

CONSORTIUM

Training and Assistance Programs

May 19, 1995

The Honorable Douglas K. Bereuter
Chairman
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
Committee on International Relations
U.S. House of Representatives
2348 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-2701

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Since 1980 the Consortium of World Learning, Save the Children, and World Education has been working in Thailand and Indonesia in support of the resettlement of Indochinese refugees to the U.S. In addition, since 1992, the Consortium has worked both in Laos and Vietnam assisting with the repatriation of refugees. It is from this dual experience that we base our opposition to section 2104 (a)(4) of H.R. 1561.

In our April 1994 testimony before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the House Foreign Affairs Committee we affirmed our support of U.S. policy concerning migration and refugee assistance in Southeast Asia. We were the only NGO or individual testifying who had actual extended experience working with significant numbers of repatriates in multiple locations in Laos and Vietnam. Our experience has both strengthened our belief that repatriation is a positive, viable choice as well as underlined the critical role which organizations such as ours play in providing facilitative support to repatriates to enable them to integrate and become self-sufficient in their new communities. Cut off of repatriation assistance discredits the successful work which the non-governmental organizations are currently doing.

This past year has only provided us with more evidence to support our position that repatriation/reintegration is working out successfully for Vietnamese and Lao asylum seekers who did not qualify for refugee status. We believe that efforts to alter the final steps at resolving the Indochinese refugee situation would be counterproductive for the individuals involved and for U.S. interests in the region. The provision gives an inhumane signal to populations which have already been misled by false hopes.

Although there have been some flaws in the screening, inequities in individual cases of status determination are receiving attention and scrutiny in order to rectify injustices which have occurred. These efforts should receive continued encouragement and support.



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This provision would reverse the efforts being pursued since the adoption of the UNHCR Comprehensive Plan of Action by all of the concerned governments to provide a humane, orderly, constructive solution to the plight of Indochinese asylum seekers. By reducing the foreign aid appropriation by 30 million dollars and prohibiting funding for repatriation and reintegration of returnees, this provision is denying much needed funds to help returnees start their lives again after many years of idleness in the camps.

The Consortium, which has had Vietnamese and Lao speaking field staff on the ground for over two years working directly with repatriates, has neither observed nor heard directly or indirectly from individuals or other NGOs of any acts of discrimination or reprisals against repatriates on the part of the governments of Vietnam or the Lao PDR.

A decision on a provision with such serious consequences must be based on all the current facts. The U.S. policy supporting monitored repatriation of screened out asylum seekers and the option of choice for bona fide refugees should not be confused with or altered by reports of difficulties in the screening process or complexities involving a few individual cases.

This provision will not serve those bona fide refugees who have resettled, the currently screened out asylum seekers, or the U.S. government.

On behalf of the Consortium,

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