

# InterAction.

American Council for Voluntary International Action

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Commissioner Eugene McNary  
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itself to deal with the problems of its peoples overseas, we see this as very much in the American tradition and deserving of the strong support of all of us.

We are sure you will agree and look forward to your positive efforts on behalf of this very worthy project.

Sincerely,

Robert P. DeVecchi  
Chairman, Committee on Migration and Refugee Affairs  
Executive Director, International Rescue Committee

On behalf of:

Mr. Wells C. Klein  
Executive Director, American Council for Nationalities Service

Mr. Dale de Haan  
Executive Director, Immigration and Refugee Programs  
Church World Service

The Rev. Canon Burgess Carr  
Executive Director, Episcopal Migration Ministries

Mr. Karl D. Zukerman  
Executive Vice-President, HIAS

Ms. Mitzi Schroeder  
Director, Washington Office  
International Catholic Migration Commission

Mr. Ralston Deffenbaugh, Jr.  
Executive Director, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Mr. Lionel Rosenblatt  
Executive Director, Refugees International

Mr. Leon Marion  
Executive Director, The Tolstoy Foundation

The Rev. Richard Ryscavage, S.J.  
Executive Director,  
Migration and Refugee Services, United States Catholic Conference

Mr. Donald Hammond  
Director, USA Ministries  
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Mr. Eugene McNary  
Commissioner  
U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service  
U.S. Department of Justice  
425 Eye Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Commissioner McNary:

We are writing to urge your active support for a legal counseling project in Hong Kong that could be operated by the Committee for Legal Assistance for Vietnamese Asylum Seekers (LAVAS). This new organization is a project of the Boat People S.O.S., Inc., and is supported among others by the National Congress of Vietnamese in America and the Interfaith Committee for Refugees and Human Rights Concerns. The goal of LAVAS is to seek to provide legal assistance to those Vietnamese asylum seekers in Hong Kong who have been incorrectly screened out and may face forced repatriation to Vietnam but who have not received any legal representation or assistance in presenting their case.

The last hope of these people to avoid forcible repatriation is the exercise of UNHCR's mandate power. Yet the extremely limited resources of the UNHCR means that many valid cases may not come to the attention of the High Commissioner's representative in Hong Kong. Attached is the LAVAS project proposal prepared by Daniel Wolf, a Washington attorney who spent many months in Hong Kong working on this problem. This is an effort which both the Government of Hong Kong and the UNHCR should welcome. Both have stated their desire to avoid forcible returns of true refugees and both have noted the lamentable shortage of legal resources to deal with this problem. We would hope that the U.S. would even consider providing some financial support for this project.

We strongly urge the Administration's support in gaining the agreement in principle of the British Government and the UNHCR to allow a LAVAS team to operate in Hong Kong with ready access to the screened out asylum seekers who have exhausted their appeal rights with the Government of Hong Kong. In accepting the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) and agreeing not to accept for resettlement asylum seekers screened out by first asylum nations, the United States government has surrendered a significant means of sovereignty, i.e. to choose persons or groups it wishes to consider for refugee admission. We believe therefore it is in the best interests of our government to support all possible efforts to ensure a fair screening system.

As you are aware, the voluntary agencies have had a long and productive interaction with Vietnamese American community. LAVAS represents an effort by some of the most responsible members and organizations of that community to meet a major felt need of their own people. Important as the problem is in Hong Kong, it is likely to become an even more urgent need in the countries of Southeast Asia in the near future. As the Vietnamese American community increasingly moves to organize