

BOAT PEOPLE SOS URGES SPEEDY AND GENEROUS IMPLEMENTATION OF RESCUE EFFORT FOR AFGHAN ALLIES

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Boat People SOS (BPSOS), a humanitarian and human rights organization that was founded in 1980 by former refugees from Vietnam to rescue refugees escaping from Indochina, welcomes the arrival in the United States of approximately 200 Afghans who worked closely with United States forces during the 20-year conflict with the Taliban. But the organization urged the Biden Administration not to repeat the mistakes of similar efforts in the years after the Vietnam War, in which inefficient implementation and narrow eligibility criteria resulted in leaving many thousands of our allies behind to suffer persecution at the hands of the victorious Communist forces.

“Our government’s decision to provide a safe haven for these brave and loyal allies should make us all proud to be Americans,” said Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang, the President and Chief Executive Officer of BPSOS. “But it is important to remember that many thousands of Afghans who worked closely with the United States remain to be rescued.”

During the weeks and months leading up to the fall of Saigon in April 1975, the US Government had no systematic plan to identify and evacuate the hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese who had worked for or with the Americans and were sure to be harshly persecuted by the invading Communist forces. Fortunately, a few State Department and military personnel organized a last-minute effort that saved some 130,000 people. Subsequently our government did develop programs to resettle our former employees and colleagues who had been suffering persecution in Vietnam, but these programs were often implemented inefficiently and sometimes ungenerously. In particular, the imposition of arbitrary eligibility criteria, such as the exclusion of those who worked for the United States for less than a certain period of time, resulted in leaving many thousands of our closest allies behind to face persecution under the communist regime.

Dr. Thang noted that “emergency legislation enacted by Congress and signed by the President this week has eliminated some obstacles to resettlement of Afghan interpreters and other U.S. employees and associates. For instance, one provision reduced the period that Afghan employees must have worked for the United States

from two years to one year in order to be eligible for a U.S. visa. But the Taliban are unlikely to deal gently with Afghans who worked for the United States for eleven months. We urge the Administration to implement this rescue effort using all the authorities and resources at its disposal to ensure that we leave no one behind.”

In the 1980’s, BPSOS conducted rescue-at-sea missions, saving 3,300 Vietnamese boat people at risk of pirate attacks on the high seas. The organization contributed to the creation in 1996 of the Resettlement Opportunity for Vietnamese Returnees (ROVR), which eventually resettled to the United States some 18,000 boat people after their repatriation to Vietnam from Hong Kong and Southeast Asian camps. BPSOS currently provides direct services to refugees and immigrants in six cities in the United States and maintains operations in Southeast Asia, protecting refugees, rescuing victims of human trafficking, promoting religious freedom, and building capacity for persecuted communities.