

Delegierten und Beobachter werden sich gewiß mit Dankbarkeit an die Gastfreundschaft der Veranstalter und an die unermüdliche Hilfsbereitschaft der zahlreichen ehrenamtlichen Helfer erinnern.

*Jens-Uwe Hartmann*

## The International Workshop on Indo-Chinese Refugees: Causes, Resettlement Processes and a Proposed Solution

Bangkok and Aranyaprathet, May 28-31, 1987.

More than 50 people participated in the above conference: academics, diplomats, members of UN-Organizations and numerous voluntary agencies. This unique blend provided excellent opportunities for discussions as different experiences and views could be exchanged.

The conference was formally opened by Professor Kasem Suwannakul, Rector of Chulalongkorn University. Altogether 14 country-studies were presented, the manuscripts – some of them quite comprehensive – were mimeographed which meant that the oral presentation could be done in a summary manner. Papers were read by the following:

*Amara Pongsapich, Phuwadon Songprasert and Nappavan Chongvatana (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok): Thailand.*

*Kingsley Seevaratnam (Red Cross and Red Crescent, Geneva): Switzerland.*

*Serge Thion (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris): France.*

*Michael Blume (University of Constance): Germany.*

*Linda Hitchcox (University of Oxford): Great Britain.*

*David Lyon: New Zealand.*

*Karl Steinacker (Free University Berlin): Malaysia.*

*Dennis Gallagher (Refugee Policy Group, Washington D. C.): U.S.A.*

*Supang Chantavanich (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok): Japan.*

*Nancy Viviani (Griffith University, Brisbane): Australia.*

*Gertrud Newwirth (Carleton University, Ottawa) and John Rogge (University of*

*Manitoba, Winnipeg*): Canada.

*Maria Fides F. Bagaso (Philippine Refugee Processing Center)*: Philippines.

*Leonard Davies (City Polytechnic of Hong Kong)*: Hong Kong.

*Zhu Rong (Institute of Indochina Studies, Nanning)*: Autonomous Region Guangxi-Zhuang of the People's Republic of China.

The planners of the conference had proposed an outline for the papers:

- Legal basis, policy and background of the policy regarding Indochinese refugees.
- Refugee selection criteria.
- Processing mechanisms. Problems of screening.
- Psycho-social integration of refugees in the foreign country.
- Expectations and their fulfillment.
- Alternative means to promote the well-being of the refugees by using the resources available.

Thanks to these broad guidelines, it was possible to compare the country-studies despite the many singularities they displayed. The discussions covered a wide range of topics, including questions of methodology, conducting interviews, language problems, assessment of the Khmer Rouge, etc. Immensely useful and instructive were also the more informal talks. Here Thai officials and people from relief organizations, some of them having been in the field for decades, spoke to people from universities, used to a more distant, academic approach.

Of course, there was general agreement that more must be done for the refugees, but no practicable solution which politicians would be likely to implement, was at hand. However, various proposals and options were discussed. A special economic zone should be established in Vietnam, whereby Western aid could be administered to help those who might otherwise be inclined to flee. The creation of "safety zones" within Indochinese countries might stem the outflow of refugees and could facilitate their return. Most of the suggestions met with pessimistic comments. If Western countries were ready to accept more refugees "it will create another pull factor" a Thai diplomat said. Co-operation with Vietnam and the establishment of a special economic zone must not, Thai representatives stressed, imply the recognition of the Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh and Vietnam's de facto occupation of Laos and Cambodia.

In foreign media Thailand is criticized periodically for not doing enough for refugees and even exploiting the situation for its own political ends. Western countries, which are economically far better off, certainly could do much more and it is understandable that Thailand rejects criticism which it regards as groundless and unfair. The living conditions of Indochina refugees in Hong Kong for example are extremely depressing as Leonard Davies impressively described, and there is simply

no logical reason why that situation cannot be improved or changed at all.

Refugees are misused worldwide for political purposes. The conference was therefore unable to come up with a realistic proposal that would put an end to the problem. This frustrating realization was further deepened by a visit to refugee camps. Thai authorities (Task Force 80) had kindly arranged for a visit to Site Two and Site Eight. Two days earlier Site Two had been shelled and according to official Thai sources eight people were killed (during our visit the estimate was four dead) and 22 seriously wounded. A handbook on Refugee Services in Thailand states that "Site 8 is the most inaccessible and most limited with regard to communication with the outside community. ... The control (feared to be abusive) of the Khmer Rouge military force over the camp population ... has long been a matter of much concern to the relief community." The site is just one and a half kilometers from the border. From my short visit I am unable to say whether the situation described above has improved.

Two institutions must be mentioned in due form: The Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University and Stiftung Volkswagenwerk. The Institute is an interdisciplinary research and service organization established in 1967. Its activities expanded to such an extent that in May 1985 it was officially recognized as a separate University Institute, a status equivalent to that of a Faculty. Under the guidance of its present director, Professor Dr. Khien Theeravit, the IAS has earned itself an impressive reputation. Just to mention one feature of the Institute: for many years Dr. Khien has been able to bring together scholars from Southeast Asian countries, from Indochina and the People's Republic of China. Again, at the conference reviewed here there were Chinese researchers presenting a paper. The conference can be seen in connection with a research project on the same subject, conducted at IAS. Both the project and the international workshop were financially supported by the German Volkswagenwerk Foundation.

The conference was well covered in Thai newspapers. "The Nation", for example, carried two long articles. Preparations have already been made to publish the revised versions of the papers in an omnibus volume. All participants of the conference will gratefully remember how superbly organized it was, thanks to Dr. Khien, his colleagues and the hard working staff of the Institute.

*Werner Pfennig*