

**June 4, 1979**

**Cable, Foreign Ministry and State Council Overseas  
Chinese Affairs Office to Guangdong, Guangxi,  
Yunnan, and Fujian Provinces**

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**Summary:**

Poul Hartling, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, will visit China to try to resolve the refugee crisis stemming from the Sino-Vietnamese conflict.

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To: the Foreign Affairs offices and Overseas Chinese Affairs offices of Guangdong,  
Guangxi, Yunnan, and Fujian provinces.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, former Danish Premier Poul  
Hartling will lead a delegation visiting China on June 14 - 23. Hartling's principal  
objective will be to seek our country's cooperation in resolving the Vietnamese  
refugee issue and is making these three proposals:

(1) The UN High Commission for Refugees is willing to assist China in the in-place  
resettlement of Vietnamese refugees and, if the Chinese authorities are willing, to  
provide assistance in the form of housing, medical care, clothing, agricultural  
equipment, technical training etc.

(2) The UN High Commission for Refugees is willing to assist Vietnamese refugees to  
emigrate to other countries to undertake registration and liaison work with the  
countries concerned. While refugees are in China prior to their emigration to other  
countries, the High Commission is willing to provide clothing, medical care, food,  
professional training, language training and other forms of assistance.

(3) Currently in Hong Kong there are 15,000 Vietnamese refugees in a camp (it has  
been reported that 95% of them are of Chinese ancestry). Hong Kong is very  
expensive and housing is crowded there so the High Commission hopes that China  
will permit it to establish several refugee transit camps within Chinese territory that  
would house these refugees temporarily. The conditions would be:

1. The UN High Commission funds the construction of a transit camp by China;  
according to the scale it could be a village-like camp with housing, schools, medical  
facilities, agricultural equipment etc.
2. A refugee could stay in the transit camp no more than three years; all expenses  
involved in managing refugee affairs will be the responsibility of the High  
Commission. The funding can be provided to China in the form of convertible foreign  
currency.
3. Once the transfer of the refugees is complete, all the property of the refugee  
transit camp will be transferred to China.
4. The High Commission for Refugees will negotiate with the Hong Kong authorities. If  
after three years, there are still refugees who are still unable to emigrate to a third  
country, it will be the responsibility of the Hong Kong authorities to accept them.
5. The High Commission will provide management and service personnel or hire  
Chinese personnel.

Hartling and his delegation have a friendly attitude towards China and stress that the  
High Commission for Refugees is a charitable organization founded on humanitarian  
principles. The High Commission avoids discussing political issues but does  
acknowledge that the refugee issue in Southeast Asia was created by Vietnam alone.  
Hartling also said that their relief efforts include refugees who left their original  
country for political reasons.

According to rough statistical estimates, the number of refugees who have come to  
China has already reached 230,000 (these include 20 - 30,000 ethnic Vietnamese  
people or people who landed in boats near Beihai, Guangdong Province). The arrival  
of these refugees created a significant social and economic burden for us. Our initial  
thinking is that China can have limited cooperation with the High Commission for  
Refugees in some areas that will not be disadvantageous to us. Politically, this  
cooperation will be to our advantage in our struggle with Vietnam and the Soviet  
Union. Economically we could obtain a certain amount of foreign exchange that

localities could use. We have already informed Hartling that we are willing to study further their suggestions.

All regions involved are requested to quickly make a study of these issues, and especially the issue of refugee transit camps, and towards the practicality, advantages and disadvantages of these proposals and to express your specific opinions. Provincial Party Committees are requested to make a speedy response which include the current number of refugees from Vietnam and their countries of citizenship (use passports or other identity document to determine which have Chinese citizenship or are non Vietnam citizens; those who have no documents but claim to be Chinese citizens; those with documents who claim to be Vietnam citizens; those without documents but who can be determined to be Vietnam citizens; for those whose citizenship is difficult to determine; and Vietnam citizens and overseas Chinese who wish to emigrate to a third country.), the total amount already spent to support the refugees, in order to assist us in our research for the report that we will submit to the Party Central Committee for its decision.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

State Council Overseas Chinese Affairs Office

June 4, 1979