugees pleaded with them to let her go, but the pirates threatened to sink the junk if the girl could not be taken, so the refugees gave in and Miss Hong was taken away.

The tragic journey continued and about a half hour later, the 1214 had turned back on them once more, this time demanding another woman, Ms. Nguyen Thi Dao, 23, who was with her husband and 2 year old son. Ms. Dao wept bitterly and clung to her husband and child, determined not

to go over to the pirates. Finally, Miss Nguyen Thi Nhuong, 20, the last single girl on board, had to agree to go with the pirates to save the junk from being sunk.

In the three days that followed the junk sailed on without further incident. At about 6:00 a.m. on Feb.2, they came upon a ship from Singapore, but they were not picked up. They were, however, given food, drinking water, medicine, life savers and 100 liters of oil, as well as directions to the Thai mainland.

They sailed on and at 10:00 that day they encountered two new pirate boats, one No.D879 and the other whose number is forgotten. The scene was a repeat of what they had experienced before--everyone was herded into the pirate boat and inspected, but there was nothing to be found and finally the women were gang-raped again.

This band of pirates was even more cruel than the first. Anyone who wavered or resisted was beaten severely. The men and youths were made to lie down on the bow and were tied with a fishing net. They cried out in desperation, believing they were going to be tossed into the sea. But they were only threatened with death, beaten with a stick and interrogated, being asked to give up any valuables still hidden on them or their junk, but since everything had already been taken away, there was nothing left for them to give up.

The pirates stole a Kohler 4 engine and so the junk had only a F-8 outboard motor to run on.

The junk with 44 people was let go and before they came to land, they were plundered and raped 4 more times by different pirate boats.

At 8:00 p.m. on Feb. 9, they finally reached the Thai shore. This was in the town of Sichol. They were taken to the police to make a report and kept there for 7 days.

On Feb. 15, the 44 suffering refugees were taken to the refugee camp at Songkhla. No one knows what has become of the two young women taken away by the pirates.

During the seven days in Sichol, the following occurred:

The refugees were examined by the Thai police and carefully investigated, with each person's fingerprints and detailed statement taken.

One by one the refugees were taken into a separate room and inspected carefully from top to bottom. A few of

them still had rings and other jewelry sown in their clothes which the pirates had not discovered before and these were confiscated by the Thai police. Mr. Do Quang Dung,²³ a driver, was one discontented refugee who complained about a ring being taken away from him.

On Feb. 14, Dung was present in the police office to fill out his report when suddenly a policeman called "La Ring" slapped him twice on the face. Dung fought back and two friends standing by, Nguyen van Nui,²⁷ and Nguyen Van Don,²⁵ tried to intervene. At once these three were set upon by a group of Thai soldiers in paratrooper uniforms of the American type. The refugees were beaten with sticks and kicked in the face with hard boots until they collapsed in front of the police station in the sight of a number of other refugees and many Thai police officers, including the deputy police chief, a lieutenant called "Stadi".

The police chief came to meet with the refugees and suggested they turn over their valuables for cash at a value of 300 bahts per 3.75 grams (while the official rate of exchange in the Songkhla market was 1000 bahts per 3.75 grams.)

Presently, the 44 refugees from the junk KG00226 are in the Songkhla camp. Ms. Do Thi Minh is with her daughter, a baby and the youngest boat refugee in the camp. Ms. Bui Thi Xuan is about to deliver a child. Dinh Van Tien, the brother of Dinh Thi Hong, and Nguyen Cong Bien, the brother of Nguyen thi Nhuong, have not yet seen their sisters. They recently received a letter from the girls, however, a brief note which we reprint here: "Dear Brothers and Sisters, After being taken by the pirates, by the grace of God we are still alive. We are now at the Satahip police station. If we want to eat we have to buy our own food, but since we don't have any money, we have to ask the other refugees to give us something. Just a few lines to reassure you. Your sisters, Nguyen Thi Nhuong and Dinh Thi Hong."

A second letter was written from the Leamsing camp in Canthabury, saying that the girls were taken there after 15 days of investigation at the Satahip police station. The girls related that after five days aboard the pirate boats, they were abandoned on a deserted shore and picked up by Thai police.

One part of the letter says: "Please give thanks to God and if you have any money please send us a little. Here

we eat what others give us, but everyone is very poor.”

Nguyễn Cong Bien showed us the letter and lamented, “We don’t have anything to give them either.”

The writers have here recorded the details of this incident, using the names of the witnesses with their approval. The refugees are here and have no relatives or friends abroad and will never receive any letters. They have not decided what country they will ask to be resettled in, and it will take the longest for them to be resettled because they do not meet any of the criteria for leaving the camps. They are here, along with 5000 of their compatriots who have their own heart-rending stories to tell. For the time being they have forgotten the things that happened on the sea and try to face the hardships of daily life in the refugee camp. The writers conclude this story with a personal comment: Even as you are reading this account, perhaps on the high seas a similar incident is taking place right now. We wonder if there will be any survivors to tell us the story.

***Third Incident: The Horrors on Ko Kra Island Continue, Many People Are Thrown into the Sea to Drown.**

Witnesses: Ly Ba Hung, who left with his parents, 6 younger brothers and sisters and a brother-in-law. His mother and three younger ones were thrown into the sea to drown.

The junk AG 0961, 8 meters long, 1.4 meters wide, equipped with a small engine and a spare outboard motor, set out from Kien Giang on Feb. 14, 1980 with 38 passengers aboard. After three days and two nights at sea, they encountered pirates on a Thai fishing boat, No. 2523 with a crew of 11. These pirates leaped on board and stole the refugees’ valuables, then rammed into the side of the junk to crack it. In 15 minutes, the junk listed and sank. 6 boat people were drowned, including a 67 year-old woman, a 20 year-old youth, and 4 children aged 5-15. The remainder were picked up by the pirate vessel and taken to Ko Kra Island. About 300 meters from the island, the pirates put the women on a small dinghy and took them ashore while the other refugees were pushed into the sea and forced to swim. 9 people drowned at this time, including 1 youth, 4 children and 4 women (two of whom were pregnant).

Ly Ba Hung, 24, a student of Business Administra-

tion in Dalat before 1975 and paralyzed in both legs since a child and relying on crutches for mobility, when thrown into the sea was fortunate to be able to cling to a life saver and after 11 hours was carried to shore by the tide as he narrowly escaped death. One sibling, Ly Nguyet Minh, 14, had died when the pirates sank the junk. Their mother, Cao Nguyet Nga, 45, and two other siblings, Ly Nguyet Phuong, 21 and 2 months pregnant, and Ly Cao Hieu, 4, drowned when they were pushed into the sea off Ko Kra Island.

The 23 remaining boat people were kept on the island for 16 days while different pirate boats raided them, torturing the men and raping the women night and day. At this point, the plight of the boat people on Ko Kra Island is worse than it was in Dec., 1979, which situation we reported to you earlier. The refugees ran out of drinking water since the rainy season had ended and there was nothing collecting in the hollows. Using tree branches they dug a 3 meter well and found some black, fetid water. They used coral to filter the water. But each time a band of pirates came to the island, the thieves poured out all their filtered water and using the branches scattered the coral as they searched for valuables they suspected were hidden there. The pirates were also by this time becoming familiar with the geography of the island so that it became useless for the women to hide from them, as even the most secret places were found out. And so for the 16 day period on the island, the women were a much sought-after prey for the pirates, who took turns degrading them, while the women had no where to flee and no help from any quarter. On Mar. 3, the refugees were discovered by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs and taken to the mainland. At this time, Ly Ba Hung is in Sonkhla with his father, a brother-in-law (the husband of Ly Nguyet Phuong) and three younger siblings.

***Fourth Incident: Pirates Kidnap Vietnamese Women on Ko Kra Island and Take Them to the Mainland for Sexual Abuse.**

Witnesses: Miss Vu Thi V.V., 18; Miss Nguyen Thi T., 15; Miss Nguyen Thi D., 14.

An unmarked junk 11 meters long, 1.7 meters wide and equipped with a small engine left Minh Hai on the night of Feb. 15, 1980 with 26 people aboard. After three days on the sea they encountered Thai pirates sailing on a fishing boat

of forgotten number and painted red and white. A crew of ten pirates was on board as well as 29 other Vietnamese refugees taken one week before after they had been robbed and raped and their boat sunk. The pirate vessel came down on the new refugee boat and the pirates searched it, then drove all the boat people on board the junk, bringing the total number of refugees on this boat to 55. They were then towed to Ko Kra Island. The sea was calm and only one refugee drowned during the trip. The remaining 54 went ashore to join the 23 refugees already there from the incident described above, to share with them the sad scene that all people brought to the island must suffer: the men were tortured and beaten to find out where valuables were hidden, the women were gang-raped by different bands of pirates, which at the high point came to 50 different fishing boats clustered around the entrance to the island.

After being on the island for 4 days, the girls Vu Thi B.V., Nguyen Thi T. and Nguyen Thi D. were kidnapped by one pirate band and taken to the mainland. This band was led by a man named Thom, with three others: Truc, Trau and Pui. These took the girls to a place about 30km from Pakphanang, Nakhorn Sri Thammaraj province, where they were kept for the pirates' personal pleasure. By a lucky chance, two girls, V. and T., escaped and told the police. They were taken to Pakphanang and later were admitted to the Songkhla camp (Feb. 28). Miss D. was removed by the pirates to another place near Songkhla. She, too, managed to get to the police and asked to be rescued and was also taken to the Songkhla camp. Currently all three are in the camp waiting to be resettled in a third country.

The tragedies described above are continuations of the general tragedy of the boat people, especially those being held on Ko Kra Island. It is impossible to say with accuracy in the early months of 1980 how many other boat people have died at sea without leaving witnesses to tell their story. We only wish to relate to you certain concrete instances of the hardships with witnesses we have interviewed here at the Songkhla refugee camp, meeting with them directly and obtaining permission to use their names. We accept all responsibility for everything described in this report.

We see that the terrible situation of the boat people on the Gulf of Siam still shows no sign of being corrected, even by the simplest of means. Satan still resides in the hell of Ko Kra Island and in the meantime, the boat people continue to leave Vietnam, especially taking advantage of the season of calm seas.

We wish to send to all groups and humanitarian organizations and to all the people of the world the urgent and desperate plea of the boat people to be saved—not only those now drifting on the sea, but also those to come.

Songkhla, Mar.25, 1980

Signed: Vu Thanh Thuy, Duong Phuc, Nhat Tien.

THE VIETNAMESE BOAT PEOPLE AND THAI PIRATES: THE TRAGEDY CONTINUES

Stories such as those that have already been recorded with their details gruesomely similar continue to be repeated daily. Ko Kra Island remains. Hardships still spread over the Gulf of Siam. There are still bands of fisherman-pirates. The stories told below differ only in the time they each took place. The atrocities continue one after another, the only difference among them being the intensity of cruelty which grows greater every day.

***Pirates Enter Songkhla Camp to Kidnap Refugee Girls.**

Witness: Pham Thi H.N, 15, a student, who left home with her 12 year old brother.

An unnumbered junk with 47 passengers aboard, including 10 women, 15 children and 22 men set off from Rach Gia on Mar. 13, 1980 and headed for Thailand. On Mar. 15 they encountered a pirate boat, No. 1443 with 11 pirates sailing her.

The pirates drove the 47 refugees onto their own vessel then rammed the junk in order to sink it. They then stripped the refugees of all the valuables they carried on them—gold, rings, watches, etc. After that, as usual they separated the men into one group and divided up the women among themselves. Pham Thi H.N. was taken into the cabin by the pirate boss and raped there.

The situation on the boat grew very tense. Dr. Ton

That Liem, representing the refugees, related that during the night a group of youths planned to resist the pirates. There were 22 men, twice as many as the pirates, but the latter had guns and knives with which they drove everyone to the bow.

Dr. Liem negotiated with the pirate boss: none of the refugees there had any more gold to hand over, but if the pirates should take them to shore, once in a camp the refugees would get in touch with relatives and contribute a certain amount of gold which would be given to the pirates in return for bringing them in safely. The pirate boss agreed with the added condition that he take Miss N. with him. On the night of the 16th, the boat was coming toward Ko Kra Island when it encountered a Thai police boat and the pirates turned away. At 2:00 a.m. on Mar. 17, they docked in Songkhla. The refugees leaped on shore and the pirates sped away.

The refugees groped their way on this strange land until they were taken to the police station and at noon that day they were admitted into the refugee camp at Songkhla.

From then on, they believed, everything would go smoothly and the refugees were swallowed up in the life of the camp surrounded by others with similar tales to tell.

But on Mar. 30, the pirates came back to make the Vietnamese fulfill their end of the bargain by handing over the payment in gold and the girl.

Five pirates entered through the back gate. There was a guard post there and it is not clear how the pirates could have entered so easily. They then went through the camp searching through every hut and lean-to with the bewildered refugees looking on in confusion and fear. When they found Miss N., two of them grabbed her to pull her along. The girl wriggled in their grasp and screamed. The pirates were surrounded by Vietnamese youths and a number of others went to report the incident to the U.N. Commissioner there. The camp's Security Dept. mobilized its force by means of loudspeakers and the pirates who had tried to take the girl away were caught and handcuffed, then escorted to the station. The refugees followed in great numbers, shouting in indignation. Nearly everyone in the camp had been a victim of pirates. Some of them had seen their entire families killed and wanted to try these pirates right then and

there to take revenge for their dead relatives. The head of the Security Dept. had to guard the lives of the pirates all the way to the station. From there the head of the police station there had his men take over. The two pirates were taken away while the other three had managed to slip back out the same gate they had entered by.

The case is now pending in the Thai court.

Mr. Rozumi, a Japanese and the U.N. Commissioner in Songkhla, ordered the establishment of a special security force to watch out for the safety of Miss N.

The Assistant Commissioner, a Thai, promised that the pirates would not be pardoned and that Thai law would see that they were given a proper trial this time.

The camp boss, former Col. Lam Quang Chinh, and his assistant, Mr. Nguyen Huu Tan, remarked that the refugees were not protected by a piece of paper and that the law did not contain a single concrete provision regarding the security of the Vietnamese.

The previous month, 4 Thai men armed with sticks, took advantage of a blackout to attack 2 Vietnamese youths, M.A.S. and B.X.H., and a girl, N.T.T.T., walking on the beach, beating the young men unconscious and trying to take the girl away. Miss T. cried out and the refugees nearby came out to help her. The attackers let the girl go, but kept the rescuers away with their sticks as they made their getaway. This type of thing happened many times during blackouts.

Dr. Liem, spokesperson for the 47, said he never would have believed the pirates would come right into the camp to see that the refugees were fulfilling their end of the agreement, an agreement he had thought was just an empty promise. Presently, the 47 do not want to take this to court because of their feeling that this would be useless and would only slow down their resettlement in a third country.

Miss N., 15 years old, staying in the camp with her younger brother, appears to have lost her senses and doesn't seem to understand anything, but can only cry all day long.

***New Victims on Ko Kra Island-2 Youths are Shot and Thrown into the Sea .**

Witnesses: Ms. Vo Thi N., 40, and Miss Nguyen Thi A., 16.

Junk No.KG1238, 13 meters long and carrying 42 people, left Rach Gia on Mar. 20, 1980 and sailed out for a day before they encountered a Communist Navy vessel. The Communists robbed them of their valuables and then let them go. This type of scene--refugee boats being stopped and robbed by Communists and then released--is becoming a very familiar one in the area.

At 3p.m. on Mar. 22, a Thai pirate boat attacked them, searching the refugees, wrecking the motor and then letting them go. The junk drifted on and the next morning the scene was repeated. The third time came that afternoon when 2 pirate boats came upon them at once. Both vessels had cloths spread over their bows to hide their numbers. At the time, 3 Vietnamese youths were standing on the bow of the junk holding out a sail. All of a sudden the pirates fired into the three. Nguyen Van Y., 29, was struck by a bullet and fell while his brother-in-law, Nguyen Ngoc Ly, 32, a former air force officer, ran to break the fall. The pirates shot him, too. Then the pirates leaped onto the junk and threw the victims into the sea. Ly and Y., only wounded by the gunshots, struggled to get back to the boat, but they were beaten off by the pirates.

Everyone on the junk saw the bodies of the the two go under.

7 year old Nguyen Thanh Thao wept bitterly to see her father and uncle die so tragically. Thao had left Vietnam with them, her mother staying behind to wait for news and come after them.

The remaining 40 refugees were driven onto the pirate vessel. The men were put in the ice hold and the women were raped. After that, they forced everyone back on the junk and left. The refugees continued to drift without an engine to power them. They had run out of food and water.

On Mar. 24, they met another pirate boat. In terror the women smeared their faces and bodies with viscous oil, hoping in this way to repulse the pirates, but this plan did not deter the attackers who went on with the raping. They pounded holes in the junk, piled up boards as they searched for hidden gold and finally took with them two girls, Nguyen Thi A., 16, and Le Thi Y., 18.

Only ten minutes later there came yet another pirate

boat. This time after the search, they towed the refugees to Ko Kra Island.

7 other pirate vessels were there waiting when they arrived. What ensued could only be described as chaos. The different bands fought over the valuables and women. The 11 women left, with ages ranging from 12-43, were the victims of the most vicious rape right on the beach when everyone was exhausted, hungry, thirsty and sick and their bodies still slimy with oil.

Ms. Vo Thi N., 40, with her 2 daughters, aged 14 and 12, were all three raped at the same time. The pirates didn't bother to take them off to some hidden place, but went right ahead with their rape there on the beach in front of everyone.

The next days, from Mar. 24 to April 1, hundreds of pirates from numerous boat poured onto the island and barbarous scenes took place each day: the hunting of women and the torture of men. The women spread out, some hiding in the jungle, some climbing the mountain, but by now the pirates were well acquainted with the territory and kept up the search. Sometimes they set fire to the jungle to drive the women out.

A. and Y., kidnapped by the pirates, were kept for their captors' pleasure as they fished and 3 days later were taken to Ko Kra to join the other women from their junk. There they again became victims of numberless pirates.

Miss A., 16, her relatives still in Vietnam, had come on the junk by herself. She tells us that immediately after being taken away with Miss Y., the 6 pirates raped the girls a total of 12 times. Afterwards, A. was kept for the pirate boss and Y. left for the other five. This went on for three days and nights—the pirates fished, drank wine, smoked pot and raped. When they were satisfied, they returned the two to Ko Kra for the other pirates to abuse.

On Apr. 1 a Thai police boat stopped at the island and took the refugees to PakPanang. At police headquarters the 40 were interrogated for 10 days and accepted into the Songkhla camp on Apr. 11.

During the ten days they were in the police station by the dock, the refugees once spotted the very boat whose pirates had shot the two young men and had been the first to rape the women docked there and this the refugees reported

to the police. But the Thai officials paid no attention to their report and actually pressured the refugees to forget their complaint, saying it had to be withdrawn before they could be taken to Songkhla.

***Vietnamese Girls Are Raped, Mutilated and Their Corpses Thrown into the Sea.**

Witness: Bui Ngoc Duong, 37, former Dean of Students at Van Hanh University in Saigon.

Mr. Bui Ngoc Duong left Vietnam with his wife and three children on the junk numbered AG 082 with 59 other refugees on Jan. 7, 1980. Three days out of Long Xuyen they twice encountered Thai pirates before finally coming ashore at the village of Maroud, Panareh district, Pattani province in Thailand. They remained there from Jan.11 till Apr.4 when they were taken to the refugee camp in Songkhla.

While they were in Maroud, on the morning of Mar. 17, they were told by local police to come and claim the body of a Vietnamese girl around 16 years of age which had been found on shore about 2½km from their camp, in Ghe Ghe village, Panareh district. Mr. Duong with about 30 other refugees, mostly young men followed directions given by Thai police and found the spot. They had come with axes and shovels, incense, a pair of clothes and a nylon cloth. Upon reaching the body, they were greeted by a most gruesome scene: there on the sand was the naked body of a sixteen year-old girl spread full length. Her hair was short, her eyes had been gauged out and the sockets were deep red holes infested with flies and other insects. One side of her mouth had been torn revealing her teeth and blood still poured from that wound. There were bruises on her neck and temples. From her neck up, she was all black and blue. Her nipples had been cut off as well and her vagina was torn and filled with bugs and pieces of the implement they had used to cut her up. Besides the refugees who witnessed this scene, there were also some Thai policemen from Panareh district, a number of Thai citizens including some military officers and an English-speaking professor who resided in Maroud. After inspecting the body, the conclusion was made by all present that the girl had been raped on the sea, but had probably resisted and thus been brutally murdered and thrown into the gulf, perhaps two days before, and now her corpse had been

washed ashore. The number of the boat she had been on, how many people were on board, what happened to them—no one knows the answers to these questions. Pham Van Liem and Nguyen Kim Cuong dressed the body and wrapped it in the cloth they had with them. The girl was buried in a cemetery two and a half km. south of Maroud. A poplar branch marks the grave with the words "For Freedom's Sake" carved on it, in memory of the tragic fate of one of their sisters who had been murdered on the sea in the course of seeking freedom from the Communists. There were no burial rites other than the bitter tears of the remaining refugees. As they passed the beach on the way back to camp, they could still see the impression the body had made in the sand and the places where the blood dripping from her mouth had stained the white beach.

This was not the first time that the corpse of a refugee was discovered on the beach near Maroud. The previous afternoon the Thai police had reported to them that there was a 2 year-old girl's body found but one kilometer from the camp. The Vietnamese who went to look found the body of the girl wearing a dress with a label from a tailor in Saigon. Mr. Tran Van Quan, 49, relates how he had left from Binh Trieu Bridge in Saigon on Mar. 13 with 24 other refugees in an unmarked junk 7.8m long and 1.9m wide. After two days they encountered Thai pirates who bore holes in the junk in order to sink it, then began taking the refugees to the mainland. They used a small launch to take the boat people the last 500m, seven refugees at a time. In the first trip, there were Mr. Quan and his wife and 10 year old son, a driver and his 4 year old son and a woman with her young daughter. About 30 meters from shore, high waves toppled the launch and everyone drowned except Mr. Quan, who lay unconscious on the beach. When the pirates saw the boat flip over, they hurried off with the other 17 refugees. While staying in the Maroud camp, Mr. Quan had been among those who claimed the body of the baby girl, which he recognized as the daughter of the woman who had been on the launch with him. The girl was buried 1km from camp and according to the local Thai people that place was also the burial ground for 3 other refugees whose bodies had been found washed ashore and taken care of by the Thais.

All across the shores surrounding the Gulf of Siam

are scattered the corpses of Vietnamese refugees who had been raped and robbed by pirates, their boats sunk and they left to drown and be washed up on the beaches. But not many of these bodies have been found and attended to by the Vietnamese. And even if they were given a proper burial, there is no one to speak up and declare to the world the horrors they encountered, like the teenage girl who had suffered in the arms of pirates before she was cut up and her body thrown to the sea.

Currently there are 6,736 refugees in the camp at Songkhla. Each person, each family, each boat has its own tragic story to tell of thievery, rape and death on the sea, on a desert island and in the fishing villages along the coast of Thailand.

We were told these stories described here by eye-witnesses now in the Songkhla camp and accept all responsibility for the accuracy of the details we have presented.

We earnestly call upon the world, especially the people of Thailand and the Thai media, to support us in denouncing the atrocity of piracy which is growing ever greater around us.

Songkhla; Apr.13, 1980

Signed: Vu Thanh Thuy, Duong Phuc, Nhat Tien

PETITION OF THE 157 VICTIMS OF PIRATE ATROCITIES ON KO KRA ISLAND

To

Dr. Nguyen Huu Xuong

Chairperson of the Boatpeople S.O.S Committee, San Diego

Mr. Vo Van Ai

Chairperson, Committee to Save the Boatpeople, Paris

with the request this petition be forwarded to the Secty. Gen. of the United Nations, the President and Congress of the United States, Freedom and Human Rights Organizations throughout the world, various organizations in the refugee community and the news media, asking them to support this petition.

We are members of a group of 157 Vietnamese boatpeople who were the victims of pirate atrocities, having been held for 21 days on Ko Kra Island where we were subjected to robbery, torture and rape day and night throughout the period of Oct. 29 to Nov.18, 1979 before we were rescued by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs who took us to the Thai mainland, namely the town of Pakphang, Nakorn Sri Thammaraj province.

It was here that due to the identification of some of the pirates who dared to frequent the police station near where we were staying and also to the moral support of the High Commissioner of Refugee Affairs in Thailand that we signed statements formally accusing the pirates, not in order to demand they be put on trial that we might obtain some degree of personal satisfaction or revenge, but rather in order that the light of justice in Thailand illuminate the appalling tragedies that have occurred and are even now still occurring in the Gulf of Siam for the Vietnamese boatpeople crossing the sea in search of freedom.

But now, five long months later, there are signs that the trial is being prolonged indefinitely.

All this time we have been temporarily settled at the refugee camp in Songkhla, Thailand, awaiting the conclusion of the trial which must precede our being resettled perma-

nently in the United States (We have already been accepted for resettlement by the U.S. government.)

We have believed that the delay in our being resettled is an essential element and a necessary price that we have to pay in order that, first, the people and government of Thailand recognize and put an end to the terrible things that are taking place in Thai territorial waters and, secondly, that the governments and freedom and human rights organizations across the globe see vividly the fate not only of ourselves but of all the refugees who came and are coming after us so that these groups might seek a means of ending these tragedies as soon as possible.

After a long period of waiting, however, a number of factors have caused us to propose this petition:

1) Although we are temporarily resettled in a refugee camp within a barbed wire enclosure and under the protection of the Thai police, there have nonetheless been times in which the pirates have taken it upon themselves to enter our camp in broad daylight, visiting each of the shelters housing the refugees who might be later able to identify them and in one instance even trying to kidnap a Vietnamese girl and take her with them (although fortunately this plan was foiled by the timely intervention of her fellow refugees). The most recent of these events are the incidents of Mar.30, 1980 when two pirates attempted to kidnap Miss Pham Thi Huong Ngã and of Apr. 22, 1980 when two pirates who entered camp were identified as having participated in the sinking of the junk AG 0961 at which time 15 refugees were killed. These incidents have been reported to the Thai police by a committee of camp representatives, but as of yet we have not witnessed any measures to greater ensure the security of the refugees in the camp. As a result, the 157 refugees involved in the formal accusation of certain pirates in connection with atrocities live in the constant fear that retaliation by the pirates can occur at any time and we have no idea how we will fare if things such as these infiltrations continue to take place.

2) Following the 21 days of abuse on Ko Kra Island, the refugees fell into a state of physical and moral degeneration. Add to that the five months of waiting for a trial and the poverty and suffering which are part of life in a refugee camp (most of us having no recourse to relatives outside for

help) and you can imagine the condition of our health. We are especially concerned for the women among us who are now victims of diseases brought about by the violence of the pirates. In spite of the devoted care of the medical personnel here, these diseases continue to worsen because of the poor health of our women, exhibiting grave symptoms both physical and psychological.

3) Our women have become exhausted totally by being called up by the court for examination, being requested to appear again the next month or being informed their testimony has been delayed for one month and then another...We feel that as a result of the tragedy on Ko Kra, the most painful wounds suffered by these women are emotional ones and all of us desire that this horrible past be put out of their minds soon. But the actions of the court continue to recall these terrible scenes to them, greatly disturbing the minds of these pitiable women. Many have already shown signs of mental breakdown—some by trying to commit suicide by drowning themselves in the sea in order to end once and for all their protracted agony.

*

It is based on these practical considerations that we reluctantly offer this petition, earnestly beseeching you to consider our suffering on Ko Kra Island and our present difficulties as we await the conclusion of the trial and asking you to use your extensive influence to campaign for our departure from Thailand so that we may resettle permanently as soon as we can. It is not that we wish to give up on the trial before it is over, but rather in order that we may be able to restore our physical and mental health and ensure our personal safety during the time we await the next convening of the court.

It is our hope that while assimilating ourselves to our new lives, in a new environment and with better living conditions we will recover our health and mental alacrity so that we may perform our role as witnesses in a confident and clear-minded manner.

We solemnly pledge that no matter where we are resettled, when we are called upon by the Thai court and have the financial means to do so, we will return to Thailand for the convening of the court, feeling as we do that the information we may provide as witnesses will cause the trial to

be carried out more efficiently and bring about a ruling of the court that will be full of true justice—an objective we sincerely aspire to.

We hope that your deep appreciation of the tragedies of not only ourselves but also all the Vietnamese boat-people who have been and are now victims of pirates will persuade you to accept this petition we have outlined above.

We send you our deepest and most sincere gratitude.

Songkhla, Thailand, May 7, 1980

Signed: Nhat Tien

*This paper is presented and forwarded by the victims of Ko Kra Island.

AN OPEN LETTER FROM SONGKHLA

To
Boat People S.O.S Committee

Please forward this to the Vietnamese communities and newspapers

To All Of You,

I'm writing this letter from hut No.25, one among 41 rows of huts in the refugee camp in Songkhla, Thailand. I'm sitting on a wooden bed held together by slats. Nearly the whole extent of the bed is soaked with rain and I'm curled up to keep the drops from the leaky leaf roof from falling on my head. I sit here writing this letter and waiting for the morning to come because there's no dry place left for me to lie down to get some sleep. Still, I'm luckier than a lot of my fellow refugees in the camp, since at least I have a hut to stay in. Many others have it harder, eating and sleeping out-

doors for lack of adequate shelter. When the rains come, like this one, they're huddled up together in the cramped quarters of a poor church with its simple leaf walls, sagging roof and no decoration other than its wooden slats.

The rainy season in Thailand has only just begun. This new rain will last but a few hours. For the next few weeks it will rain for 3 to 4 days at a stretch without any let-up. I can't imagine what will become of the more than 6000 refugees here. One night last week, early in July, we had a storm with a heavy wind. How those cold, bitter winds must have bitten the flesh of the young ones who have only been in camp a short while, how much it must have made them shiver. Maybe in a week or two they'll be given a thin blanket—not one apiece, but one for three people. These blankets come from the charities, including contributions by many of our compatriots collected in fund drives by newspapers. Many nights I've seen the children huddled on top of gunny sacks along the barbed wire fence on the beach. If a storm should come, these kids, like everyone else, jump up and scurry for shelter till the rain is over.

Last night the wind blew the roofs off some of the dilapidated huts. The people in huts 12, 17 and 26 were suddenly exposed to the violent storm when their huts were blown down. Clothes, belongings and even people tumbled about in the rain. A lot of other huts won't make it past the next storm because of their poor state of construction. This squalid environment is home for countless scrawny, feeble frames. There's no telling how many of our compatriots are not eating well. But by the meagre rations we've been given (one family of five shares three fish half the size of your hand for 2 meals, or some days the fare changes and 70 people share a chicken for one day) and also by the pale, gaunt faces, the bony shoulders, the scrawny arms, I can see clearly that many people here are not getting financial help from the outside. We all simply hope for our rice and fish from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs and then we have to worry about how to come up with kindling to cook that rice and fish, which is a problem in itself, although once in a while, on rare occasions each person is given one kilo of coal. As for stoves, pots, pans, bowls and chopsticks, salt and fish sauce, that's up to each refugee to take care of for him-or herself. This is the plight of the over 6000

refugees here, not counting a small minority who have relatives sending money to help them out.

In an open letter we all signed and sent to the Pope in Rome in May of 1980, we included the moving statement: "Here we lack all the essentials for living as a human being. We are not living here-rather, we are just trying to survive."

Indeed, this struggle to survive is like tottering at the gates of hell or on the brink of the abyss. Here we do not have life, since real human life is not sharing our rice bowls every day with black flies and our wooden beds with bedbugs, enduring rainy nights and blistering hot days by trying to find cover beneath tattered leaf roofs with a crowd of others. It's all just an existence fighting for breath on the border of true life-and it can be found not just here but in all the camps in Southeast Asia. At the same time I must also add that although this is hell for the survivors, it is still a thousand times-nay, a million times better than the hell erected for us by the Communists at home, with its frequent arrests, imprisonment and exile, the physical as well as mental torment, where a person sinks continually deeper into shame and misery with no hope of escaping this as long as the Communists are still there.

Having reached the port to Freedom, we have the right to hope in the future. But in the days and months of waiting, wasting away, in the refugee camp, the lives of our fellow refugees will no doubt be less agonizing if all those who left before us, already secure in their new lives, would look back to sympathize with us, to share with us by sacrificing one part of their income to contribute to a rescue fund. Surely by doing this you will remove your fellow refugees far from the abyss of suffering. Children and babies will not shiver in the nights, unprotected against the cold winds. Women will not crouch lamentably not only from fits of exhaustion after having been victims of violence on the sea, but as well from struggling against want and total physical depletion.

Dear Friends,

The scene we have described above is but the plight of those lucky enough to have reached shore and are waiting to resettle in a third country.

Prior to this, nearly all of us have had to pass through horrible tragedies on the sea. By our statistics, gathered on our own by boat people presently in the camp, in May of this year altogether 41 new boats arrived at the camp, out of which 36 (88%) had been attacked by pirates. In June the number was 36 boats, 35 of which had been attacked (97%). Behind these cold, dry facts is hidden how much suffering and humiliation? The terrible details of these tragedies have been recounted over and over again in the indictments now being printed in the papers...perhaps to the point of being almost dull and commonplace. But the fact remains that these stories are still something new for each boat, each family that comes across the open sea. Every day, every hour there are bands of vicious devils ready to strike, leaping and screaming onto the motionless bodies of innocent women already unconscious on the deck, ready to start their motors so that their sturdy boats can ram the fragile vessels of the refugees, ready to throw innocent babies into the sea, ready to use hammers and axes to drive the boat people into the sea...

We here have wept with all our feelings for such tragedies that continue to occur on the sea and which we know will occur again often in the future. And we here must personally greet each day our fellow refugees coming in--or more accurately, to greet those just come back from the grave as they climb up the shore in ragged and filthy clothes, and the many who have nothing but the clothes on their backs. We meet the rickety boats bearing from the sea babies lying motionless from exhaustion in the trembling, bony arms of their mothers. The women look bewildered, ashen and lifeless, the horrible events that took place during their journeys imprinted on their faces in shame and hurt. Most painful of all is witnessing the boats in which all the women are unable to move from having been raped so many times. These women we take to the dispensary, one litter following upon another in a somber line passing groups of fellow refugees who have come to watch them, no one speaking, no one daring to make a sound, not even a small one. Silence envelops us all in that sad scene, a quiet replete with hurt, misery and frustration that no one need tell another as everyone's eyes are brimming with tears. That image follows us every hour, every minute, everywhere we go. We try to eat, but get

a feeling like our insides are being chafed with salt. At night, asleep, we can still hear the heart-rending screams of the young girls being used in the arms of those devils and can see in our dreams the hands waving helplessly just above the surface of the water and the waves covering their heads and finally them all sinking in the wide ocean. It is here at Songkhla, or Leamsing, or Sikhui, or Trengganu, or Pulau Bidong, Pulau Tengah, or any other refugee camp in Southeast Asia. The milieu of suffering, separation, hurt, shame, of deprivation and sickness serves to trouble and pain all those who now live a secure new life and who share the suffering and hardships of their compatriots.

We ask you to please stand up and do something to alleviate the deprivation of the refugees in the camps so that piracy will come to an end and so that the sea devils will not be allowed to continue their savage screams over the bodies of the Vietnamese women and children or to viciously throw your fellow refugees into the sea.

Please do something.

We do not want this to be a desperate call to awaken your pity. Rather, we raise our voices in a cry, a demand that everyone pay a debt of the heart. It is the debt of those who for freedom left their homes and died silently and solemnly on the Eastern Sea. On behalf of these courageous and silent deaths for the sake of freedom (a freedom which we now enjoy), we must do something for those coming after us. We feel that this would be the best means of honoring the memory of the lost ones, some of whom are our own loved ones and friends, and the others at least our fellow Vietnamese.

Songkhla, Thailand
July 10, 1980
signed: Nhat Tien

REPORT ON THE KO KRA TRIAL

Pirates, Witnesses, The Thai Court The Most Recent Developments Concerning Piracy On The High Seas And The Plight Of The Boat People In The Refugee Camps

Dear Friends,

We are witnesses in the trial involving 157 boat refugees who had been detained on the island of Ko Kra by pirates and who later accused by name certain of those pirates whom we recognized in the vicinity of the police station of Pakpanang, Nakorn Sri Thamaraj province in South Thailand, charging them with certain crimes committed against us on the island.

During the time the trial dragged on (from November 1979 to June 1980), newspapers and magazines published accounts of the tragedies, not only of the 157, but of nearly all the boat refugees who have left their country seeking freedom.

All of you, the communications media, various organizations and groups, high school and college students, individuals in different departments and the government and our fellow refugees in the U.S. and abroad, assisted by raising your voices, utilizing various and sundry methods to see the trial be brought to a conclusion and to apply pressure on the Thai government to bring the crime of piracy to a swift end. We wish to express our sincere gratitude for your sympathy, your sense of sharing and your assistance all throughout the course of the trial while we were being detained in the refugee camp at Songkhla.

Now that our role in Thailand is completed, we have left that country to resettle and we feel we have a responsibility to report to the world about the Ko Kra trial and at the same time, having witnessed what transpired here, we wish to report further the most recent news concerning the scourge of piracy on the seas. It is not our ambition to relate every incident, each painful circumstance encountered by all the

boat refugees. However, we hope that our tiny voice raised in conjunction with the voices of the victims and witnesses will be sufficient to describe the frightening tragedies that the Vietnamese boat people have endured, are enduring and shall continue to endure on their flight from the Communists in search of freedom.

Our report is composed of three parts:

- A. the report on the Ko Kra trial.
- B. a description of the robbery and violence on the sea up to July 1980, as recorded at the camp in Songkhla, Thailand, and some suggestions by ourselves on how to deal with it.
- C. a description of the material and psychological and emotional conditions of the refugees in the camps and the deep aspirations of those people.

PART A: THE KO KRA TRIAL

The atrocities of the pirates committed against the 157 victims on Ko Kra island during 21 days (from Oct.29 – Nov. 18,1979) can be summarized as follows:

1) driving 17 people into the sea 300 meters from the island shore so that they drowned,

2) raping the women in a most barbarous and brutal manner continuously night and day for the duration of the time we were on the island.

3) setting fire to the brush to force the women in hiding there to flee into the open and thus searing the back of an 18 year old girl,

4) degrading and torturing the men in all possible ways: choking them with fishing lines, hanging them upside-down from trees, breaking their heads open with axes and then thrusting them head-first into fire, throwing people from high rocks down the mountain slope to the beach, threatening by placing guns to their temples then firing just beside the head, as well as beating and other acts of violence,

5) using pliers and axes to pry out gold teeth and seizing other articles, including clothing.

When we were rescued by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs and taken to the police station at Pakpanang district, a group of 7 pirates (out of the hundreds who came to do violence on the island) happened by

the place where we were temporarily staying so that we recognized them and got the police to arrest them. We asked to have these men taken to court, not with the intention of gaining any personal revenge, but in order that the Thai government and the people of the world learn of the woeful plight of all the boat refugees in hopes that the tragedies on the sea would be stopped because of this.

By Thai law, we were not permitted to be plaintiff, but the trial proceeded with the pirates as defendants, the government as plaintiff and we as witnesses. Our actual role we were not informed of at once, but rather, several months passed before it was made clear to us.

In the situation described above, our trial proceeded in two stages.

***First Stage:** The report by the Pakpanang police, which took ten days, from Nov.18–28. During this time, some of the victims offered to testify witnesses to identify the 7 pirates taken by the police. Other victims, since they were not direct witnesses, were not examined. The Thai police concluded their investigation, made their reports, took pictures with the pirates and finally the witnesses signed their statements. We should note that during the 10 days at Pakpanang, we felt pressure from the Thai police and relatives of the captured pirates, in the form of threats of death, the spreading of rumors that the trial would drag on to delay our resettlement and promises of money if we would drop the charges. But we paid no heed to these attempts to influence our attitude and we remained steadfast in our position, despite our disappointment in seeing that only 8 days later the captured pirates were released and some of them later reappeared at the police station to taunt us.

***Second Stage:** The provincial court at Songkhla took up the case, which continued from December 1979 until we left the camp (early July, 1980), all during which time we had to remain in the temporary resettlement camp. Beginning in June, 1980, each month the witnesses were called up by the court to be questioned or told there would be a postponement for another month, and then another month...

The court never called all the witnesses together in one session, but instead, broke them up into small groups of one or two people. Ostensibly, the Thai court felt that for

each group of victims bringing a case against the pirates the court would convene separately for that group of witnesses. But in reality, this was a deliberate attempt to divide the trial into many small components, each unrelated to any other, in order to diminish the integrity of the trial.

And so, every month the witnesses were called on to testify, one person each day, each on a separate day. All the court sessions were the same, with the witness being examined then sent home to be examined further the next month or else be told her testimony would not be required for another month.

Each time the court convened, there were in attendance: the presiding judge, the prosecutor, the attorney for the defence, the witness and a Thai-Vietnamese interpreter. We never saw one of the defendants there to confront the witnesses nor was there any attorney for the witnesses. (Only in the end, in the final sessions of the court in June and early July, was there a famous Thai lawyer representing the U.N.H.C.R.A. in his testimony.) All sessions were conducted in this manner, not just one. The judge took the witnesses' testimony merely in order to complement the court's file.

However, the attorney present for the defence intimidated the witnesses. This advocate contrived a number of questions that had nothing to do with the trial, for example: In Vietnam, what street did you live on? In what province? What job did you have? Were you good at your job? How many years experience did you have? What was your salary? Do you have many friends? What kind of people are they? Why did you leave Vietnam?

Or if the questions were relevant to the trial, they were malicious, in the order of : When you were raped, did you scream? How did you scream? Show us exactly how you screamed at that time. Tell us explicitly what the rapist did to you. Was there a moon out at the time? Did the moon rise on your left or your right? etc.

Questions of this sort were asked throughout the 8 hours of the session, except for an hour's break for lunch. The witnesses were made to stand in the dock, in accordance with court procedures, and there was no chair for them to sit on. Fatigued, expended, humiliated, sore, crushed and angered—these feelings trespassed upon the depressed and hopeless, enfeebled and diseased victims, bringing them to a state of

total collapse and filling them with fear and apprehension each time they were called testify. If indeed the intention was to mistreat the witnesses as a means of coercing them to abandon their attempts to try the wrongdoers, then the court at Songkhla reached eminence in the technique of breaking a person down. Along with that, the defence attorney tried to buy off the witnesses right there in the courtroom: drop the charges and you'll be compensated monetarily, if not, it will be a long time before you can leave the country to settle.

This was the pattern of trial that all the witnesses experienced and it lasted from January to May 1980.

At the end of June, due to the intervention of the U.N.H.C.R.A., there was a U.N. lawyer present and the session no longer dragged on in this absurd manner. Each session was concluded in short order in 2 hours. These were the sessions of June 30, July 2 and 3 and July 30. At the end of each session, the judge handed down his ruling for each group.

The term "ruling" means the court declared it no longer needed the witnesses to be present. They could leave Thailand without hindering the court's processes. From that point, it was an affair of the Thai government as plaintiff and the pirates as defendants. Whether the plaintiff wished to prosecute or not, and if so in what manner, only it knew and no outsider could interfere. That is the Thai law, that is the form they carried on in, while the witnesses could demand nothing, nor even force the government to make public its decision.

With a trial of this nature, the victim-witnesses no longer had any reason to remain in Thailand. They had fulfilled their responsibility courageously, enduring their situation to the utmost. In the 8 months time, not one had been absent from court even a single time when called to testify. And though broken down in body and mind, and despite having borne threats, pressures and bribe attempts, they never from the start betrayed their testimony. This says much for those who, during the entire time from the opening of the trial till the day the U.N.H.C.R.A. gave them permission to leave, had become prisoners behind four rows of barbed wire that surrounded the Songkhla camp, living in want and misery, while the accused pirates could do as they pleased outside the dominion of the law.

We predict that, if made to bear pressure from the outside world, in another few months the Thai government will publish its ruling on the Ko Kra trial, symbolically, silently—just as in early June the Songkhla court handed down for the first time a sentence of 8-24 years against another band of pirates. These pirates had raped a good number of women on Ko Kra Island in January 1980, including a 12 year old girl who was thus degraded to death. When the verdict was announced (as related by Voice of America, based upon a story from the Bangkok Post), the victims had already been resettled in West Germany. As for those who died wretchedly, never were the names of their relatives mentioned and, of course, there was no compensation for the hapless refugees.

From the painful experiences extracted from the trial, we can make the following observations:

1) The Thai government is not really concerned about the tragedies caused by the pirates against the Vietnamese refugees, to the point of not even sympathizing with or comforting the victims. While suffering caused by their own countrymen spreads through the camp, no organization, be it voluntary or governmental, has gone to the camps to meet the victims to comfort them or offer assistance, not to speak of siding with the victims before justice.

2) The fostering of piracy has its origin, as the news media has already stated, in the Thai government's desire to discourage the Vietnamese boat refugees from coming to Thailand by permitting improper behavior by the pirates.

3) the Thai government's complaint that it is powerless in the face of the pirates and that it does not have the means to stop them is merely an excuse for evading their responsibility. In fact, the pirates are not well-equipped or well-armed. In most cases they carry only axes and daggers. Some have pistols, shotguns or old rifles of the ancient French style. It is our belief that the Thai police with only small boats like the fishing boats and armed with a few M16's can take care of all or at least the majority of the pirate vessels on the sea. The pirates are cowards. They attack only those refugees whom they know are unarmed and exhausted in body and spirit from hunger, thirst and storms on the open sea. And besides, almost no refugee boat is equipped with weapons for self-defence, except for a very

rare few and in those instances the refugees escaped the atrocities of the pirates, though they met many of them on their journey. And among the pirates, most are just ordinary fishermen who take to piracy when the opportunity arises. There are a few professional brigands with loudspeakers and English translators. The danger is that in acquiring wealth by preying on the refugees, they attract more and more fishermen to their atrocious behavior and bring back bestiality to the traditionally gentle nature of the Thai people.

To wind up this section of the report on the Ko Kra trial, we have made the following conclusions:

1) In running through this trial for 8 months, although we did not get a concrete verdict by the court, nonetheless, through this process and with the support and assistance of the news media and efforts from many quarters, the plight of the boat refugees has been clearly brought to the attention of the general public. Many have died before us in silence and bitter shame. Their relatives spoke of them, the newspapers mentioned their fates, but because the wrongdoers had not been apprehended, the voices of the victims were lost and forgotten. Now, however, the Thai government cannot deny the concrete evidence laid before it. And this point is worth mentioning: our prime goal has been achieved because of the active assistance of every arena, every organization around the world.

2) This action by us with the assistance of the news media and people all over the world can only be of benefit to the refugees coming after us if the struggle against the pirates continues to push hard to the end. If after we are gone the public sinks into apathy and no one cares any more, like leaving a play after the final curtain, indeed it will bring for our compatriots following us sad consequences contrary to what we desire. The pirates will run wild, with the fostering of the Thai government, even while the whole world rails against them. They will turn around and retaliate against the boats coming after by their wicked and unconscionable actions: robbing and pillaging, rape, and finally the eliminating of the victims by throwing them into the sea in order to destroy the evidence of their misdeeds. We beg each and every one of you to be concerned about that danger, that by pooling our strength we may find the means to stop them before it is too late.. Presently, the East Sea is entering on the

rainy season and perhaps the number of refugee boats will diminish. But in the beginning of next year, without a doubt the Gulf of Siam will again be swarming with Vietnamese refugees seeking freedom. And it is not unlikely that they too will fall into the thick nets laid by the Thai pirates.

Until then, do we have enough time to deal with the piracy problem? We believe in the days to come, the efforts will continue everywhere and we hope that by relying on the firm and active spirit of struggle of all people our goal can be achieved.

PART B: PILLAGE AND VIOLENCE ON THE SEA UP TO JULY 7, 1980, AS RECORDED IN THE REFUGEE CAMP IN SONGKHLA

During the time we have been temporarily settled in the refugee camp in Songkhla, we have learned (through the newspapers) about certain real successes in many areas in the struggle against piracy. Of special note is a patrol boat given by the U.N. and other organizations to the Thai government to keep the pirates off the sea. But as we stated earlier, seeing that the Thai government is not inclined to resolve this problem, no matter how many boats you give them, their use will only be a formality and for all practical purposes the pirate plague will remain with us. We feel that only when the Thai government is moved to suffering and compassion for those who have died ignominiously on the sea, for the women and girls subjected to violence in the arms of the pirates—only then will they realize the spirit of Altruism, Wisdom and Courage of the Buddhist tradition, long-standing in their country, and only then will the piracy problem be dealt with an active manner.

At Songkhla, we had to opportunity to meet with the new boats coming into camp. Nearly all these boats had left Vietnam since the beginning of 1980, especially between March and June, when the sea was in its peaceful season. The Gulf of Siam at that time is like a lake and as well during that period there were palpable measures being taken by the outside world to assist in opposing the pirates. Nonetheless, Vietnamese boats continued to be attacked, refugees were thrown into the sea, women were raped, people were taken to Ko Kra to be abused en masse. On the average, each boat

was robbed about 5 times, some as many as 24 times. The record for one boat is 47 times. This speaks something about the nature of the activities of the Thai pirates. Each attack was simply a repetition of the scene before: they drove the refugees onto their boat and divided them into two groups, men and women (many pirates drove the men into the ice hold--for preserving fish-- and some men died from being kept there too long); then came the painstaking search, the tearing up of the boat to look for hidden gold; many pirate gangs coming later went on with their search and destruction very patiently, in hopes of discovering a hiding place that the other gangs had missed, causing a lot of refugee boats to be so riddled with holes that they began to sink; sometimes the later gangs, upon finding nothing left worth taking, rammed the refugee boat until it ruptured or turned over; everything aboard had been cleaned up: gold, jewelry, money, watches, clothes, the boat's compass, repair tools, the boat engine, even gasoline and oil; food and water were dumped overboard as the pirates searched for gold; finally came the rape of the women, even of girls around 11 or 12. Often after several such attacks the boat degressed to a most pitiful state: holes were plugged up with clothes and water had to be bailed out constantly while everyone on board was nearly exhausted, with no food or water and no way to power their craft. Like ghost vessels they drifted over the broad Gulf of Siam. They might drown forever in the great sea with no one surviving to tell their tragic tale. Some junks were towed by the pirates up to within a few kilometers from shore and then the cable was cut and the refugees were abandoned in the water. Using planks from their freedom boat, they rowed toward land. Many times, 100-200 meters from shore, they'd be surrounded by smaller Thai fishing boats whose sailors hoped to find any last valuables before the refugees came in. In other instances, after the refugees had already landed, they were taken out by the local populace and searched while they stood exhausted and faint from hunger, thirst and weariness. In other, sadder, situations, some local Thai youths shot and killed refugees and raped the women by night. When the refugees are taken from the beach to the local government headquarters, youths might come to search them, touching the women's bodies in an offensive manner, even in broad daylight and right in view of the police and local

people (this has not been mentioned before by us since it did not seem as serious as the gang rapes which also occurred).

In touching on these dismal topics, we are not trying to generalize the blame or deny the many instances in which the local people came to the beach to try and help the refugees when they arrived. Such kind-hearted individuals cooked rice gruel, built fires, and sought ways to contact the Thai government in order to facilitate the transfer of the refugees to the camps. According to our statistics, in May 1980 the boats that came to Songkhla had been robbed at sea a total of 117 times, while on only 9 occasions did the local people rob them on shore. However, when speaking of good and evil, helping versus taking away, in Thailand it appears the people are either all good or all bad with no mixtures of both—good people did good, bad people continued to do evil. No one seemed to be affected or moved by another. Indifferently, everyone simply fulfilled his or her own responsibility in a cold manner. Permit me to describe to you here the bitter and painful image of a number of refugees coming ashore. First, they were concentrated in one place by the local populace. Up to 100 people gathered around the refugees. Old women brought baskets of bread or cakes to distribute among them. In the meantime came 50-70 men, forcing all the women and girls to stand straight up with their hands held high in the air so that these men could feel them freely along their entire bodies. Imagine a young girl, starving and nearly exhausted, one hand clutching at a basket of cakes that an old woman was bringing by, tears flowing as she devours the food with her other hand raised to gratify the Thai youths who acted as they wished. What could be more painful, provoking and bitter?

This is the general plight of about 80% of the Vietnamese junks that arrive at Songkhla. Most of the other 20% endure even greater hardships. These are the refugees taken by pirates to Ko Kra Island. Some 300 meters from the island's shore, the men are pushed overboard to swim ashore while the women and children are mostly taken in small dinghies. Many of the refugees drown at this point. The survivors endure further terrifying and horrible ordeals, which we have reported to you in our previously published indictments. These sad people are forced to suffer in this manner until discovered and rescued by the U.N. High Commissioner

for Refugee Affairs.

A very rare few junks have had the good fortune to come across West German oil rigs in the Gulf and they encountered no difficulties as long as they never encountered any pirates. A number of Vietnamese junks came upon oil ships only after they had already been battered by the pirates. One exceptional and uniquely painful circumstance concerned the junk AG0961 of one Ly Ba Hung, a student of economics and politics at Dalat before 1975, with 36 others aboard. This boat was out at sea for two days when they came upon an oil rig. The ship's captain, however, tricked them, guiding the boat toward the mainland, then abandoning it after a few kilometers. The junk was taken by pirates to Ko Kra for 15 days and 15 victims died from drowning when they were thrown into the sea.

Below is a table of statistics that we have made with the assistance of the population of the Songkhla camp, making contact with the junks just arriving in May, June and July of 1980:

	MAY	JUNE
*no. junks arriving at camp.....	41	36
* no. junks robbed.....	36(88%)	35(97%)
*total number robberies.....	(land) 117	204
	(sea) 9	
*no. junks taken to Ko Kra.....	5(12%)	1(3%)
*total no. boatpeople arriving in camp	1515	1341
*total no. women.....	384	440
*no. women raped.....	92(24%)	55(13%)
*no. people died or lost at sea.....	70	3

In July we can see that the number of boats diminished and this is probably due to any of three reasons: 1) From the beginning of July, storms began on the Gulf, some of them of high magnitude. It is possible the Vietnamese them-

selves voluntarily cut back on the number of escape attempts as they wait for the sea to calm next year before venturing out. 2) Reverberations of the pirate atrocities in the Gulf of Siam may have echoed to Vietnam, inducing potential refugees to alter their route of escape, heading straight for Malaysia, Singapore or Indonesia and avoiding the more dangerous Gulf area. 3) During the month of June the number of refugees staying in Songkhla grew to at one time 7,000 and new arrivals had to sleep anywhere they could outside while the U.N.H.C.R.A. put the lid on the number of new people who could enter the camp. This has resulted in many refugees temporarily staying in remote districts in Southern Thailand while awaiting permission to come to the settlement camp. The statistics for July, then, will not accurately reflect the true number of junks coming ashore at Thailand for that month.

I think I should also say that we, the boat people in the Songkhla camp, believe the statistics we developed and quoted above reflect the truth, although their degree of accuracy cannot be absolutely determined, due to the caution of many refugees just arriving. We carried out our research by talking directly with the witnesses as soon as they arrived. While the U.N.H.C.R.A. prepared similar statistics, we feel their personnel encountered more difficulties in gathering the data since new arrivals are not inclined to report officially to the U.N. about their journey. The simple reason for this is that they are afraid this will protract their stay at the camp, as it did for the 157 Ko Kra victims. Their only hope is to resettle as soon as possible. How many pirate atrocities have been immersed in the darkness of concealment or suppression?

To bring an end to the tragedies of these boat refugees, we call upon all organizations, groups and individuals to combine their strengths to begin a firm and committed movement, based on the following fundamental points:

- 1) Do not associate the piracy in Thailand with the beautiful tradition of the Thai people or with the policy of the Thai government toward the boat people. We are ever grateful for the Thai government's policy of accepting refugees so that the refugees have a temporary haven before their resettlement in a third country. The authorities in Singapore and Malaysia have ruthlessly shut their doors and towed

boats outside their territorial waters except when they are rescued by a foreign ship and their resettlement is guaranteed. Meanwhile, when Vietnamese boats come ashore in Thailand, all the refugees are allowed to immigrate for temporary resettlement in the refugee camps. This measure had opened a pathway to life for many Vietnamese boat people, even though earlier they had to endure the uncountable horrors of the pirates. If we are not prudent in our attitude toward the Thai government, they may take umbrage and declare they will no longer accept refugees, causing the plight of the boat people to become even more miserable.

2) In our struggle against piracy, we cannot separate it from its basic source: the impoverished Vietnamese society where the Communists mistreat people on the level of animals, taking away all their basic rights, such as the right to live, to work according to one's ability and personal interest, to reside where one wished, to come and go as one pleases, to express one's thoughts and all other areas of life that are contained in the sacred meaning of the word "human". Having had 5 years experience living under a Communist society, we may affirm that as long as the Communists are in Vietnam, people will be losing their homeland right within their country and against their will they will have to leave and thus the fragile, ragged band of boat people will continue to set out by the sea. With this, the milieu of pirate activity will continue to have an opportunity to flourish.

As the whole Vietnamese community utilizes all its efforts to realize its lofty goal of resistance and the restoration of national sovereignty and of returning home, and because piracy remains one great calamity for our compatriots now drifting on the high seas or preparing to do so, we have to see the objective of confronting the pirates as a major responsibility we must take on, not just for the victims and the relatives of those who have died on the sea, but for everyone, for all organizations and communities, in the name of humanity and progress.

We would like to suggest a number of measures you might take to continue the struggle:

1) Actively continue to try and influence the U.N., the people and governments of the world and especially intellectuals, artists and the news media of Thailand so that they, too, can share our grave concern for the tragic fate of the

boat people and give us real influence with the Thai authorities in this manner in order to diminish the strength of piracy in the Gulf of Siam.

2) Push so that the U.N. opens an international conference on piracy, so that from there, with the benefit of the prestige and office of the U.N., many countries having the good will to resolve this problem will be able to directly take part in the task of patrolling the Gulf of Siam by supporting a U.N. military force, for example, which will not interfere with Thai internal affairs. Many Vietnamese in different countries have already expressed their willingness to participate in such a force and merely await the opportunity to go into action.

3) Act so that the United States steps up its sea patrols by the 7th Fleet to discover in time and have the means to rescue the boat people in dire straits.

4) Ask the U.S. government to give more concern to the refugee problem, through such measures as guaranteeing with the Singapore government that they will transport all boat people on any foreign vessel to refugee camps in Thailand, Malaysia or Indonesia, while foreign delegations choose them for resettlement, just as in the case of junks that go straight to Thailand without being picked up by a ship. In this way, the junks will not be abandoned and left to drown at sea in a most pitiful way.

5) Act so that all foreign ships passing by open their arms to the boats they are already encountering on a regular basis on the sea. Once granted permission by Singapore authorities to allow the refugees to stay in that port temporarily before taking them to Thailand or Indonesia, there will not be many ships indifferent to the urgent call of the boat people.

6) Collect contributions from all the Vietnamese abroad in order to have the means to publish an exposé to be sent around the world denouncing the Thai pirates and forcing the Thai government to apply more palpable measures within their capabilities, and also to record a period of our history, at once painful yet full of the valour and courage of our people during the time the Communists are in our country. If we do this, we can also sponsor the production of a film depicting the brave, indomitable and heroic spirit of the boat people in their flight from the Communists to freedom.

After 5 years, we have what we need to make such a film if we only decide to do so.

7) The trial of the Ko Kra 157 went from December 1979 until now before finally completing the stage of formalities and investigation. The witnesses have fulfilled their responsibility and have been told by the Thai court that they are no longer needed for the remainder of the trial. This means the Thai court has sufficient evidence to come up with a verdict reflecting its impartiality in the course of justice and righteousness.

Although this is just one out of thousands of such painful incidents that the boat people have experienced, nonetheless, because of its vanguard nature, the trial has become a challenge to the world's conscience and sense of justice. We recommend all of you to continue to apply pressure on the Thai authorities as plaintiff to complete prosecution of the trial and bring before the world a clear and just verdict concerning the atrocities that have been committed against the 157 victims of Ko Kra. The publishing of such a verdict will not only serve as a model for the pirates, forcing them to restrain themselves in the face of the determination of the Thai government, but it will also speak of the responsibility the Thai government is willing to take with regards to problems related to a civilized society, among which are the people of Thailand.

8) Besides the trial of the 157, the Thai court in Songkhla is currently investigating another trial with the culprit arrested. This is the case of the AG0961 of Ly Ba Hung that we mentioned earlier. The boat left Kien Giang on Feb. 14, 1980 with 36 people aboard. After two days the refugees met an oil rig and received promise that they would be guided to the mainland, but after sailing a couple of kilometers they were abandoned. The next day the pirates came, robbing, boring holes in the junk to sink it and causing the deaths of nine people by drowning. The pirates took the remainder of the boat people to Ko Kra, where, 300km from the island, they pushed them all into the sea. Six more people drowned in this way. Luckily for the others, there were lifesavers floating within reach. The survivors suffered 15 terrible days on Ko Kra before the U.N.H.C.R.A. took them to the mainland. They were admitted to Songkhla on Mar. 11, 1980. On Apr. 22, the skipper of the pirate boat that

had bored holes in the junk with another individual were seen milling about the refugee camp in a carefree manner. They were indentified by the refugees, and taken to the police. The accompanying individual was later released when he could not be identified by the boat victims. The skipper, however, was known and identified by all the victims on that boat. The trial is straining through its protracted course, so that even now all the surviving members of that junk are still waiting for the closing of the trial which will allow them to leave Songkhla like the other 157 Ko Kra victims. We here request that all the world exert every pressure to force the court at Songkhla to carry out a speedy trial so that the victims can leave soon and to give us a true and fair ruling, since the offender has been apprehended.

9) Finally, with regards to the female victims who were direct witnesses at the trial, the individuals who suffered most the violence on the highseas, on the island, in court, and further, in nearly one half year in the refugee camp simply because they had the courage to stand up in defence of justice and the worth of a woman's dignity, of human dignity- these women will continue to suffer the consequences of their experiences when they go to resettle: weakened bodies, broken spirits, mixed up minds, many complexes and obsessions that will not go away. They deserve very special consideration and assistance, different from that given to ordinary boat people, materially as well as psychologically and emotionally, to enable them to stand secure and build a fine new life in the United States. We call upon every organization and group in the Vietnamese community to think of these women, assist and help support them in their first steps as they set foot in a new society. Their names and addresses will be sent to the headquarters of the Boat People S.O.S Committee, 6970 Linda Vista Rd., San Diego, Ca. 92111, USA.

PART C: THE MATERIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL— EMOTIONAL STATE OF THE REFUGEES IN THE CAMPS

The violence of the pirates against the boat people is only one tragic aspect of the refugee problem. It is the opening stage of the refugees' journey in fleeing the Communists and seeking freedom.

When setting foot on the mainland, they are greeted by want and impoverishment—not just in one camp, but in any camp in Southeast Asia.

***Materially:** All the refugees live in the most depressed of human conditions: crowding in sagging and tattered huts, wearing ragged clothes, eating food with no nutritional value, while support funds from the U.N. is shaved along the official path down to the refugees to a terrible degree. All amenities, such as blankets, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, cooking utensils, toothbrushes, soap, etc., are not to be had at all unless contributed by the charities. And aid from the charities is not regular in coming, but relies on the financial and contributive ability of those agencies.

***Psychologically:** Besides the grief of mourning and the pain that obsesses them from the events on the sea, the refugees have another great worry, creating in their minds further apprehension and distress with nowhere to turn for support. I am speaking of how some of them must be sent to the Galang transfer camp in Indonesia. When they left home to flee the Communists, freedom looked good no matter where it happened to be. The refugees never insisted on being settled in one place instead of another. However, their pressing need, which they hope is being given all due consideration, is the need to become stable soon in a new life to prepare the futures of their families and children. Of those who have no relatives in outside countries, the majority would resettle in the U.S. if they were given the freedom to choose. But to go to the U.S., they have to first pass through a transfer camp—in other words, they have to prolong the number of days and months of waiting as they go from one camp to another, lengthening as well the period of want and extreme poverty they must endure. No one is very happy when he or she must sign their name to an agreement that they will go to a transfer camp where they will spend

from 1-3 years, presumably to be given vocational training and English instruction. In the meantime, letters coming from the transfer camp in Indonesia indicate that the English classes are loosely organized and no different from the one in the temporary resettlement camp, such as Songkhla, Chantabury, Sikhiu, or any other place—and nowhere is it better to learn English than right in the U.S. As for the job training, up to now we have never heard of any such course being opened of any kind. Even if we look at the organizations already in existence in the refugee camps and even if we see the authorities are full of good will and concern for the refugees, this still cannot compare with the job training that can be had right in the U.S. As a consequence, the refugees have become pessimistic, feeling that their being made to go study English and job training is just an excuse for prolonging their hard times in the camps. Of course, they have to accept any conditions made by the American government, but if it should be found that the overflow of refugees could be taken care of by a different, more practical and active means, it might reduce the suffering and poverty of the refugees. We hope the leaders in the Vietnamese refugee community can discover a way in which the hope of the majority of the refugees to go directly to a third country to resettle without the necessity of stopping at a transfer camp can be realized soon in a spirit of humanity and openness.

Presently in Songkhla there are as well about 900 youngsters without relatives and in a position of having no one to sponsor them, forcing them to live day by day on their own. Other camps have the same problem. This growing number of misplaced youngsters is not getting much concern from the resettlement officials for basically two reasons: first, many of the young people have declared their ages to be much lower than they actually are, causing the international delegations to distrust and care less about not only those who misrepresent themselves, but others as well; secondly, some others were lucky enough to be resettled early, but because they have no family to teach them how to behave, they became wild and undisciplined and found it more enjoyable to fool around or cause trouble than to study and try to build their new lives. This has had an uncomplimentary effect on those youngsters coming afterwards since it has given

the people of third countries a bad image of these unaccompanied youngsters and this had caused the foreign delegations to adopt an attitude of indifference in carrying out the formalities for their resettlement.

We'd like to call on the community of Vietnamese refugees already established in their new lives to show their concern for the fate of these youngsters and seek some means by which they can be resettled soon. One thing you can do is try to find families who will agree to sponsor them and send the list of these families to the refugee camps. The Board of Representatives at the camp will be more than happy to refer these families to youngsters who need to be resettled. 900 of them live without direction or aim in the camp in Songkhla. We feel that this is a problem truly worthy of your attention and concern.

Finally, we suggest that the Vietnamese language newspapers and magazines in third countries give greater emphasis to setting aside a number of pages in their publication for the refugees in the camps so that our compatriots there have a chance to tell us of their activities and discuss their thoughts and aspirations. We believe that while this is only a temporary sojourn for them as they await resettlement, still, the refugee camps have been with us for years in Southeast Asia and are a real part of our people's suffering in this time of adversity. The history of our people cannot ignore the existence of those places which constitute a microcosmic Vietnamese society. Greater attention being paid by the newspapers and magazines to the camp activities in Southeast Asia, besides its significance to the home country and our compatriots, will also help to alleviate the suffering and hardship and the violation of the freedom of the refugees by some of the camp representatives who are already using their position to suppress the voiceless majority. This abuse of power which is developing does not happen all the time, but only in those places where the Board of Representatives, in conjunction with the camp boss, treats as inconsequential the rights and dignity of the refugees. Within these new "dynasties" some transgressions are occurring, such as the abuse of power by the camp security force, the Board of Procedural Translators making difficulties for refugees in order to solicit bribes, etc. Besides these difficulties are the problem of a number of local police who habitually insult and revile Viet-

namese refugees, a minority of foreign delegates who are narrow-minded, shallow, prejudiced, etc., to make new the suffering that had lain dormant in the refugees' minds and hearts.

The many times we articulate these grim realities, we do not wish to negate or forget our gratitude for the merit and goodwill of many foreign individuals, especially those belonging to charities and religious organizations connected with refugee relief. At the same time, we are eternally grateful to those boat people of goodwill who have enthusiastically taken upon them selves the task of running the camps with the lofty and wonderful goal of serving the refugees in a spirit of ardor and with no desire for personal gain.

Furthermore, we now and always believe that despite the hardships and suffering, in the last analysis the refugees in the camps throughout Southeast Asia stand on the threshold of a future a million times brighter than that of those who endure mistreatment, loss of freedom and dignity, and who have not a single ray of hope, such as our unfortunate brothers and sisters still living wretched lives back home under the Communists. As for us, our miserable state in the refugee camps can be diminished with the help of all our fellow refugees already resettled and secure in a new life, who know the pains and can share with those now waiting through the long days toward resettlement. We earnestly entreat you all to sacrifice a small part of your incomes to contribute to the charities, newspapers and magazines who try to raise funds to assist the refugees. We feel this is a most practical way to share with us and to sympathize with the misery of your fellow refugees, who night and day endure so much in the camps of Southeast Asia. And the people in those camps will find the greatest of comfort when they see we have not forgotten them and are always thinking of them and working for them in concrete ways.

As we conclude this report, once more on behalf of the 157 Ko Kra victims as well as for one person who has just left camp to resettle, to all of you, religious organizations, groups and associations in the refugee community, university and highschool students, all the refugees abroad and communications media, who by one means or another have used your efforts to support us—please, share with us now and en-

courage us as we try to realize our great common goal of struggling to reduce the pain and misery of the refugee boat people as they flee the Communists in search of freedom.

signed: Nhat Tien

A REFUGEE'S STORY

Introduction

Ly Ba Hung was a student of business Administration at the university in Dalat before 1975. He is one victim of Thai pirates and also one of those taken to Ko Kra Island where he spent 15 days in misery before being rescued (from Feb.18—Mar.3, 1980).

As soon as he came to Songkhla Camp we recorded the story of his tragic journey for you in one of the previously published reports. (see The Tragedy Continues for The Boat People in the Gulf of Siam) Since at that time he had only just arrived in camp and had not yet gotten over the traumatic experience, Hung only gave us some of the main features of the trip.

Now, after four months of recovery in the camp, he is able to relate to us in more detail the things that went on during his flight for freedom and describe the suffering both he and his family endured. Because his story is typical of those told by the boat people coming here, we would like to recount the tale for you in his own words, partly in order to add to our record of pirate atrocities and partly so that the Vietnamese community might see more clearly the pitiful fate of their compatriots crossing the sea by boat in Southeast Asia.

Songkhla, July 4, 1980
Nhat Tien

*The following is the narrative of Ly Ba Hung.

There were ten in my family—my parents, two younger brothers and 4 sisters, a brother-in-law and myself—who together with 28 others set out from Kien Giang around 10:00 at night on Feb.14,1980 (the 28th day of the lunar new year). We left on a junk marked AG0961 that was 8m long, 1.4m wide and had a small engine as well as a spare outboard motor to power it.

We reached the open sea around midnight that night. It was very quiet and peaceful. The waves beat softly against the sides of our boat. The sea at that time looked like a great big river. It was very lovely.

About 4:00 in the afternoon on the 16th we were in international waters. The water was still calm. Our feelings then were both glad and worried—glad because it seemed we had escaped the evil of the Communists, but worried because who knew what would happen to us out on the ocean. Thoi, our pilot, steered us toward Thailand.

It was around 9:00 at night when the sea opened up its mad fury. Giant waves 10m high pounded us, as if to swallow up our tiny boat. We were terrified and prayed to those on high to save us from the cruel arms of the god of the sea. The ocean was no longer so lovely to us, but rather, harsh and savage. Our little boat lurched into that violent wrath. Sometimes we encountered big merchant ships and we shot off flares to signal them to rescue us, but we gave way to despair.

Two hours later, we saw lights off in the distance and our pilot mustered all his strength to head us in that direction. It was when we had come up close, closer and then stopped alongside, that we found it was a big West German oil rig in the Thai territorial waters. A spokesperson for this rig refused to let us tie in or pick us up. We were fearful for our lives and pleaded with him. Finally he called in their supply boat and promised to guide us to Bangkok. We trusted his word, as he was a man who came from a Western, civilized nation, a man of European intelligence, and so we struggled to bring our tiny boat to follow him to Thailand.

But after a few hours we had fallen behind them and they abandoned us to turn back to their rig.

We wanted to turn back, too, but because of the darkness and rough weather we were unable to determine

the position of the rig. Anyway, we thought, that man who was guiding us has neither a conscience nor a sense of humanity. There we were before his eyes—on the brink of death—and he wouldn't raise a hand to help us, but instead tricked us. And if we went back he would surely drive us off more cruelly next time. As it was, we decided to place our lives in the hands of fate and continue in the vicious sea and winds.

The next morning, a propeller blade on our engine broke. We dropped anchor and prepared to replace the broken piece, but because of the rough waters we couldn't see properly. We had to use our outboard motor to head off again and wait until the seas calmed down enough before we could fix the engine. But an hour later we were nearly out of gas, so, once again, we dropped anchor and let someone down to try and fix the propeller.

After about a half hour changing the broken piece, a Thai pirate boat, numbered 2325, came upon us. They rammed their vessel into ours and put a crack in the stern. They knocked a hole in the side as well and water began to pour in. We had to use our clothing to stop up the leak. Meanwhile, they used a hook to pull themselves right up along side us. Then 8 or 9 of them charged on board our boat, leaping so hard they made us wobble and nearly turn over. They had knives and hammers to bully us and they forced our pilot and mechanic over to their boat.

Our women and children wept and screamed and we pleaded with the pirates. But they paid us no mind and began their search. They dumped all our fuel, food, clothes and goods overboard and ripped the boat apart. They felt and squeezed every part of everyone's body. A number of them thrust their hands into the girls' private parts (four words were deleted from the Vietnamese version—translator) and laughed in delight as the girls doubled up in fear, crying and begging them to stop. It was horrible to have to watch these things.

After the search was over, the pirates pounded up our engine and hurled the outboard into the sea. Then they all went to one side of our boat and pushed down hard so that the boat began to wobble and sink.

All was chaos then. Screams, the calls of women and children, the howls of men...Everyone fought to get out

of the boat by jumping into the water. One person was smart enough to think of letting out a big lifesaver made from a truck's innertube that had been tied to the stern and this saved most of us since almost none of us could swim.

During this time, I and a brother and sister had just come up from the hold. Seeing that our boat was tipped over and water was flowing in, my brother and I went quickly to the other side in hopes we had enough strength to push the boat back up. But that effort proved to be futile and we continued to take on water. The boat went down fast, taking with it me, my brother and sister and six others. My brother was smart. With one great breath he jumped in. My father saw him and swam over to get him and bring him to the lifesaver where he was tied on. As for me, I was caught by an airhole with a mesh covering at the stern and using my head I beat at the mesh to break it so I could get out. Many times I was exhausted and stifled and wanted to just let go and die, but my survival instinct forced me to continue beating my head against the fence. It took nine or ten times before the mesh finally broke. There was a 10 year-old boy, Nguyen Bao Quoc, hanging around my neck at the time. He must have grabbed on while I was hitting the mesh. He was holding on so tight he nearly choked me. With all my strength I pulled myself through the hole, taking the boy with me. We were both scraped and scratched up by the fence, but I felt no pain—only fear. Once off the boat, I held my breath and the sea force brought me to the surface. Seeing everyone around me, I called out, then lost my breath and the boy and I went under. I came up again and called out and once more went down. This happened several times before my father found me and swam over to pull me and the boy to the lifesaver. With my left hand I grabbed the lifesaver and with the other I took the boy off my neck and put him inside it. That is how we both escaped death.

The pirates had swum back to their boat, started the engine and sailed off. We were desperate and waited for the god of death to come and take us away. But 15 minutes later, for some reason, the pirates came back and pulled us into their vessel. Once on board, we looked over our group and discovered that 6 of us were missing: Ly Nguyet Minh, 14, my sister; Nguyen Vu, 4, son of Nguyen Viet Khan; Hung, 12, and Thu, 14, children of Nguyen Van Bao and Le Thi

Loc, owners of the boat; Son, 20; and Le Thi Loc's mother, 70. They had probably been stuck in the boat and drowned when it went down.

The pirates said they'd take us to the mainland and they gave us rice and water. But partly out of fear and partly from grief for our loved ones who had them lost, none of us was eager to eat. Towards evening, the pirates took the women and children to the back of the pilot's cabin while the men were driven into the fish hold and they began to search us for the last time.

That night, about 8 or 9:00, the sky was pitch black the waves were high and the wind strong. We were about 300 meters from the shore of an island and they gave us the order to jump into the water and swim ashore. We looked at the sea crestfallen, because we did not know how to swim. By sign language we asked the pirates to let us use the lifesaver. They agreed and let it down. As soon as it touched the water, they began to push us in. The quicker ones among us ran to the other side of the boat, but the pirates chased after them with hammers and knives and in the end they, too, had to jump in.

One woman, Le Thi Loc, was so afraid she couldn't jump. She clung to the railing, crying and pleading with her captors. One pirate beat her on the cheek with a hammer and two others charged up and, taking her by the arms and legs, they threw her over. I was sitting in one corner in the dark while all this happened so I was able to witness the entire scene. Eventually they saw me, too, and tried to make me jump. But as soon as I stood up, I fell down again (I've been crippled in my legs with polio since I was one). One of them picked up an empty 5 liter container lying nearby and handed it to me. Then they threw me into the water. I went under, then came back up again, buoyed by the container. The pirates rode off after throwing me in, since I was the last of the refugees on board. I looked after them with resentment I can't describe. I clung to the container, trusting my fate to God. All around me I could hear the terrified screams—the sound of one person calling another mixed with the roaring of the waves and wind, cries for help half-stifled with water pouring into the mouth...The cries for help grew fewer and fewer as time went on and eventually stopped entirely.

I was surrounded only by the roar of the sea.

The empty container kept me from drowning, but I had to taste the salty-bitter seawater until it made my stomach tighten. The waves pushed me farther and farther away from the island. I hung on to the empty container and let the waves pummel me for about 11 hours. As day broke, I found myself a full kilometer from Ko Kra. Then I saw the lights of a Thai fishing boat and I called for help. They pulled me aboard and gave me a change of shirt, a blanket to wrap myself in and a cigarette. They also gave me some rice, but I was too exhausted to eat and fell asleep in the warm boat's cabin.

On the morning of the 18th, the fishermen took me to shore at Ko Kra in a skiff. I met those who had come with me on the escape boat, including my father and three sisters. My mother and two other members of my family had been lost in the night. Now there were only 23 of us left, including myself. In all, nine people had perished or were missing from that terrible night: Cao Nguyet Nga, 47, my mother; Ly Nguyet Nhung, 21 and 2 months pregnant, my sister; Ly Cao Hieu, 4, my brother; Phuong, 28, about 6 months pregnant, Thoi's wife and the daughter of Mrs. Loc; Mai, 18, daughter of Mrs. Loc; Huong, 6, and Hoang, 5, 2 of Mrs. Loc's children; Tinh, 3, Thoi and Phuong's child; Le van Tro, 27, older brother of Le Van Trong.

This horrible truth remains always on the minds of those of us who were lucky enough to survive. Even now as I sit writing these lines I can almost seem to hear the cries for help of my younger brother and sister, my mother, and the others who shared with me that tragic sea journey and that awful night. We, the survivors, thought we too would die during those terrifying moments. But maybe God wanted us to go on living, to survive as witnesses, to speak out against the barbarity of human beings even now at the end of the twentieth century in a supposedly civilized world.

Well, on that same morning another pirate boat came and this one brought 55 more boat people. The boat landed about 50m from shore and started bringing in the refugees on a small skiff. After a few trips, however, they stopped that process as some of the pirates remained on shore to guard the victims. Those pirates still on the boat

used hammers and knives to drive the boat people who were left into the water to swim to shore. As a result, one of these people lost his life (a Catholic priest, around 25 years old, the younger brother of Dao Huy Hoang) so that 43 were left.

After that, 12 more pirate boats came to the island. In all there were over a hundred pirates who bullied us with hammers and forced the girls and women into the bushes and onto rocks to dishonor them. Those who resisted were beaten severely. Many of the girls were abused collectively, in every detestable and painful manner, as they screamed and fainted while the pirates shrieked in delight, pouncing on their like wild animals. When they were finished with their games, the pirates left the girls where they were and swam back to their boats. We took care of the girls and led them to hiding places to escape the beasts.

Thus, 77 of us lived in the "hell on earth" of Ko Kra for 15 days. Every day(night as well as daytime), another band of horrible black-faced devils came looking for some pitiful Vietnamese woman to rape. If they couldn't find what they wanted, they beat the men and children cruelly to get them to reveal the hiding places.

Besides this torture, we suffered also from constant hunger and thirst. To keep ourselves alive, we had to drink a black, turbid water, stinking of rotten leaves that we drew from a well we ourselves dug. The spot was the old site of a well that had gone bad long ago below a fuel shed for a lighthouse. During the time we were on the island, it was the dry season so all the gulleys were dried out and all that we could find were the flattened stones and jagged coral. We used sand, coral and stones to form a small water container to act as a filter, but our well water didn't come out much cleaner and it never lost the smell. Even this structure was attacked by the pirates—each gang that came ashore knocked it down and dug through the pieces, searching for gold, silver, jewelry, whatever, that they thought might be hidden in the sand and coral. Our men also had to swim out 200 or 300 meters to beg the pirates for food to keep us alive. A few nearly drowned, due to their extreme exhaustion, while making this swim. If the pirates were satisfied with their pleasure-seeking (i.e., if they had found women on the island), they would give us a bit of rice and fish, and if they hadn't been successful in their games, they gave us nothing. Truly, these were savage

and wicked men.

Shortly before noon on Mar. 1, we were spotted by an American plane. They parachuted down some food and water, plus a walkie-talkie so we could communicate with them. But the radio hadn't been wrapped and when it landed it hit the rocks of a waterfall and wrecked, so we couldn't call anyone.

It wasn't until the afternoon of Mar. 3 that the Thai police picked us up and took us to Pak Phanang. The women could hardly walk at that time, due to hunger and exhaustion and the degradation they had endured for 15 days. The rest of us had to climb into the caves and crevices in the tall mountain to lead them down. Our joy and relief were indescribable. After midnight, we were at the police station. The administrative red-tape was troublesome, so we didn't get a chance to sleep until morning had come. Though all of us were tired, here was still a spark of life, a ray of light in our gaunt and lean faces. We stayed in Pak Phanang 8 days and on Mar.12, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs took us to Songkhla.

For now our lives are peaceful, we are not threatened, we are not starving and we no longer hear the roar of the sea waves drowning out the barbaric howls of the pirates in the night. We will never forget our tragic journey and the painful and shamefilled days we spent on the "hell on earth" of Ko Kra Island.

We have great respect for the Vietnamese women, who had suffered under the chains of Communism and now had suffered abuse to their bodies and their honor in order to ensure the survival of their shipmates as they went out seeking freedom on a trip fraught with unforeseen dangers. To us, these women are still pure and saintly and more radiant than ever.

Now, we who have found our freedom raise our voices and our hearts for the people who have more than once lived and died for freedom.

Ly Ba Hung
Songkhla, July 3, 1980

THE NARRATIVE OF VU ZUY THAI

If sad and painful stories are told on this earth, then my story must be ranked among the most sad and painful of them all. I have gone through very tragic moments and I have suffered greatly, but the reason I stand firm here now is that I believe all things in this life to be arranged by the hand of God.

My name is Vu Zuy Thai. I was born on Oct.2,1936 in the village of Hoa Loc, Tuyen Son district, Ninh Binh province in North Vietnam. As a boy I was poor, so I had to tend buffalo and do field work from the time I was five years old. I lost my father when I was ten, and my mother was sick all the time. But when I turned 23, my life became a little easier as I started to work as a taylor. I went south in 1954 with the flight from the Communists and there I married on Apr.6, 1958 in An Lac, Gia Dinh province. My wife's name is Dinh Thi Bang, born 1940 in Phu Nhai, Nam Dinh province in North Vietnam. She, too, was among those who came south 1954. At first, we were very poor and we could not come up with the 6,000 piasters needed for the wedding. Eventually we had to sell our sewing machine for 2,000 and borrow the rest from our friends before we had enough. So, from the moment she stepped foot in my home, my wife shared with me the hard work and difficult times we lived through. Nonetheless, the years flowed by, due to the industriousness and thrift of my wife. She was fragile in body but strong in spirit and she sacrificed a lot of her personal needs for her husband and children. Nearly all her life she enjoyed nothing, took to no personal pleasures and found no joy except that of running the household and seeing after the needs of her family. She always tried to see that we ate well. In my eyes, she was a perfect woman, a model of the Vietnamese woman--industrious, faithful, meek, a constant source of comfort and encouragement, someone the whole family could rely on. In all we had 7 children: Jesus Vu Zuy Thanh, born 1959; Vincent Vu Zuy Trung, 1961; Peter Vu Zuy Tuan,1963; Mary Vu Thi Thanh Thuy, 1966; Mary Vu Thi Thuy Trang, 1968; Martin Vu Zuy Tai, 1971; and Peter Vu Zuy Tri, 1975.

You might have called us a happy family had it not

been for the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, when our country fell into the hands of the Communists.

A Roman Catholic family, our children enjoyed an education in the love of God, and we could never live under the dictatorship and oppression of the Communists. Thus, we decided to leave the country.

We let two of our sons go on the first trip. Their boat set off from Bach Dang in Saigon on Oct.1, 1978 with 130 people aboard. But four days later the engine died. The boat drifted onto a coral island surrounded by reefs belonging to Taiwan. There they lived for 50 days with no food. The number of those who died increased daily and the others had to eat the flesh of the dead in order to fight the hunger. My two oldest sons, Thanh and Trung, fell into this miserable condition. They died and their bodies were eaten by their boatmates.

On the 50th day, a Taiwanese fishing boat came by and rescued them. Only 60 of the original 130 refugees were left. But during the move from the coral island, more died of exhaustion and starvation and when they set foot in Taiwan there were only 34 people left. My son Tuan was among them, and a godchild, Trinh Vinh Thuy. Tuan is living in Taipei now and Thuy has been sponsored by relatives and is in California.

Tuan hid the facts of his brothers' horrid fate from us. It wasn't until Dec. 20, 1979 that we learned of the frightening journey from a friend of mine, Do Minh Ngu, who lives in the U.S. During that time, we were preparing for a second journey out. We went to Mass for three days in a row for our boys at a church in An Lac, Chi Hoa, and despite the hurt we felt inside, we went on with our plans to flee.

So, we left Saigon for Rach Gia on Dec. 28, 1979 at 4:00 in the morning. The next morning our boat set out. It was called VNKG 0980, 13m long and 2.5m wide and there were 120 people aboard. We sailed until the evening of the 30th when we encountered pirates who had a Thai flag flying on their boat. They were the first to rob us. After they were finished they left us alone. The following morning we were attacked again and this time the pirates wrecked our engine. A series of explosions came out of the engine room and the boat began to go around in circles and then sink. We cried

out in terror. I had no time to say anything to my wife. I could only witness the fear on her face. I kissed my youngest children, Tai and Tri. Then I heard Thuy call out, "Daddy. Tuynh there...!" and Trang cried, "Daddy, Oh...!" As the boat went under, my wife was still with me. But she did not cling to me. That was her last great sacrifice for her husband and children. She refused to burden me down in order that I might save the children. Just then an evil wave roared by and stole away my family. I could see no one, only the waves rolling over my head. Then one of my relatives, Phuong, grabbed me and brought me to an empty water barrel that was floating nearby. I held on tight only by instinct. When I opened my eyes, I could see my wife floating helplessly before me. Then I passed out and don't know what happened. When I came to, I found myself lying in a pirate boat. Hung and Chau, my younger brothers, were next to me, trying to revive my wife, who they had probably just pulled in. I struggled to get up and help them, but the pirates signaled us to throw her overboard. Nothing could ever break my heart like that scene. I ran over and hugged her to my breast, gazing at her in grief and pain. Her eyes were still open, but she lay motionless. Saliva dripped from her mouth. I closed her eyes, then took her by the head while Hung and Chau took the feet and we lowered her into the sea. That was the last time I was with my wife. The most painful moment of my life. Then a big wave came. The vicious sea took away the person closest to my heart. I never will see her again. There is no grave for me to go and visit. A ripple on the water, and then gone forever. We will no longer meet on this earth. Oh, what pain is like the pain I have to bear? All my loved ones taken in an instant. When she died she was wearing black trousers and a black shirt. There was no sign of suffering on her face. Only a fleeting shock on her otherwise expressionless face. That was this last image of her that I remember before the parting that will last 1,000 years.

And not only did my wife die, but 4 of my children perished as well. Thanh Thuy, Thuy Trang, Zuy Tai, Zuy Tri. Those I loved the most went forever to the bottom of the sea. Of all the calamities that might strike us on earth, mine must be among the most horrible, more than any human being can bear. Along with my wife and children, there were 65 others who drowned. All together, 70 persons

lost their lives at the cruel hands of the pirates.

The survivors were taken to Ko Kra, an island on the Gulf of Siam. This island has become a hell for the Vietnamese boatpeople. Everyone who is taken there is become a victim of pirate abuse. Men are tortured to get them to divulge the hiding places of the women or give up valuables, while the women must hide out in the mountain caves and jungles and out on the reefs and if the pirates find them they are gang raped. You can find on the island the remains of the refugee groups that came before us, like lines scrawled on the rock walls, tufts of women's hair scattered about (perhaps cut off to make them look like men), wrecks of the boats and the graves of those who died.

We were dropped on the island on the evening of Dec. 31, 1979. Our hearts were broken and our bodies were exhausted and weak with disease. My brothers found dry grass to make a matting for me to lie down on and they found me food to eat. And since I was sick, they rummaged everywhere through the remains of the previous boatpeople groups looking for medicine for me to take—any kind as long as it was medicine. Some of the pills had not much left to them, but I took them anyway to keep up my strength.

The 6 days on the island were days of sadness and fear. We were hungry and cold, sad for the loss of our loved ones and hurting to the depths of our souls. And the women continued to hide out like animals with no escape from the brutality of the pirates.

On Jan. 6 the High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs of the U.N. found us and took us to Pakphanang in Nakorn Sri Thammaraj province in Thailand. There we spent 16 days being processed with the Thai police before we were admitted into the Songkhla camp on the 23rd.

I want to express my thanks to Chau and Hung, who from the bottom of their hearts took care of me and comforted me on that terrible trip. I will never forget their kindness.

Today is Apr. 10, 1980, the one hundredth day since my wife and children died. I am in the refugee camp in Songkhla. 50 days ago, Chaplain Joe Devlin held Mass for my wife and children at the little church in camp. Today he will pray for them again. I am in great agony, thinking of the

ones I loved the most. My wife and six children. They are gone from me forever and they will never come back. Time, though a miraculous medicine that eases the pain of the heart, will never make me forget my wife, the gentle, hard-working woman, who all through her life was at the side of her husband and children never enjoying a moment of rest and leisure.

I pray God take pity on the suffering souls of those who died in the calamity at sea, the Vietnamese people, Your children.

Please, Lord, take up the souls of my wife and children and take them all to a place of peace, rest and happiness forever in Your kingdom.

Please God, give me, Your child, the courage to stand firm after this most horrible ordeal of my life and have the clearsightedness and strength I need to take care of my only child, now living in Taiwan.

I have suffered too much in pain and grief.

I pray, Lord, that by Your grace all my relatives and compatriots, all those who will cross the sea, may find their journeys peaceful and reach shore safely.

And I pray that another day I will once again meet all my loved ones in Your kingdom in Heaven.

Songkhla, April 10, 1980

Vu Zuy Thai

A JOURNEY FOR FREEDOM BY BOAT THROUGH THAI WATERS

Escape from their homeland under Communist rule to find a land of freedom—that is what the Vietnamese people now dream of. Before us, and after us as well, many bands of refugees have taken to the East Sea by boat, putting their lives on the line and facing many dangers. But what struggle for freedom does not have its price? Some groups of refugees have succeeded admirably in their flight and now live peacefully in free countries, but there are, too, many who have died bravely and tragically on the sea. We gathered stories of those who left Vietnam before us so that we could prepare our own journey. We wish our story of adversity give those who are still to leave their homes some added experiences to take into account. It is with this sense of responsibility that we make this report. At the same time, we hope that the sufferings we have had to bear on the road to freedom will contribute further to the noble meaning of the word “freedom”, that all the Vietnamese presently long for.

Our party consisted of 81 persons, composed of families who had never before met and whose only true relationship with each other stems from our shared pains and trials during our journey. We were, looking at us, a rather complex group: some were artists, writers, reporters and newsmen; TV producers as well; others came from sciences, including university professors, agricultural engineers, chemical engineers, telecommunications professionals, aeronautical mechanics; and there were even priests and nuns, officers from all ranks who had escaped the Communist reeducation camps; yet the largest component of our group was made up of the students from various disciplines from Saigon University who were of that age where one is held responsible for military duty.

We left Vietnam on Oct.19, 1979 departing from Vung Tau and planning to go by way of Malaysia, feeling that a ship passing by might see us and pick us up. But we had been gone nearly a day when the sea began acting up. Our fragile 14 meter boat could not handle the storm so we were forced to change course and follow the Vietnam coastline, prepared to accept returning to our country if we were un-

able to continue far. On the morning of the third day, however, our engine died and the battery was no good. We had no choice but to flow with the current past Ca Mau and then further and further from our country's waters. From then on we had lost our course and could not plot the boat's coordinates.

After 8 days adrift, the shortage of food and water was becoming critical, with some of the passengers drinking their own urine, yet we continued to alternate bailing water out of the boat with a can. At night we stood watch over our signal fire, hoping a ship going our way might catch sight of it and save us. Several ship actually did pass, but none paid any attention to our distress signal.

On the 10th day, we came upon a fishing boat and that was when we learned we had entered the Gulf of Siam. These fishermen instituted our first shakedown, confiscating all our jewelry, watches and some clothing they took a fancy to. Afterwards, they repaired our engine, lent us their battery to get us started and directed us toward the Thai mainland. There was no end to our joy and high spirit when we heard our engine revving up again.

But our happiness did not last long, for the next evening we were approached by 2 fishing vessels, whose occupants rushed aboard our boat to search us again and all the rest of our goods were taken.

Despite having lost everything we still rejoiced inside because up to then our women had not yet been violated. But when they found nothing of value to steal, the fishermen of one boat were furious and tried to ram us. Our women and children huddled together begging on their knees, but the roof was knocked off in one piece complete with the observation deck and compass. Finally, one fishing boat left and the other connected a chord to us and towed us to Ko Kra Island, about 5-6 sea hours from Pakpanang district in Nakornsrithamaraj province in Thailand. The sky had darkened and the vessel's captain had turned on a light, then led us to the side of our boat nearest them before calling us over one-by-one to be searched carefully for any gold or dollars that might be left. After this, we were allowed back on our boat. In the end, they brought us close to the island to land while they took our vessel to another part of the island to take the engine apart.

We were all pleased to be setting foot on land, even though it was a desert island. No more was the fear of the boat sinking at sea that had gripped us every hour and minute for 8 days and nights. We lay down on a beach covered with stone and coral, our hearts light as if we had just laid down a heavy burden. We slept the first peaceful night since our leaving.

A couple of days later we began organizing our life on the island with the little food we had managed to bring off the boat. We found a narrow cave in which to shelter the women and children from the elements. We planted a white flag with the letters "S.O.S" on a high place in hopes a ship or plane might pass by. With our meager rations we were able to limit each meal to one small bowl of watery rice gruel. Fresh water had collected in the rocks on the mountain and this we picked up each day by youths going up and down the slippery cliffs with plastic containers. Tired and hungry, some of them almost died as they lost their footing climbing that mountain. Fortunately none did, but one youth fell and scratched his head badly.

The first 2 days went by peacefully and we had an opportunity to take a look around the island. We found traces of other Vietnamese refugees who had occupied the island before us. In some places they had written messages in white on the rocks, in others they had used firewood and coal to record their experiences on the lime wall of a brick hut, a storehouse formerly used to hold fuel for the lighthouse on the mountain. Though time had faded the coal markings, there were nonetheless still many things that could be read: women reaching the island had had to flee immediately up the slopes or into the jungle to avoid being raped; most of the Thai fishermen in the area were also pirates and they might give you rice and fish by day but at night they took the women out to gang rape them. As if to bear witness to these words, there were scattered over the island tufts of hair, showing how these woman had cut their hair in order to look like men and try to fool the pirates. These things planted inside us a tremendous fear that grew deeper every minute, like black clouds gathering before a storm. We were on the verge of taking very seriously the advice mentioned on the walls and rock from former victims, but before we were able to carry it out, on the evening of the second day we saw a

Thai navy boat coming in our direction. Who could describe our joy? We thought a miracle had come down to save us from the terrors others had faced. We climbed atop the mountain to wave the S.O.S. flag and clothes and handkerchiefs. The Thai boat soon anchored and men in uniform came ashore. They asked to meet our representative and they recorded the essential data in their log. They also came to inspect our hiding place. After that, they left the island with an encouraging promise: "We'll be back to see you later." To us, their appearance seemed a saving one in two respects: first, we felt assured we would not be abandoned on the desert island in the middle of nowhere, and second, we felt from then on we were under the protection of the Thai government and need not worry about being robbed or raped. Indeed, as some of the more optimistic said, "Now, whoever strikes against us strikes against the Thai law. No fisherman would be stupid enough to do that."

Amid this optimism, we spent one more good night, happily sitting and talking around a big fire—what might be called our last good night of the chain of days that were to come. Ever since then, we gazed anxiously out to sea for that navy boat bearing the number "15" to return as promised, but there was no more trace of it. Even to this day we cannot understand how they could have abandoned us so cruelly. How could this happen in the 20th century in a country with so fine a tradition as that of the Thai people? But the fact remained—we were abandoned. If today we are alive, it is due to the representative of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in Thailand who arranged for us to be transported to the mainland. The night after the navy boat left us, we tasted our first night of terror. As dusk fell, a band of Thai fishermen bearing rifles, hammers and knives came to us with torches. They gave us a thorough search, took some clothing and then went away. Just after they were gone, another band came to take their place, searching us everywhere and this continued until beyond midnight. All in all there were three bands that did this. The last one, completing their search, drove all the men and youths into a cave and stood guard over it while they took the women away to rape them. In the dark mist and the cold wind, we could only listen to the cries of the children being torn from

their mothers' arms, the prayers and beseeching of the feeble women. We could do nothing but gnash our teeth and swallow our anger and shame beneath the barrels of their guns. That was the only way we could be sure no one died. It was nearly dawn when the incident ended. The women were brought back to us and lay on the coral exhausted. Many were sobbing, collapsing in grief and humiliation in the arms of their loved ones. When we counted everyone, we discovered that one was missing so we set out to search for her. Shouts and moans echoing on the walls of rock drowned out even the roar of the sea, sounding terrible and heartrending. We eventually found the girl lying on the shore. It turned out that when the pirates had come and taken her, she had fled to the high rocks and tried to throw herself into the ocean to kill herself, but the waves had carried her back to the island and she was caught in the rocks unconscious.

Following that painful and frightening night, we began organizing the concealment of the women, after the advice of those who had written on the walls. Some of our women went into the jungle to lie in the cold and damp for entire days in thick brush full of snakes and insects whose bite could make you swell up and drive a sharp pain through to your brain. Others climbed precariously on the smooth rocky slopes to hide in the trees, and some slipped and fell, tearing up their flesh. It was fortunate that none dropped into the sea or on the rocks hundreds of meters below. Many more women and girls hid in between the rocks on the beach, their legs constantly lying in water and their bodies crouched because of the lowness of the rocks. Even now we don't know how they were able to stand it for 18 days. It comes as no surprise that on the last day they nearly all fainted at their rescue and it was a long time before they could move again like before. If that had persisted much longer, for sure a number of them would have been crippled.

The task of bringing the rice gruel to these women in hiding was left to the men and youths. Even the concealment was not ensuring of safety. The fishermen who came were apparently well-acquainted with the geography of the island so they did not cease looking both day and night. Women were pulled out of some spots and beaten, then gang raped cruelly by as many as ten fishermen at a time. Some

pirates engaged in sadistic sex, striking the victims as they raped them until the girls fainted. One person was beaten continuously in the abdomen so much that it even now is painful. In this awful situation, we had to keep changing our hiding places, taking them deeper into the jungle or higher onto the mountain, so that bearing supplies to them grew harder every time. One place took us half a day to reach in this manner. But these difficulties were nothing compared to the things the women endured. Cold and hungry, exposed to the wind and rain, their clothes drenched for weeks and never having a chance to dry, not to mention the fear of being captured, the terror at every noise in the bushes—which could have been small animals and snakes, swarming packs of jungle rats forging for food. Worst were the centipedes that grew as big as a stirring chopstick. Just the thought of them is enough to make you shudder. But our women actually lay in the cold and dark with all manner of these creatures around ready to attack at any moment.

While the bitternesses of the women were legion, the men and boys were not immune to dangers. We never slept a good night through. Sometimes it rained 3-4 times a night and we had to flee beneath the trees for shelter (we usually slept in the open), but this is hardly worth mentioning next to the regularity with which we were awakened by bands of pirates coming for the women. Some of us were beaten and forced to point out their hiding places, others were choked with a chord to make them divulge where gold or dollars were supposedly hidden. Most tragic was a case where a man tried to save the virtue of a relation of his. First he was hit with an ax till his forehead split open then he was thrown on the rocky shore. By some luck he did not die then and there. One old gentleman with a few gold teeth had these pried out with a knife. He swooned from the pain. As you can see, not a day went by when we were not terrorized at all hours.

The fishing boats each had many men, and as one left us another came. This was especially true when the sea was agitated and they jammed the entrance to the island. We counted at times up to 40-50 boats at any one period. Of course, not all the fishermen had come to harass us. But it only took a few to sow among us fear and shame. In our

great despair, we could only pray and wait for the navy boat that had come once to rescue us from that hell. But although we waited, the despair of being abandoned on a desert island began to grow and became deeper every day. We started feeling fully the thoughts, bitter and painful, of a life without a tomorrow and our supplies continually depleting, of fatigue in the face of so many searches and hunts by the fishermen.

On Nov.8, another refugee boat was towed to the island by Thai fishermen. On board had been 21 person, but one had been thrown into the ocean and drowned so only 20 joined us. The next day, Nov.9, there came another boat, this time with 37 Vietnamese on board. A fourth vessel was brought to us on the night of the 15th and it gave us 34 more refugees, all of whom were tossed into the sea about 1kilometer from shore so that 16 drowned, including four women and three children. Of the 18 remaining, when they reached shore, they had no time to rest before the women were taken out and degraded in an unimaginably barbaric way.

The following day the body of a nineteen year old youth was washed up on the beach and we gathered to retrieve it and give the victim of the pirates a simple funeral. We bundled the corpse in a nylon sack and laid it on a plank carried by 4 people. Those who came behind the procession prayed softly. A hole ready dug served as the grave. (We found out later that the hole was the burial place for 4 children refugees from some earlier time.) The body was laid in the hole and covered with stones and coral. We could not utter a sound in our grief, but the tears welled in our eyes. A few days later, the effluvium rose through the rocks of the grave and was so heavy that the women hiding in the brush nearby had to move to another spot, unable to stand it. It was good that there was never any epidemic. Of four boats and 157 people, no one was seriously ill, except for one girl whose back had been seared when the pirates burned the bushes looking for her, one youth who had been scratched badly when he fell on the rocks, and the man who had had his head chopped open and his body ripped up on the shore when the pirates threw him down.

Amid all this, we prayed that our plight would not be forgotten by the outside world, although deep inside of us

the despair increased daily. We were very concerned about the dwindling supplies. We had begun eating leaves from the trees with our gruel, but that wasn't enough. We dug up arrowroot to boil and eat, but they had to be soaked for days to remove the oily substance from them and even then they left the mouth and throat with an itching sensation. Some of us couldn't sleep, what with the worry and fear, and they discovered that a certain type of leaf boiled made a good sedative. Another type of leaf was used as a vegetable and made the body feel cooler inside. As for meat, anyone who could catch any of the creatures could have a choice of many kinds. There were rats, bats (some as big as a kitten), centipedes (up to 30mm long and said to be rather delicious, not unlike chicken). Once a couple of people going swimming came upon a giant sea turtle, which they dragged ashore and cut up. There was 100 kg of meat there and thousands of eggs besides. The meat was dried and the eggs boiled—you could say that that was the only stroke of good fortune for us in those days.

Also on the 15th, a helicopter flew over us. We ran out and waved to it, but it was soon too far away. We were without hope, when two days later it returned and left us dried fish and rice with some medicines. We were as pleased as if we had been reborn. The outside world knew of us. We had not been abandoned in distress and shame.

Our being supplied afresh was not lost on the fishermen. We had hoped that they would take this as a warning that the world was protecting us and they must put an end to their savage activities. But that was foolish rationalization and in fact the contrary occurred. Groups of fishermen came and searched us more cruelly than before. They took all the clothing we had left, our torn raincoats, the shirts off our children, and the women were too exhausted to flee when they were taken to be raped. But this did not last long before it was over.

On Nov. 18, the people who had left us the supplies by helicopter returned with a navy patrol boat. We learned that this was the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees' representative in Thailand, Mr. Theodore Schweitzer. Mr. Schweitzer on our island along with a doctor who brought some medical instruments and medicines. As our sick and injured were being attended to, we took Mr. Schweit-

zer to some of our hiding places from which the women crawled out as soon as they heard we were being rescued. Some of the women indeed had to wait for us to crawl in and drag them out, they were so weak. With his own eyes, Mr. Schweitzer saw us pull the women out from under the rocks. Upon seeing the light of day, they collapsed. Mr. Schweitzer was so moved he could not bear to watch any longer. His camera recorded many priceless scenes: women coming up from the deep rocks, hiding places in the thick brush of the jungle, the spot that had been burned by the pirates searching for women to rape, the simple unmarked grave in the coral, and the gaunt faces full of terror. Mr. Schweitzer tried to comfort the suffering and encourage us, telling us that those terrible things would now be over.

We were deeply touched by his concern and would like to at this time and in the name of all the 157 refugees on Ko Kra on that day express our gratitude to the U.N. representative and all his staff. Your devotion and eagerness have realized most nobly the spirit of the human rights declaration of the U.N. Within the area of your competence and authority, you did as much for us as anyone could, acting most swiftly and necessarily.

Presently we are in Pakpanang district, waiting to complete the precessing before we can go to the refugee camp in Songkhla. Now we have no fears, and boldly raise our voices before the Thai government and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to denounce the barbaric action of a number of Thai fishermen, perpetrated against us, especially our women, for the 21 days we stayed on Ko Kra Island.

The pain will pass and time will take away the sorrow. We would apply the teachings of the Buddha if we say that all resentment should be cast off, not put on, but here the problem cannot be looked at from a philosophical point of view, rather from that of the safety of those Vietnamese refugees coming after us taking the same route we took. We hope that our denunciations before the conscience and opinion of the world will cause the Thai government to pay more heed to the robbery and rape taking place, which according to reports has been going on for years but only now has concrete witnesses. We hope our accusations will create an opportunity for organizations of an interna-

tional scope, such as the U.N.H.C.R., the International Red Cross and Amnesty International, to seek out effective means to protect the human dignity and lives of the refugees coming at later times so that they do not experience the same tragedies we have.

And finally, we hope our accusations will create a public opinion that will influence our friends and relatives back home to take more caution in fixing their flight for freedom through Thai waters, or better yet, find another route altogether. If even this cannot be done, then at least do not bring women with you.

Freedom is something extremely noble and precious. Any journey in search of that freedom must have a price. It is our wish that when our experiences through blood and tears have been publicized to those who will come later, the price they will have to pay for their freedom will not be as high.

Pakpanang, Nov.24, 1979
Nhat Tien
Vice-Chairperson
of the Vietnam Pen Club

IN THE END—LOVE WINS OUT

Songkhla, Thailand.— Last June 15, the 157 victims of the Ko Kra Island atrocities along with all the refugees in the camp in Songkhla celebrated a special wedding whose significance was not confined to the camp but extended to all the boat people refugees. The bride, Maria Nguyen Thi Hanh, 18, former student at the Normal School, and the groom, Giuse Do Trung Nghia, 25, former student at the School of Science in Saigon, both were among the 157 people whose ordeals on Ko Kra Island have moved the entire world. Both were aboard an unnamed boat of 34 people, thrown into the sea by pirates after they were taken to Ko Kra so that only 18 people survived. The bride had clung to a lifesaver and floated throughout the night before she was rescued. The groom had left with a 19 year-old brother, who was one of the unfortunates who drowned and whose body washed ashore to be buried on Ko Kra by the others.

Fate had brought these young people unto the island hell. There they shared each other's suffering and they relied on each other through the days of fear and hardship.

When they joined the camp at Songkhla, the hurt could not separate the two and in the end love won out. They decided to have the wedding on the day before they were to leave to resettle in the United States. In attendance at this wonderful ceremony were the full Board of Representatives of the Songkhla camp, all important religious delegates and representatives of all elements of their fellow refugees in the camp. Following the services at the Catholic church, a very emotional, though simple, reception was held to congratulate the couple.

The matching of these 2 youths who had been victims of the hell of Ko Kra speaks not only of the love of a husband and wife that shares to the end, but also manifests the courageous and indomitable spirit of all the boat people, who have passed through every suffering and danger to attain their goal of escaping the Communists in search of freedom.

During the ceremony, the groom announced, with a lump in his throat, "we have always felt that the honor of the women who were victimized by the pirates remains as clear and spotless as it was before. They showed their

courage and bore their suffering in a most admirable way. As for us, we have shared the pains and we have seen happiness."

On the morning of June 19, the happy couple along with nearly all the victims of Ko Kra Island left to resettle in the U.S. A number of direct witnesses have remained at Songkhla, awaiting the outcome of the pirate trial.

Songkhla, Thailand
June 14, 1980

To: Prof. Nguyen Huu Xuong
President, Boat People S.O.S Committee

On behalf of the 157 victims of Ko Kra Island in the Gulf of Siam, we wish to extend to you our most sincere gratitude for the efforts of you and the Boat People S.O.S. Committee in your struggle against the pirates, not only for the sake of our band of boat people, but for all our fellow boat refugees now coming and soon to come in the future. It was due only to the swift and efficient action of your committee and the absolute, forceful and determined support of the Catholic community, the communications media, various groups and organizations, university students and our compatriots among the Vietnamese community that, while not yet bringing about full measures to solve the problem of the tragedies on the seas, we nonetheless have been able to sound a resounding chord that moved the conscience of the world and at the same time caused a number of concrete measures to be applied that may diminish the force of piracy in the Gulf of Siam.

We wish to make this request of you, Professor, that you convey through the Boat People S.O.S Committee to all the Catholic community, communications media, organization, students and other compatriots our deepest feelings and our most sincere thanks for the display of unity and sympathy which every one in every arena has shared with us by one means or another to bring us so much comfort and encouragement in the face of the pain and suffering we've borne during our journeys across the sea to freedom.

Most notably, it was because of the swift action of the Boat People S.O.S Committee, communicating through the broad influence of its president within those circles of the highest authority, that in relation to a suitable resolution

of the fate of the 157 boat people, our petition of May 7, 1980 was sent and acted upon by your committee and has resulted in some encouraging measures being taken. The authorities of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs in Thailand and a delegation from the American embassy in Bangkok arrived at Songkhla camp on June 13, 1980 to open official contacts with the 157 Ko Kra victims by expressing their sympathy and sharing with us our sufferings, and by promising to deal with the internal problem in two areas:

1) They will take action so that the trial involving our witnesses will be concluded soon so that the witnesses can be resettled in the shortest amount of time and

2) in the meantime, the others in our group who are not official witnesses will be placed on the resettlement list of the visiting American delegation so that these individuals can be gradually resettled. (We decided among ourselves that some should go to the U.S. first while others remained with the witnesses.)

We have accepted these measure, first as a show of sympathy for the plight of the direct witnesses, who have undergone so much torment already and yet must stay in Songkhla for a while, and also with a reinforced hope in world opinion, not because of any progress made in the Ko Kra trial, but with a feeling that righteousness won over in the end. Piracy is still with us! We cannot know if the future of those boat people coming after us will be given more attention or if they will continue to fall into the horrible tragedies taking place on the sea.

Because of this hope, we ask the Professor in his capacity as president of the Boat People S.O.S Committee to continue to use his influence to maintain the voice of the suffering victims boat refugees in their struggle until piracy is eliminated once and for all. We feel that as long as the problem of Communism in Vietnam remains, the problem of boat people will remain and the role of your committee will still be necessary. We promise that we ourselves will contribute actively in all our capacities to assist you and the committee in every task that is of benefit to our fellow boat refugees.

Once again, please accept our most sincere good

wishes.

The 157 Boat People of Ko Kra Island
signed: Nhat Tien, Zuong Phuc, Vu Thanh Thuy

FATHER JOE DEVLIN: A MISSIONARY OF LOVE

by Nhat Tien

transl. by Pham Xuan Vinh

I have trouble finding words to express my feelings about a wonderful foreigner who has given his thoughts, his heart, his compassion and his special love to the refugees in the Songkhla camp.

He is the reverend Joe Devlin, an American Catholic priest and a person who has been sharing the fate of the Vietnamese people not only this time in the refugee camp, but long before the fall of Vietnam into the hands of the Communists. His feet had taken him many places in South VN, from the cities in the coastal area to the beautiful valley and delta. The names of those places where he once spent his life were never erased from his mind, even when they were out of sight: Long Khanh, Bien Hoa, Vung Tau, Binh Tuy, Minh Hai... And now he has come to the refugee camp of Songkhla Thailand.

Father Joe Devlin was born in 1915 in USA. Following his doctorate in theology, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1941 in San Francisco. In response to a special request of Dr. Phan Quang Dan, who at the time was Secretary of State in charge of resettlement program, Father Joe came to VN in 1970 to help resettle about 10,000 Vietnamese refugees in Dong Thap Muoi, a huge rural area in the delta of South Vietnam.

These refugees had been brought to this new area following their escape from communist-controlled areas. In 1974, he asked to be transferred to Phan Thiet city in the coastal area to help local authorities with their project to resettle huge waves of refugees fleeing the Communists from the cities in Central VN and the Highland. When Phan Thiet was taken over by the Communists, he refused to let himself be rescued by a helicopter of the U.S. Naval 7th Fleet. Instead he accompanied the refugees aboard their boats to seek safety in Vung Tau, which was then still under control of the

free Vietnamese government. He is very proud of being one of the first "boat people", even before today's boat people.

From 1975 to 1979 he became actively involved in activities for the refugees at the refugee camps in the U.S. mainland. But in Nov. 1979 he returned to Southeast Asia to serve the boat people in Songkhla, Thailand, as a volunteer. Through his wonderful service to human beings, Father Joe has become a great friend to the people of Vietnam. He sympathizes and shares in the fate of a small nation that has been submerged in war after war for over a quarter of the century. He shares in the griefs, the pains, the distress of a people who experienced the sudden and violent fall of the entire free Vietnam of the South. He understands what this people has been suffering under the communist yoke. He has come to meet the boat people who have just set foot from their tiny make shift boats on to free land. They come with fright-stricken hearts, with torn clothes hanging on their starving bodies. They bring with them the intense pain of having to leave their loved ones behind back home. They come to freedom as though they had just come back to life from their graves. They need the helping hand of ~~someone~~ who really cares and, most of all, they need consolation, comfort for their war-torn broken hearts and exhausted bodies.

He always wears his white clergyman's garment, and on his chest he pins a little insignia bearing Free Vietnam's National Flag and two inscribed words: "South Vietnam". This meaningful symbol tells everyone that he keeps South Vietnam in his heart all the time.

Following each Mass he spends time speaking to his congregation. He always mentions his admiration of the extreme courage of the Vietnamese who daringly accept risks and challenges awaiting them at sea in order to seek freedom. We can say that he shares in the joys, the sorrows, the worries of the refugees living under adverse conditions in camp. He always has some petty cash with him so he can help anyone who is in urgent need.

He was once found furious. What made him so upset? The story began like this: in the afternoon of Feb. 28 1980, while walking on the only road in the camp, he came across a little girl of 10 years old standing crying alone on the roadside. Through his talk with the poor little girl he learned that she was an unaccompanied refugee child. There are many children like this in the camp. Some came to the camp after their parents and brothers and sisters had lost their lives

to the sea; others had been sent out with their neighbors while their parents remained in Vietnam because they could not afford to leave with them. Because everyone suffers a critical shortage of basic needs, no one has much time or energy left to take care of these children who have come along to safety. No until that evening did Father Joe find out for himself the core of the tragedy thru the living example of that suffering little child. In his homily that evening mass, Father Joe didn't mention anything else other than his strong feelings for the case of the little girl. He said: "From now on anyone who knows of such a case, please let me know right away. We cannot leave those (unaccompanied) children to their own fate. I repeat 'We cannot!'"

His face turned red. His lips quivered. He was rarely outraged. His attitude touched many people of the congregation. They were moved to tears by such a wholehearted person. Right on the following day a group of boat people and members of the Parish Council met to discuss and find possible ways to respond to Father Joe's wish.

Two weeks later a day care center for unaccompanied refugee children was established and provided for by Father Joe's own money. A tent was repaired and turned into a good-looking day care center. The center is equipped with a kitchen, school furniture and a water pump. Everything looks well-prepared for the children's sake. The center has the following practical objectives:

1. To feed the children nutritious food from a ration funded by Father Joe;
2. To teach them classes of history, geography of Vietnam, drawing, music, Vietnamese and English;
3. To guide the children in their recreation, games, and physical exercises;
4. To introduce their cases to voluntary agencies for immediate follow-up and speedy sponsorship.

At the opening ceremony there were up to 60 eligible children. The center is in good regular operation. The center means a lot to the children. It brings great comfort to them-materially and spiritually-while they wait for resettlement.

The above project is only one of the many beautiful jobs that Father Joe has been doing for the welfare of the refugees in the camp. All of these works flow from Father Joe's generosity, affection and sympathy because he has a deep understanding of all that the refugees have suffered from.

At the time thousands of Cuban refugees were expelled by Fidel Castro to the U.S. shore, Father Joe felt that the admission of Vietnamese Refugees might be affected, so he urged boat people in the camp (there were about 6000 at the time) to join in his "signature campaign" petitioning the leaders of the American Catholic Church and the Pope to voice the sufferings of the refugees. The petitions ask that more efforts be made for the refugees. The requests in the name of the refugees at Songkhla were prepared by Father Joe himself.

If there is no change in Vietnam and the Communists remain in control of the land, many people will leave the country. Thus, for the remaining years of his working life, Father Joe's love is more and more attached to the boat people coming to the camp.

We refugees always talk about him as a human being with an enlightened heart. His heart is a guiding light for us, teaching us to love and care for one another.

In his homilies at the daily mass, he always encourages refugees to overcome feelings of inferiority that so many of us have. He keeps saying, "It is we foreigners who should learn from your courage and sacrifices. In the history of mankind there has never been a people willing to cope with so many dangers at sea to seek a life of freedom like your people have been struggling for..."

PART 2

Dear Nhat Kien - Dec 27

I have before me your beautiful letter and it makes me feel very grateful for your kind words. I am glad you are away from here... and I suggest strongly that you try to not think too much about the past. I also have the sleepless nights and I do not think they are good for us. Now everything is the same here as when you were here except the camp is more fallen down and the sad tales of Kra are even worse than before. I cannot understand the savagery of the Pirates...

You were a great man and will always be ... Now I am glad your wife & daughters were able to get to America with you.

Tien Phuong may just sent another \$2170. for the Refugees!!

We received about 2000+ this past month of December. - The camp is in poor state. We have a fine camp kitchen.



POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

5c



Bui-Nhat-Tien
10590 S 171 Barnes Rd #6
Portland Ore 97225
U.S.A.

Re: J. J. Dedlin S.E.

P.O. Box 126

Hanoi - North Vietnam

HANOI AND

I hope America gives you the peace
and happiness Communist Vietnam
failed to afford you.

Your letter gives me strength to
continue here. I have already decided a
long time ago that I shall stay here till
I die. For Dedlin, God Bless You



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
BANGKOK.

10 April 1980

Dear Dr. Ven Thich Man Giac :

H. E. General Prem Tinsulanonda, the Prime Minister, instructed me to convey to you and through you, to the Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation in America his sincere appreciations for your letter of February 29, 1980, concerning the capture and torture of Vietnamese boat people of which he deeply regrets.

It is my honour and distinct responsibility to inform you that the Government of Thailand is well - aware of the recent growing number of pirate activities and has deliberately determined to pursue vigorous policies against them. The pirate activities in the Gulf of Thailand do not take place in the Thai territorial waters only. Our Police Marine has to combat against those terrorists who, from time to time, attacked not only the Vietnamese boat people but also those of Thai nationality as well. Furthermore, the long eastern coast of Thailand does not facilitate our small Marine Force to accomplish such operation.

Realizing the inhumane action towards the Vietnamese boat people, His Excellency has instructed the concerned officials to investigate this case in particular. The result shall be further delivered to you as soon as possible.

With best regards,

Sincerely yours,

Colonel

Chamlong Srimuang
(Chamlong Srimuang)
Secretary-General

Dr. Ven Thich Man Giac
863 S. Berendo Street
Los Angeles, CA 9005
U. S. A.

P E T I T I O N

Whereas at least one third of hundreds of thousands Indochinese refugees have drowned in high seas due to tempests, storms and died from thirst, hunger and long exposures,

Whereas tens of thousands of boat people, in extremely dangerous situations, have been denied the right of being rescued, have been refused adequate help and assistance as ruled by international maritime laws,

Whereas, most shockingly of all, many of the boat people are victims of frequent acts of piracy including hold-ups, tortures, rapes and even killings and other horrible crimes which multiple evidence have been publicly brought to the attention of human conscience (Press release attached),

It is hereby requested:

That the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugee Affairs take immediate actions to prevent such calamities imposed on Indochinese boat people by pirates on high seas, especially that public hearing sessions be held to attract attention of the United Nations' authorities,

That the Governments of all Nations especially the ASEAN countries combine efforts to save the lives of the unfortunate Indochinese boat people, moreover to stop the shameful acts of piracy which, together with communist violence and terrorism, are blackening the memory of this generation of mankind,

That the United States of America, as leading nation of the Free World with undeniable responsibilities vis-a-vis human rights, use its influence to ask other countries to

- (1) actively contribute to the rescue of boat people;
- (2) put an end to acts of piracy by frequent naval/police operations in remote islands located both in international and within each respective country's territorial waters, especially in the southeastern part of the Pacific Ocean.

* One thousand signatures are on file at the Boat people S.O.S. Committee Office,
6970 Linda Vista Road - San Diego, Ca. 92111



STATE OF CALIFORNIA

EDMUND G. BROWN JR., Governor



HEALTH and WELFARE AGENCY
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
915 CAPITOL MALL, ROOM 200
Sacramento, California 95814
(916) 445-6951

Mario G. Obledo
SECRETARY

James W. Cannon
UNDERSECRETARY

March 6, 1980

Mr. Xuong Nguyen huu
Chairman
The Boat People SOS Committee
6970 Linda Vista Road
San Diego, CA 92111

Dear Mr. Xuong:

As Chairperson of the Governor's Indochinese Refugee Task Force, Governor Brown has asked that I respond to your recent letter to him in which you solicit his endorsement of the letter you plan to send to the King of Thailand. I am sure all who read about the barbaric acts of the pirates against the refugees were appalled at their conduct.

I am taking the liberty of forwarding your letter to Mr. Victor Palmieri, Ambassador-at-Large for Refugee Affairs in the State Department. I am sure he is equally concerned over this situation and possible official action at that level would be far more effective.

Let us all hope there will be no further atrocities directed against refugees or any other groups throughout the world.

Sincerely,

Mario G. Obledo
MARIO G. OBLEDO
Secretary

cc: Ambassador Victor Palmieri
Office of the U.S. Coordinator for
Refugee Affairs
State Department 7526
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520



VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST CONGREGATION IN AMERICA
TỔNG HỘI PHẬT-GIAO VIỆT-NAM TẠI HOA-KỲ

863 S. Borendo Street Los Angeles, CA 90005
(213) 384-9638

February 29, 1980

Your Royal Highness
President, World Fellowship of Buddhists
Bangkok, Thailand.

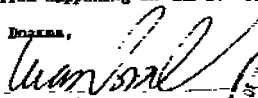
Your Royal Highness:

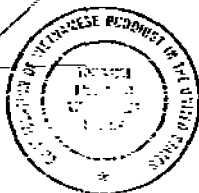
I have received a painful account of 157 Vietnamese boat people being held as prisoners on the island of Kokra by the Thai pirates for 20 days. During this time, some of them had been repeatedly beaten, robbed, raped and murdered.

The authors of this account asked me to make this report known to the public so that the people of the world would be informed of the tragic fate of the Vietnamese boat refugees and the cruelty committed by the Thai pirate.

My profound respect for you, my admiration and love for your people and your country has dictated me to send this report to you instead. I fervently hope that you would use your power and influence to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future.

Yours in the Dharma,


Ven. Dr. Thích Nhất Hạnh
President.



LIONEL VAN DEERLIN
4th District, California

COMMITTEE ON INTERSTATE
AND FOREIGN COMMERCE

SPANISH-SUBCOMMITTEE ON
COMMUNICATIONS

COMMITTEE ON
HOUSE ADMINISTRATION

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

3400 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

OFFICE ADDRESS
100 W. Broadway, Room 301
San Diego, California 92101
(619) 592-2400

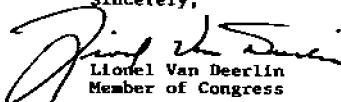
March 3, 1980

His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadet
King of Thailand
Chitlada Palace
Bangkok, Thailand

May it please Your Majesty:

I fully endorse the plea of the Boat People
SOS Committee of San Diego. I would hope that you
would carefully consider their sincere entreaties.

Sincerely,


Lionel Van Deerlin
Member of Congress

LVD:c

Sincerely,

Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR REFUGEES

REGIONAL OFFICE AT UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS



NEW YORK

HAUT COMMISSARIAT DES NATIONS UNIES
POUR LES RÉFUGIÉS

DÉLÉGATION AU SIÈGE DES NATIONS UNIES

TELEGRAMS: UNATIONS, HSCOMREF New York

TELEPHONE: (212) 754-3404

6 May 1980

Dear Mr. Xuong,

We wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 24 March 1980.

The attacks of piracy against Vietnamese refugees off the coast of Thailand to which you make reference in your letter is, indeed, a matter of most serious concern and has been the subject of consultation between the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Poul Hartling.

You will be glad to learn that the attention of the governments concerned has been called to this situation and full measures are being taken to prevent and punish these appalling incidents. In addition, the High Commissioner, with the support of certain member governments, has arranged for a fast patrol boat to be placed at the disposal of the Government of Thailand to assist them in undertaking the necessary surveillance. UNHCR is also continuing its efforts to mobilize further governmental support in curtailing acts of this nature.

Thank you for the interest and concern you have expressed over what is undoubtedly an extremely serious problem. Please be assured that your views are fully shared by responsible officials at the highest level in the United Nations system who are pursuing initiatives towards a solution of the problem by a concerted effort of the international community.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'I. Haynes'.

I. Haynes (Mrs.)
Information Officer

Mr. Nguyen Huu Xuong, President
Boat People S.O.S. Committee
6970 Linda Vista Road
San Diego, Ca 92111

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF CONSULES
1615 AVENUE OF THE STARS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006
San Diego, California 92111
U.S.A.

February 29, 1980

His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadet, King of Thailand
Chitlada Palace
Bangkok - Thailand

May it please Your Majesty:

Under the spectre of Communism that has grown daily greater, our country of Vietnam has borne many of the most painful adversities. This is especially true after April 30, 1975 when South Vietnam fell into Communist hands, when millions of our people have been forced to endure grave peril, leaving their country and crossing the ocean to seek freedom. Of these refugees, thousands have come to Your shores and received Your assistance, care, and accommodation as they awaited resettlement in other countries. This gracious and meritorious deed is due primarily to the enlightened rule of Your Majesty and of Her Majesty the Queen, as well as to the tolerance of the government and people of Thailand, a people deeply inculcated in the compassion of the Holy Buddha. As a result, not only are the refugees grateful to You, but all the world expresses its admiration for Your country. We send our deepest and sincerest thanks to Your Majesty, Her Majesty the Queen and the government and people of Thailand.

However, concurrent with this admirable situation, in past months, a number of our Vietnamese boat people, after having been in Your waters, have suffered cruel and barbarous atrocities that cause great pain and distress to them. Among these bloody and tear-filled incidents is the mistreatment of refugees on the island of Ko Kra in November 1979. Every day, boat load after boat load of pirates came ashore to rob, torture men and rape women. After 20 days of ordeal, the refugees were led to safety by a representative of the High Commissioner of Refugee Affairs of the United Nations. The official records also show that during a meeting with a United Nations representative in Pak Panang, some rape victims had the opportunity to accuse the pirates before Thai police (these pirates were quite confident that the victims would not dare to accuse them publicly). The Thai police took little action even though accusations were filed with full evidence. For more details we are enclosing an open letter written by two of the victims for Your consideration.

We are certain that these terrible and inhuman actions run contrary to the policy of the Royal Family, the feelings of the government and people of Thailand, sully in no little way the meritorious actions of the Royal Family and government which are still being performed for the benefit of the boat people. Such inhuman action are also stirring up unfavorable worldwide public opinion.

Therefore, in the face of the peril that has threatened and is still threatening the lives, property and dignity of freedom-loving people crossing the sea and in light of the prestige of the Royal Family and Your Nation, we respectfully submit this letter to Your Majesty, Her Majesty the Queen, and to the Thai government, strongly hoping that stern measures be taken against those responsible for the great tragedies mentioned above. We also respectfully request Your Majesty, Her Majesty the Queen, and the Thai government to stop as soon as possible these horrible actions that are affecting the great reputation of the Thai people.

With this hope, we pray that the Holy Buddha bless and protect the Royal Family and all the Thai people, that You forever enjoy peace and prosperity, and that the Thai shores be a safe and cordial haven for people seeking freedom.

Respectfully yours,

Xuong Nguyen Huu
Xuong Nguyen Huu, Ph.D., Chairman
The Boat People SOS Committee

Rev. Do Quang Hien
Rev. Do Quang Hien
Chaplain Vietnamese Catholic
Community of San Diego

Kathy Do
Kathy Do, Director
Indochinese Service Center

Pham Quang Tuan
Pham Quang Tuan, Advisor
Vietnamese Community Foundation

Vu Minh Tran
Vu Minh Tran, President
Vietnamese Education and Culture
Association

Dinh Thinh
Dinh Thinh, General Secretary
Vietnamese Buddhist Association

Le Phuc Thuy
Le Phuc Thuy, Ph. D., Biochemist
University of California, San Diego

Dinh Thach Bich
Dinh Thach Bich, Editor
Vietnam Kai Ngoc Magazine

Lac Phuong Vinh
Lac Phuong Vinh, Chairman
Vietnamese Military Personnel Overseas

Nguyen Van Nghi
Nguyen Van Nghi, Chairman
Council of Indochinese Associations
and
President of the Vietnamese Catholic
Association

Thich Tri Chon
Venerable Thich Tri Chon
Buddhist Spiritual Leader, San Diego

Nguyen Hue Cio
Nguyen Hue Cio, Director
Indochinese Refugee Assistance Center

Nguyen Huu Khang
Nguyen Huu Khang, Director
Prelegal Aid Services of Indochinese

Tran Manh Phuc
Tran Manh Phuc, Vice President
Vietnamese Alliance Association

Tran Van Khang
Tran Van Khang, M.D.
Vietnamese Alliance Association

Phan Lac Tiep
Phan Lac Tiep, Writer

Nguyen Nguyen
Nguyen Nguyen, General Secretary
Vietnamese Pilot Association

Do Quang Giai
Do Quang Giai, Chairman
Vietnamese Student Association
San Diego State University



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Telephone:
(714) 235-2271

ROGER HEDGECOCK
Chairman

February 25, 1980

His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadet, King of Thailand
Chitlada Palace
Bankof, Thailand

May it Please Your Majesty:

As Chairman of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, I am endorsing the letter sent to you by the Council of Indo-chinese Organizations of San Diego. The letter condemns the atrocities committed against the Vietnamese boat people by Thai pirates.

I respectfully address this letter to Your Majesty and to the Thai government in hope that you will take stern measures against those individuals responsible for the crimes against the boat people and that you find an effective means to prevent these crimes.

I send my deepest thanks to Your Majesty and the government and people of Thailand for the assistance you have given the boat people awaiting resettlement in other countries.

I pray the Holy Buddha bless and protect the Royal Family and that you may forever enjoy peace and prosperity.

Your consideration is appreciated.

Respectfully,


ROGER HEDGECOCK, Chairman
Board of Supervisor

RR:fj

cc: Xuong Nguyen huu, Chairman
The Boat People SOS Committee



DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY, 8-817
LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA 92093

October 9, 1980

Mr. Gary Perkins, Representative
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
1785 Massachusetts Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Perkins:

As stated in our telephone conversation yesterday, the Boat People SOS Committee will really appreciate your sending us all the information about the arrangements the High Commissioner has made with Singapore about picking up the "boat people" from commercial ships. We also appreciate knowing about your efforts to make these arrangements known to shipowners and ship captains.

Our committee is very concerned about finding ways to relieve the suffering of the "boat people" who flee Viet-Nam. From information that we receive directly from the refugee camps, the sufferings are immense. Many boats are attacked over and over by the pirates, some up to forty times. Many refugees are imprisoned on deserted islands by pirates who come day after day to rob, murder and rape them. Other boats are stranded on far away islands without any food and some of their members have to resort to eating dead people's flesh in order to survive.

After interviewing many refugees, we have found one startling statistic; the "boat people" always meet one or more commercial ships even before meeting the pirates. Some ships show concern, giving them food and water but refuse to pick them up. Others simply ignore them. Perhaps the captains are afraid about immigration troubles at the next port. The refugees feel strongly that if the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees can give some warranties that the refugees will be picked up from the ships and transferred to existing refugee camps, the ship captains will be more willing to let them come aboard. This act will relieve much of the suffering of the boat people.

I was delighted to hear from you that some similar arrangements have been made. We would like to know more about these arrangements to make them better known to the maritime world. We would also like to petition the governments of all the involved countries to have them support these policies more strongly.

I would like to take this occasion to transfer to you all the thanks of the boat people. Every refugee stated clearly that their suffering only ended with the arrival of a representative from the U.N.H.C.R. office. They are really grateful to the dedication of these workers.

Mr. Gary Perkins, Representative
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Page 2

October 9, 1980

I enclose here one of the many letters that we receive from the refugee camps so that you have some idea of their sufferings.

Sincerely,

Kuong Nguyen Hau
Professor of Physics, Chemistry
and Biology
and Chairman, The Boat People SOS
Committee
4635 Sauk Avenue
San Diego, CA 92117



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

July 15, 1980

Nguyen Huu Xuong, Ph.D
President
Boat People SOS Committee
6970 Linda Vista Road
San Diego, California 92111

Dear Dr. Nguyen:

I refer to your correspondence of April 16 to President Carter enclosing a petition calling attention to the problem of pirate attacks on Vietnamese boat refugees in the Gulf of Thailand.

This tragic situation has been a matter of concern for the Department of State for many months. In January, we jointly participated with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the purchase of a boat to seek out refugees in the Gulf of Thailand and provide for their relief. Manned by Thai Navy personnel, this boat began operations under UNHCR direction in May. Additionally, during the spring, two privately owned mercy ships began to cruise in the Gulf to pick up refugees whenever spotted. Since that time, several hundred refugees have been rescued at sea by these ships.

The Thai Government, I should note, is prosecuting alleged pirates for crimes against refugees. On June 25, seven Thai men (detained since October 1979) were convicted in a Thai court in Songkhla of raping and robbing refugees and were given sentences averaging 16 years. Earlier in June, the Thai Government publicly stated its intention to mount a more active program against the pirates and invited assistance in this endeavor.

The US Navy has assigned patrol aircraft to search for refugees in distress as one of their missions, and on several occasions these aircraft have directed passing merchant ships to refugees threatened by pirates. US naval vessels which transit the Gulf of Thailand often pick refugees up as well.

Under the auspices of the UNHCR, a meeting to discuss anti-piracy measures is planned and will be attended by the ASEAN countries and other concerned countries including the United States. Additionally, the Department of State and our Embassy in Bangkok are discussing with the Thai Government a number of suggestions to combat this menace, and we are seeking funds to work with UNHCR and other countries to this end. Piracy in the Gulf of Thailand, however, has a history which antedates the appearance of the Vietnamese boat refugees and is of a complex and obdurate nature. I am hopeful that the steps already taken will develop into a more effective anti-piracy program.

Your humanitarian concern for the welfare of the Indochinese refugees is deeply appreciated. I hope that the foregoing information is useful to you.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Powers
Refugee and Migration Officer
Office of Asian Refugees

VIET NAM COUPLE DESCRIBE 20 DAY ORDEAL

San Diego Union, Feb. 11, 1980

A letter from Thailand describing a 20-day ordeal of kidnap, robbery and rape of 157 "boat people" by Thai pirates has prompted refugees in San Diego to mount a political campaign against the Thai government.

A Coalition led by UCSD physics professor Nguyen Huu Xuong calls itself the Boat People SOS Committee. They intend to appeal to the U.S. government to pressure the Thais to crack down on the pirates.

But they also will protest directly to the Thais themselves, if necessary, appealing to the king and queen of that country to intervene against the pirates, Xuong said.

"We call them pirates, but they're really fishermen," Xuong said. "There are absolutely no penalties for what they do."

In letter to refugees in San Diego and Santee, an Vietnamese couple, Duong Phuc and Vu Thanh Thuy, wrote of their experience on the island of Ko Kra.

They said Thai pirates held three boatloads of refugees on the island for 20 days before United Nations officials rescued them. They also accused the Thai government of protecting the pirates from prosecution.

Two days after their arrival, a Thai naval vessel stopped at the island and the officers aboard promised to return with help. They never did, according to the two Vietnamese writers. "The day after Thai navy boat left us, we were attacked by pirates, searched and raped," the letter said.

Pirates attacked one man with hammers, screwdrivers and pliers to remove his gold teeth, then raped his 15-year-old daughter. One woman washed ashore from a refugee boat attacked by other pirates was raped as she reached land. Others became pirate "wives" to avoid being passed from one man to another.

"There was a girl, 12 years old, who hid in a crevice in the side of a wooded mountain... terrified of every sound she heard. After suffering thus for 15 days, she couldn't help but leave her hiding place, only to be raped on the spot by four pirates."

Many women left their families and tried to hide, crawling under brush or clinging to mountainsides. Some refused to leave the brush even after pirates set fire to it and were badly burned. Vietnamese men who refused to reveal the hiding places were beaten with hammers and hanged,

the letter said.

The number of refugees killed on the island was not specified in the letter. Phan Lac Tiep, one of the San Diego refugees who received the letter, said at least one of the writers was injured, but was unsure of details.

Eventually, the group was flown by U.N. helicopters to the Thai mainland, first at a camp called Pak Panang, then to the U.N. camp at Songkhla. Many signed formal accusations against the pirates, some of whom went to the refugee camp after the island episode had ended.

On the complaints of the refugees, they were arrested by Thai police, but then released after eight days, the letter said.

"Showing no signs of what they had done, they mingled with the Vietnamese boat people, joking and care-free," the writers said. "They seemed assured the police were on their side."

Later, uniformed police officers told some of the women to take their names off the accusations they had signed, otherwise later boat people arrivals would be killed, the refugees said.

The letter writers said they had been journalists in Vietnam and were writing in hopes that newspapers throughout the world would print their story.

"We call to the people of Thailand, to the world, to pressure Thai authorities to put a halt to this piracy" the letter said. "Each minute we await your help."

Attacks on refugees by Thai vessels is nothing new, but this is the first time refugees in this country have heard of whole boatloads being abducted and held, Xuong said.

Neither the U.N. nor the U.S. State Department could immediately confirm this story, but officials for both said that such abductions are not uncommon.

"There is a substantial problem with pirates in the area," State Department spokesman Tom Reston said. "I think it happens periodically."

Xuong said the SOS committee plans to protest the Thai piracy to the Carter administration, the U.N. and Thai consular authorities in Los Angeles. They also plan to send letters to King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit of Thailand, asking their direct involvement.

Furthermore, the committee plans to mount a petition drive next week during the celebration of Tet, the Vietnamese lunar new year, Phan said.

THE PIRATES OF THAILAND

San Diego Union, Editorial

By almost any measure, Thailand has shouldered more than its share of the international responsibility for one million Indochinese refugees who have fled Communist regimes in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam since 1975.

The Thais have granted at least temporary sanctuary to hundreds of thousands of these refugees. They have permitted use of Thai soil for huge refugee camps although the presence of these foreigners strains Bangkok's resources and may yet threaten the country's political stability. Indeed, the sanctuary and aid granted starving Cambodians in recent months may even provoke a Vietnamese invasion of Thailand's eastern provinces.

But for all Thailand's laudable conduct, it has tolerated one outrageous practice that offends every civilized norm. Thai pirates, operating with virtual impunity in the Gulf of Siam, are subjecting thousands of refugees to ordeals of rape, robbery, and even murder.

The unarmed refugees in their rickety fishing boats can neither escape nor defend themselves against the heavily armed pirates. The sickening tales told by survivors of these attacks should long ago have moved Thai officials to act. Instead, the Thais say only that they lack the resources to police a 2,000 mile coastline.

While that is undoubtedly true, it is also apparent that Thai police and naval units are not even trying. Nor is there any sign of a serious effort to investigate the countless refugee complaints.

It has been suggested that Bangkok's willingness to look the other way as Thai pirates plunder, rape, and kill is the government's way of discouraging new waves of refugees from seeking temporary haven in Thailand. If so, it is a vile tactic fully deserving of international condemnation.

Whatever the reason for the Thai government's inaction, the consequence is a new plague of suffering on innocents who have already endured a full measure of misery.

The Carter administration could and should use its considerable influence in Bangkok to press for action against the pirates. If even a few of these human vultures paid a price commensurate with their crimes, there would be less incentive for others to extort profit from Southeast Asia's continuing agony.

Boat People S.O.S. Committe
6970 Linda Vista Road
San Diego, CA.92111, U.S.A.