

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(79) 448 final

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AID TO REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS IN

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

(Communication from the Commission to the Council)

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1.- The Secretary-General of the United Nations called a meeting in Geneva on 21 and 22 July 1979 of countries and organisations ready to contribute to seeking a solution to the problems of refugees and displaced persons in South-East Asia. Sixty-five countries took part, as well as a number of national and international organisations, both governmental and non-governmental. The meeting can be considered in various ways a success.

2.- In the first place the meeting itself - besides the many bilateral and multilateral contracts in which the Community played active part - led to an undertaking by Vietnam to do its utmost to put a stop to unorganised departures, and to cooperate actively with the High Commissioner for Refugees in the creation of a system of orderly departures. This would include the provision of transit camps on Vietnamese side.

3.- Secondly, the attitude of the Vietnamese, together with the commitments made by countries inside and outside the region, enabled the developing countries of the region to gain more than simple expectations for immediate relief of their problems as countries of first asylum. This improvement should also allow an effective system of organized departures to be set up in conditions of safety, both from the point of view of transport and of security against any threat of refoulement.

4.- Finally the magnitude of the additional offers of assistance of all kinds made during this meeting by various countries, especially of the West, shall be emphasized. At the end of May 1979, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees had a capacity guaranteed of placing 125,000 persons in countries of final asylum; at the end of the meeting the figure had risen to no less than 260,000.

5.- The present figure of 10,000 persons per month on their way to final destinations should reach 30,000 per month very shortly, taking into account offers of transport and transit camp facilities. This speeding up of the movement of refugees and displaced persons, from the countries of first asylum to transit camps or to final destinations, should alleviate their sometimes appalling situation in the countries of first asylum, and permit the organisation of orderly departures from the countries of origin.

6.- In total the financial commitments both definitive and conditional undertaken by a certain number of countries at the Geneva meeting should allow the High Commissioner to set up the agreements and the machinery for ensuring orderly departures, for the physical creation of transit camps, and for the support of refugees in countries of first asylum, in transit camps, and in countries of final asylum. The additional offers of aid, financial and in kind, made during the meeting - including those from the Community - total approximately 190,000 million US dollars.

7.- To all this should be added the commitments made by certain countries concerning the search and rescue of those shipwrecked on the high seas, and to make available temporarily to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees the services of national experts; this will give the Agency the personnel and the expertise that are indispensable for carrying out the tremendous task entrusted to it at Geneva.

8.- The Geneva meeting, therefore, concentrated on three questions:

- (i) orderly departures from country of origin;
- (ii) transit of refugees and displaced persons - particularly in the South-East Asia region;
- (iii) the permanent settlement of the refugees and displaced persons in the countries of final asylum.

Clearly certain aspects of these problems concern primarily, or even exclusively, the individual Member States. This is true particularly for questions of final asylum, although some use of the Social Fund (immigrant workers) is a possibility (see Commission note COM(79) 426 of 13 July).

9.- The Community itself announced at the end of the Geneva meeting its intention, in accordance with the guidelines adopted by COREPER at its meeting on 18 July to renew immediately measures recently taken for the benefit of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees :

- (i) to meet 50% of the requirements for rice and milk for the period September 1979 to February 1980, i.e. 20 000 t rice and 1 500 t vitaminised milk powder;
- (ii) to renew its financial commitments to UNHCR. The Ministers recognized, at their meeting at Geneva on 20 July 1979, that it was appropriate to make a cash contribution to the High Commissioner very much larger than the one just made. This new payment was set at 10 Meua.

10.- The Ministers at their Geneva meeting also recognized that it was imperative to foresee a Community action for Cambodia, for the relief both of those turned back by Thailand and of those remaining in Cambodia in such appalling conditions. It is not possible at this time to define exactly how this action will be carried out; evidently, it can only be done through international agencies such as UNICEF or CICR, and without passing any direct aid to the Phnom-Penh authorities.

11.- In its note of 13 July (COM(79) 426) the Commission stated that all the above undertakings, towards UNHCR and the South-East Asian refugees and displaced persons, could be met within the 1979 Budget appropriations, on condition that the appropriate budgetary transfers were sanctioned. The Geneva proposals, and the suggestions made there by the Ministers at their meeting, imply that the necessary appropriations must be released for the following:

- (i) the food aid; except for the milk powder, of which enough should be available in 1979 to satisfy UNHCR's needs for the period September 1979 to February 1980;
- (ii) the aid in cash mentioned in paragraph 9(ii) of this Communication;
- (iii) the aid to Cambodia, through the appropriate agencies, mentioned in paragraph 10.

12.- Part of the food aid (10 000 t rice equivalent to about 27 000 t cereals) can be taken for the time being from the 1979 food aid programme for Vietnam, currently suspended. Once a satisfactory agreement has been reached between UNHCR and the Hanoi Government on the matter of an orderly system of departures, the Council could take, on the basis of a Commission's proposal, the appropriate decisions to replace and even increase the amounts originally set aside for this programme.

This of course assumes that UNHCR manages to persuade the Vietnamese to cooperate actively in implementing, and enlarging, the Agreement of 30 May 1979 on the subject of an orderly system of departures. The need for enlargement was stressed by the High Commissioner for Refugees, and strongly requested by several Member States. The Vietnamese did announce, through the UN Secretary-General, their agreement to work out such an enlargement with UNHCR. It is also clear that the Community's position logically requires that among the beneficiaries of the above food aid for Vietnam there should be included all those wishing to leave that have been accepted by UNHCR under the orderly system of departures and placed in UNHCR's transit centres in Vietnam.

13.- The remaining appropriations required can be obtained by way of transfer inside the 1979 Budget, in an amount of 24,2 Muce. This represents:

- (a) 18 000 t rice food aid (1);
- (b) 10 Meua for the cash aid to UNHCR for its general assistance programme for Vietnam refugees and displaced persons;
- (c) 4 Meua for the relief of displaced and needy persons in Cambodia, through international organizations; on the understanding that the use of these appropriations will be dependent on a Council Decision that the Commission will in due course propose. The appropriations will be used to purchase immediate vital needs (supply of medicines, foodstuffs and other essential goods).

(1) 8 000 t rice (granted to UNHCR by Decision 4/7/79, plus 20 000 t (proposed 18/7/79 and confirmed by the Ministers meeting in Geneva 20/7/79, less 10 000 t (taken for the time being from the 1979 programme for Vietnam). This gives 10,2 Meua, assuming that the 20 000 t can be procured on the Community market after taking account of quality and delivery date imperatives.

14.- In view of the foregoing the Commission proposes to the Council that it should give its agreement to a global transfer of 24,2 Meua from chapter 96 (Cooperation with third countries, articles 965 and 966) (1). This global transfer is made up as follows:

- (a) transfer to chapter 92 (Food aid) and Title VI (for the restitution element) of the appropriations needed for the 18 000 t rice food aid, outside the annual programme. The appropriations needed for the whole 18 000 t amount to 10,2 Meua;
- (b) transfer to chapter 95 (specific actions in favour of l.d.c.s. and third countries) of the appropriations needed for the assistance in cash to UNHCR, amounting to 10 Meua;
- (c) transfer to chapter 95 (specific actions in favour of l.d.c.s. and third countries) of the appropriations needed for the action proposed for Cambodia, amounting to 4 Meua.

In addition the Commission proposes that the Council should authorize:

- (d) the immediate implementation of the food aid through UNHCR mentioned in paragraph 9 (i);
- (e) the payment of UNHCR of the 10 Meua, as and when called for by the Agency, acting as coordinator of all aid to the South-East Asia refugees and displaced persons.

(1) The amount requested for transfer corresponds to the portion of the 1978 appropriations for the Maghreb-Maschrak that will not be able to be used, for various reasons (late ratification, delays in the preparation and implementation of individual projects, etc.), before 31/12/79 and will therefore be cancelled on that date.