
Background Guide

HUNHCR: “Vietnam War: Ensuring the safety and well-being of Vietnamese refugees - 23rd March 1973”



Chairs: Luiza Marchetti and Paulina Baumer

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1. Greeting Word

1.1. By the Secretary General and PGA

Dear Delegates, Chairs, and Participants of HUMUNITED2021,

after one year at home, it feels, to almost everyone, like our daily lives have come to an infinite sameness as if we had to follow the same journey every day. Our routines have become repetitive and new experiences are a distant idea hidden inside our memories.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we realized that our compromise with the Humboldt students was more than just organizing a conference, especially in hard times like these. Over the last 7 years, we have recognized that HUMUNITED was never an ordinary MUN Conference that takes place every year.

HUMUNITED is a feeling, a wonderful experience that is almost indescribable since it has a different meaning for more than a thousand students that have already participated in our event.

HUMUNITED is an independent idea, apart from its format, its organizers, or its committees, that will keep growing over the next generations.

HUMUNITED is a journey in which the most important high school project from our lives can also influence our future careers and university decisions.

In one of the delegates' application forms we received, there was a very remarkable sentence which said: "Life is a learning path". After a long quarantine, we realized that life is not a permanent journey with a determined goal, but a learning path in which challenges and events bring us special knowledge and make us stronger, enabling us to persist along the way.

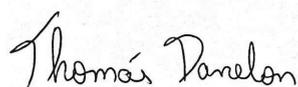
Similarly, HUMUNITED has always been a learning path, enabling us to improve our English, communication, leadership, and debating skills, but also allowing its own members to change it, improving and adapting it to its participants. With a huge tradition and an amazing 7-year history, we realized that, as said by Martin Luther King, Jr. *"We are not makers of history. We are made by history."*

Bearing in mind that innovation and challenges would be a great possibility to unite ourselves during such difficult times, we decided to make a bigger conference than the ones before the pandemic. With more than 170 delegates, 9 committees, and students from 12 different schools, including other countries such as Mexico and Argentina, our event has more participants than ever.

Additionally, we would like to point out that this conference would not have been possible without our incredible Organizing Team. We are truly grateful for all your work and we are extremely proud to have you as part of this year's team.

Thus, it is with great satisfaction that we welcome you to our sixth edition of HUMUNITED. We are looking forward to seeing all of you, and we hope that you enjoy HUMUNITED2021 as much as we always do.

Best wishes,



Thomás Danelon
President of the General Assembly



Nicole vom Bauer
Secretary-General

1.2. By the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

We are very excited to have you all sharing this moment together as part of the Historical United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the sixth edition of HUMUNITED and the second online version of the conference.

Especially in times of a pandemic, we believe that getting together to discuss and have fun with new people is very important since we tend to fall into monotony very often. It is a pleasure to be your chairs this year, and we hope we have a great conference and a wonderful time!

We are Luiza Marchetti, from the 13th grade, and Paulina Baumer, from the 10th grade, both from Colégio Humboldt. Both of us would love to get to know people from other schools and even from our own, since getting to know new people and different points of view is one of the best parts of MUN conferences. We are looking forward to three days of exciting debating.

MUN is for us a very special opportunity, not only to have fun and meet new people but also to improve our English and debating skills as well as to expand our knowledge and horizons. We both believe that these experiences were and will be extremely important in improving the people we are, and we hope to be able to accompany you on this path.

Thus, Model United Nations usually approach very current and relevant topics, which is very important to help us build our political opinions. But this time, the topic will not be something that

actual, but still, something that still influences our world: Vietnam War: ensuring the safety and well-being of Vietnamese refugees (23rd March 1973).

We thought this would be a more challenging job for us since we are not only digging into a political situation and putting ourselves in the position of a new country but also having to learn about the History of the late 20th century and to imagine ourselves in the reality of almost 50 years ago. But we are sure all of you are going to succeed!

Our topic is very important to bear in mind, even today because it took place in the Cold War, which impacted not only the historical and social matter but also the humanitarian with the proxy wars, causing many refugees to flee their countries of origin, bringing along their culture to other countries. Being able to put ourselves into this conflict will help us understand why our society and international relations are the way they are today, as well as to reevaluate the situation with our own ideas, bringing a new perspective.

Additionally, 1973 was a difficult year for Vietnam, even with the Peace Agreement and the Ceasefire signed in January, a reason why there were many refugees at that time. Therefore, the UNHCR had to increase its activity in the region. The refugee issue in Vietnam persisted and increased for years, even decades after this year, but you are going to lead the very beginning of it, being able to write a brighter course of history, or perhaps not. It will be enough if we do not end having a nuclear 3rd World War in our committee.

Jokes aside, we hope to have great experiences with you all and a very fruitful debate. We wish you all good luck preparing yourselves for the debate and remember we are always open to questions and to help you anytime you need.

Sincerely,

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2. Background

2.1. The History of the UNHCR

The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), also known as the UN Refugee Agency is a UN (United Nations) agency that works to ensure and protect the rights of people in refugee situations around the world, it was established in 1950 after the Second World War as a way to help millions of Europeans. The aftermath of the Second World War was very bad, at least 11 million people had been displaced from their home countries, fled or lost their homes. The agency was given a three-year mandate to complete its work in Europe, but it didn't stop after the Second World War. The UNHCR faced a major emergency in 1956 after Soviet forces crushed Hungary's revolution, and they had to face the flight of 200,000 refugees. In the following year, the UNHCR went on to tackle refugee crises in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.¹

By the end of the 20th century, displacement had become a worldwide phenomenon and had come full circle. New crises emerged in Africa as well as conflicts in the Balkans which created Europe's first refugees since the end of WWII. Since the turn of the 21st century, UNHCR has continued its work in Africa, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia, and is active in Asia where the refugee situation in Afghan marks its 30th anniversary. In Africa as well as in Latin America, regional legal instruments on refugees have strengthened UNHCR's original 1951 mandate: "UNHCR's original core mandate covered only refugees, that is, all persons outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and who, as a result, require international protection".²

In recent years, UNHCR has expanded its role by coming to the aid of the internally displaced, and by helping millions of stateless people who have been denied basic rights because of their lack of citizenship. UNHCR was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1954 for its ground-breaking work in aiding the plight of European refugees. Then again In 1981, UNHCR received a peace prize for its worldwide efforts. The citation for this prize noted the political obstacles the agency faces and overcomes in the completion of its mandate.³

¹ UNHCR, "History of UNHCR", <https://www.unhcr.org/history-of-unhcr.html#:~:text=The%20office%20of%20the%20United,fled%20or%20lost%20their%20homes>

² UNHCR, "History of UNHCR | Humble origin", <https://www.unhcr.org/ceu/169-enabout-ushistory-of-unhcr-html.html>

³ Wikipedia, "Displaced persons camps in post-World War II Europe", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Displaced_persons_camps_in_post%E2%80%93World_War_II_Europe#:~:text=At%20the%20end%20of%20the.and%20Jewish%20concentration%2Dcamp%20survivors

With a staff of only 34 at the time of its founding, the UNHCR has 7,685 national and international staff members, they are active in over 125 countries around the world and have as of today 414 offices, most of which are remote sub-offices and field offices. The UNHCR activities affect 35.8 million people, of which 10.5 million are refugees, 17.7 million are internally displaced people, 525,940 are returnees, 3.3 million are stateless people and 936,740 are asylum-seekers. The Refugee Agency started with a budget of \$300,000 US dollars in its first year to more than \$4.3 billion US dollars in 2012.⁴ Today, over 70 years later, the organization is still working hard, protecting and assisting refugees around the world.

2.2. The Vietnam War

2.2.1. 1887-1945

| 1888-1907

Vietnam was part of French Indochina, a French colony in Southeast Asia Established in 1887 for the French to reinforce Catholic missionaries.

| 1930-1940

Indochina was controlled by France until World War II when France innovated by now to Germany and Japan invaded Indochina. The Japanese ruled through the former French protectorate emperor Bao Dai as a puppet.

| 1940s

Ho Chi Minh was the leader of the “Viet Minh”, a communist army who rose up against the Japanese occupiers. After the Japanese defeat in 1945, the Viet Minh declared Vietnamese independence with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Hanoi as its capital, and extended their war against the French, becoming the first Indochina War.

| 1946-1954

During this time, the Cold War was setting in and that USA were backing anti-communist regimes while the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China were backing pro-communist regimes. The Korean War was a fine example of this. Thus, China and the Soviet Union backed the Viet men and the USA and Britain backed the French in the South.

⁴ FMR, “The resettlement of Hungarian refugees in 1956”, <https://www.fmreview.org/resettlement/cellini#:~:text=During%20the%20suppression%20of%20the.and%20another%20%2C000%20to%20Yugoslavia>



The state of Vietnam was established with Emperor Bao Dai as a leader in an anti-communist regime. American Military advisors had been helping the French, so President Eisenhower was Fullerton to put US troops on the ground.

Though Vietnam ultimately was Victorious, and it was decided in the Geneva accords that Vietnam would be divided into the state of Vietnam And the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Cambodia and Laos were also granted Independence, ending French Indochina.

Ngo Dinh Diem Became the prime minister in the South as South Vietnam prepared for a referendum on reuniting North and South. Many Northern shows me Vietnamese Catholics fled South Viet Minh went North to plan ahead.⁵

2.2.2. 1955-1958

| 1955

The North Vietnam regime Sought To take power away from North Vietnam from the landlords and distribute the wealth Among The Peasants. Many people were executed and wrongly imprisoned. The referendum was held, but many were skeptical about its fairness. Diem wrecked the votes, winning a ridiculously massive majority in keeping the South separate.

Diem Declared the South independent and became the Republic of Vietnam with Saigon as its capital. Thus, Vietnam would move into the second Indochina war, or simply known in the west as the Vietnam War. The US looked on in fear, believing that communism would spread like dominoes and if Vietnam fell, it would threaten India, Japan and other nations in that region. Diem said about quelling any communist action in the South, arresting and executing many people. He was a Roman Catholic which was often at odds with the predominantly Buddhist population.⁶

2.2.3. 1959-1975

| 1960s

North Vietnam support came via the Ho Chi Minh Trail, a border hoping Trail Connecting North and South Via Laos and Cambodia. In 1960, communist forces and other anti-government groups in the South were organized into the National Liberation Front or the Viet Cong, as they

⁵ Wikipedia, "Vietnam War"; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War

⁶ History, "Vietnam War"; <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>



were branded by the South. Support for the MNLF was strongest in the countryside which was being crushed by extreme rent and landlord reforms by the south government. The government under the US advice and funding tried to allocate many rural peasants answers to cryptogenic Hamlet's to keep them away from the influence of the NLF insurgents, but the program was a failure and actually ended up strengthening the NLF.

New US President John F. Kennedy faced many embarrassments with the spread of Communism such as the Bay of pigs disaster, the construction of the Berlin Wall, and the growth of communist power and laws. He believed Vietnam was where he could make a strong stand against the spread of Communism. Kennedy was reluctant to put US troops on the ground believing that the South Vietnam Army would defeat the NLF on their own, but they were disorganized, crippled by political corruption, and under constant attack from Guerrilla forces. More and more US military advisers and Equipment were sent to Vietnam to help, but despite this, the South Vietnam Army continued to suffer silly defeats at the hands of the NLF.

By 1963, religious tensions ran high as the Pro-catholic government discriminated more and more against Buddhists, Banning the flag, killing protesters and raiding pagodas. Protests intensified. On November 1st, officers of the South Vietnam Army rose up against the government and captured the leaders in a Coup d'etat. Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother and adviser in Ngo Dinh Nhu were brutally assassinated the following day. MNLF took advantage of the political chaos of the South and strengthened their position with the people. To add even more instability, John F Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas less than a month's after the coup. Lyndon B Johnson became the new US president and things changed. After some more coups, General Nguyen Khanh became head of the South Vietnamese military Council. The CIA had been training South Vietnamese forces and sending Vietnamese Commandos on raids in the North.

On August 2nd 1964, the U.S. Navy ship, the USS Maddox was monitoring signals coming from North Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin. It fired three warning shots at some North Vietnam torpedo boats who opened fire with torpedoes and machine guns. The Skirmish resulted and for Vietnamese casualties no us casualties. 2 days Later, a similar incident was reported from the Maddox, but it would later turn out to be false, but not before these incidents were used by President Johnson to order an airstrike and get Congress to push through the Gulf of Tonkin resolution which allowed him to escalate the United States involvement in Vietnam without an actual declaration of war. Johnson and the US people that he would not be sending American boys over to Vietnam... before he was re-elected. Concription in the United States known as the draft had been on the go constantly since 1940 to fill gaps in the Army where volunteers weren't joining.

As tensions in Vietnam escalated, many young men tried to avoid the draft, which could be a criminal offense. 1965, the NLF and North Vietnam forces continue their victories against the south.

| 1965-1969

In February, while new Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin was on a state visit to strengthen ties with North Vietnam, the MLR attacked a US helicopter facility in Pleiku. In retaliation, Johnson ordered bombing campaigns over North Vietnam. It was also decided that the South Vietnam Army would wear enough to guard the US Air bases so on the 8th of March, the first US ground troops were sent to South Vietnam in the form of 3,500 marines. Neighboring Laos fell into a civil war between the US-backed government and the Communist Pathet Lao. US operation Barrel Roll saw the aerial bombardment of the Pathet Lao, trying to deny Viet Nam's access to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but this didn't work. One particular bomb which was used by the US throughout the war was napalm, a sticky, flammable chemical which was very effective at destroying the jungle and causing mass devastation and terror. By the end of 1965, US ground forces had swollen to 200,000 troops still with the view of defending South Vietnam, but troop morale was low.

This defensive position was soon to change however as General William Westmoreland believed that the US troops could end this war if they went on the offensive. A three-point plan was made with a view to winning the war. Johnson approved and the war escalated. South Vietnamese Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky became prime minister in mid 1965, bringing a little political stability to the south. The US called its SEATO allies to contribute troops to the conflict, which they did, as did South Korea. Despite the change of focus to go on the offensive, the harsh conditions, and lack of progress, President Johnson and the US government reassured the public that everything was going as planned. Amidst the war, the United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races rose up to oppose both North and South and defend minorities in the central highlands of Vietnam.

In December 1966, Ho Chi Minh said of the Americans "if they want to make war for 20 years, then we shall make war for 20 years. If they want peace, we shall make peace and invite them to tea afterwards". It was a hard and gruelling war of attrition in which the US had the technological advantage, but the NLF and North Vietnam had the knowledge of the land and the support of many of the people. Underground tunnel networks were used by the NLF to secretly move around the countryside near Saigon, surprising US troops seemingly out of nowhere. Nguyen Van Thieu became president of South Vietnam in 1967 and would remain until 1975. On January 30th 1968, the Vietnamese New Year known as Tet, the NLF and the North Vietnamese launched a massive offensive across the south taking everyone by surprise. The Tet offensive saw 85,000 troops attacking over 100 cities including the US Embassy in Saigon.

Despite being caught unawares, the US and South Vietnamese counter-attack was powerful and effective. The city of Hue, the former capital which lay near the border of north and south was fiercely fought over. While occupying the city, NLF and North Vietnam brutally executed over 3,000 people after a month of fighting. The city was retaken by the US and the south, but there was little left of the city standing. It was one of the bloodiest battles of the war. Media coverage of journalists on the ground in Vietnam differed from the official line coming from President Johnson, which damaged his credibility.



The US people's approval of Johnson and the war plummeted. The conduct of some US forces was also very controversial. The My Lai massacre in March 1968 saw between 347 and 504 unarmed men, women and children massacred by US troops in Son M. The story didn't emerge to the public until November 1969. Peace talks between the US and North Vietnam began in Paris in May 1968 which resulted in bombing on North Vietnam. After a presidential campaign with many twists and turns, Richard Nixon was elected President of the United States. When Nixon came into office, the war was very unpopular and looked more and more unwinnable.

Nixon began to withdraw troops from Vietnam in 1969 with a view of replacing them with South Vietnam forces. Ho Chi Minh died at the age of 79 in September 1969. Some ministers and military leaders formed a Politburo for collective leadership to see an end to the war. Unbeknownst to the public until the 2000s, Nixon actually sent a squadron of nuclear-armed B-52 bombers to the Soviet border in October in the hope that they believe he was mad enough to win the war in Vietnam at any cost.

| 1970-1973

The US bombed NLF and North Vietnam camps in neighboring Cambodia. North Vietnam invaded Cambodia in support of the Cambodian communist movement Khmer Rouge, so US and South Vietnam in turn invaded Cambodia, This escalation angered many. Nationwide protests in America sprang up, and four students were killed by national guardsmen in Ohio. The South Vietnam army invaded Laos looking to cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but it was a complete disaster. More controversies about war became publicly known, including the Pentagon Papers, revealing top-secret documents which were leaked to the New York Times. Nixon tried to block their publishing, but the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the papers. Nixon did begin to open talks with the Soviet Union and China to isolate North Vietnam from its communist allies.

The Easter offensive saw a new invasion from the NLF of North Vietnam in 1972. This resulted in the US recommencing the bombing of North Vietnam which stopped the North's offensive, Eventually after Hanoi and Haiphong were heavily bombed at the end of 1972, North and South came to the negotiating table with the US. Around this time, Lyndon Johnson died of heart disease in Texas.

In January 1973, Nixon suspended any attacks on North Vietnam, ended the draft, and the Paris Accords were signed, ending the United States involvement in the Vietnam War. All US ground troops were withdrawn by March. US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and North Vietnam foreign minister Le Duc Tho were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, but Tho refused, as true peace didn't exist yet in Vietnam, and right he was. The South's economy felt the vacuum left by the US Army and Spiking oil prices due to the trouble in the Middle East hitting the South hard.⁷

⁷ Britannica, "Vietnam War", <https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War>



3. Refugees and the UNHCR

3.1. Definition of Refugee

In the same year it was funded, the UNHCR decided upon a definition of the term “refugee” in the 1951 Refugee Convention in order to avoid misinterpretations. At first, this was mostly regarding refugees from World War II, but the 1967 Protocol expanded this definition and eliminated any geographical and temporal restriction. Before that, there was not a clear definition of the word and authorities and international organizations used it with slightly different meanings. Afterwards, this definition by the UNHCR became the pattern used until today.⁸

According to the convention, a refugee is someone who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”. This means that people who left their country of origin and are unable or afraid of returning because of these threats are considered refugees. Thus, this definition applies to refugees who fled during and after the Vietnam War, mostly because of the fear of persecution due to their nationality, being North or South Vietnamese, and due to belonging to the political opposition.

The convention also states, that the countries in which these refugees arrive are recommended to grant them asylum, allowing them to stay in their territory and giving residence and work permits, and treat them as favorably as they treat their nationals, without discrimination of race, religion nor origin, as well as allowing their residence there. The countries who signed both the Convention and the Protocol committed to ensure these rights to the refugees in their territories.⁹

3.2. How the UNHCR dealt with refugees in the early 70s

‘By the time our conference takes place, the UNHCR was already active in the field of dealing with refugees, but still uniting forces and authority to deal with governments. For instance, some countries

⁸ Haya Madanat, “1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol”, <https://hopesforwomen.org/1951-refugee-convention-and-the-1967-protocol-by-haya-madanat/>

⁹ UNHCR, “Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees”, <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>



still refused to accept arrivals of refugees in their territories, mostly because the country itself was facing a crisis and had no resources to do so.¹⁰ On the other hand, some countries already had experience dealing with refugees and showed effective results. Ensuring an effective implementation of the UNHCR provisions in national laws and regulations was therefore an important goal.

The High Commissioner also had good and effective connections with the Economic and Social Council and with the UN General Assembly, which adopted resolutions acknowledging the importance of humanitarian action by the UN, as well as cooperating with other UN Agencies such as the UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Additionally, non-governmental organizations were crucial and were part of dialogue between the UN and the local governments. The UNHCR activity focused mostly on the emergency demands of new refugees and on the longer termed goals of assisting refugees becoming self-supporting and with a consolidated economic and social position, not needing international assistance anymore.

Another objective was helping a refugee to stop being a refugee, roughly meaning, giving them a new nationality or asylum until he feels safer regarding returning to his origin country. If this last alternative is impossible in a relatively near future, the measure to be taken is to give this refugee the nationality of the country which has offered him permanent residence, so that he may have the same economic and social benefits a national does, avoiding his statelessness.¹¹

The High Commissioner also used resources from the Emergency Fund and complementary projects financed from other trust funds. For example, in the 1971 Programme and the Emergency Fund amounted to \$7,084,730 and other trust funds contributed to an amount of \$1,216,353. This was to support governments of host countries assisting their refugees, which is primarily their responsibility.¹²

3.3. Difficulties of an asylum seeker

It often happened, and happens, that an asylum seeker makes his way until the country of asylum under much stress and then face several difficulties gaining admission, permits for living and working there and even recognition as a refugee. This is because many refugees entered the countries of asylum illegally, for instance without visas, facing the risk of detention or other consequences making it difficult for them to achieve the status of refugee. Another issue is when refugees do not portray

¹⁰ UNHCR, "The State of The World's Refugees 2000 - Chapter 4: Flight from Indochina", <https://www.unhcr.org/3ebf9bad0.pdf>

¹¹ General Assembly, "1973 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees A/9012", https://www.unhcr.org/excom/unhcrannual/3ae68c3c4/report-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees.html#_ftn2

¹² General Assembly, "1973 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees A/8712", <https://www.unhcr.org/excom/unhcrannual/3ae68c7d4/report-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees.html>



proper documentation when they arrive, even though, according to the 1959 Convention, the asylum country should provide them that.

Additionally, the UNHCR saw employment as very important to help integrate refugees. Access and allowance to employment is often linked with their legal status; in most countries, achieving an immigration visa and permanent residence automatically allows employment. Depending on the country, however, allowance to work does not mean access to work, since many countries have high unemployment rates. Thus, other measures had been taken to grant refugees' social security, so that refugees can benefit from monetary assistance the same way nationals do, when the asylum country provides such a programme.

Resettlement was also a common strategy, in which the UNHCR provided the funds and assistance, such as counselling and language training, in order for the refugees to migrate again to another country that had more resources and was open to receive more refugees.¹³

¹³ General Assembly, "1973 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees A/9012", https://www.unhcr.org/excom/unhcrannual/3ae68c3c4/report-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees.html#_ftn2



4. Refugees in the Vietnam War

4.1. Refugees in previous moments of the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War, as many other wars, made the living conditions in the places where it happened, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, terrible. Besides the fear of bombs and attacks, or even the fact, their cities and houses were destroyed in the war, forcing them to leave, Vietnam was economically devastated by the war. At that time, the movement happened mostly internally, however, some refugees and immigrants fled by boat, wherefore they were known as boat people, more common after the War.

After the First Indochina War (1945-1954), with the establishment of North Vietnam and South Vietnam, many people moved from one country to another. More than a million people moved from north to south, mostly Roman Catholics, while 130,000 supporters of the communist party Viet Minh were transported to North Vietnam by Polish and Soviet ships.

In 1960, with the United States allied forces sending troops to diminish the spread of communism in Southeast Asia, the number of displaced people increased drastically. It happened mostly internally; by the late 1960s, it was estimated that around 10 million people, half of the South Vietnamese population, had been internally displaced to escape the war. Thus, there were cases of migration across borders.¹⁴

Later, with the temporary end to the Vietnam War with the Paris Peace Agreement of January 1973 and with the withdrawal of most US troops from Southeast Asia resulting in the assumption of power of communist governments in Laos and Cambodia¹⁵, most of the Vietnamese population, mostly who were not affiliated with the Communist government officials, lived in poverty, unable to afford food nor education.¹⁶ These terrible living conditions lead to multiple displacements and migration inside and outside the borders.

¹⁴ UNHCR, “The State of The World’s Refugees 2000 - Chapter 4: Flight from Indochina”, <https://www.unhcr.org/3ebf9bad0.pdf>

¹⁵ Carl Bankston, “Involuntary migration, context of reception, and social mobility: the case of Vietnamese refugee resettlement in the United States”, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1724411>

¹⁶ Migration Memorials Project, “Our Little Saigon: Vietnamese Boat People - Migration and Assimilation of Vietnamese Refugees”, <https://migrationmemorials.trinity.duke.edu/our-little-saigon-vietnamese-boat-people-migration-and-assimilation-vietnamese-refugees>



With the Peace Agreement, the UNHCR was able to assist the refugees and displaced more effectively, with a program directing US\$12 million to reconstruction projects. In the north, the High Commissioner assisted in the agriculture, health and reconstruction of some of the 2.7 million displaced people, mostly having fled from the conflict in South Vietnam or because of the US bombing in the north. Meanwhile, in the south, the UNHCR provided more than 20,000 tonnes of food and other supplies so that the displaced people could rebuild their lives.¹⁷

4.2. UNHCR action Regarding the Vietnam War

The 1971 Programme and the UNHCR Emergency Fund directed \$160,000 towards the rural settlement of over 3,000 families from the Republic of Vietnam helped by the Vietnamese Red Cross. They also assisted in improving facilities at a refugee reception center in the Khmer Republic.¹⁸

The High Commissioner Representation in the Southeast Asian region was increasing by the time of 1973. Its station was located in Bangkok, Thailand. Additionally, in the 1972 Programme, \$134,250 were directed in projects focusing on vocational training, medical facilities in settlements, road camps and housing programs, for instance. The UNHCR also joined forces with the WHO in vaccine campaigns, for example.¹⁹

The agency began operations specially directed to Vietnamese refugees in 1973 in both North and South Vietnam. It acted in the north sending housing material and cotton yarn in the south helping farmers rehabilitate the land that was blasted by years of heavy bombing in Quang Tri province and the Central Highlands.²⁰

¹⁷ UNHCR, “Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees”, <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>

¹⁸ General Assembly, “1973 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees A/8712”, <https://www.unhcr.org/excom/unhcrannual/3ae68c7d4/report-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees.html>

¹⁹ General Assembly, “1973 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees A/9012”, https://www.unhcr.org/excom/unhcrannual/3ae68c3c4/report-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees.html#_ftn2

²⁰ Fernando del Mundo, “Refugees Magazine Issue 113 (Europe : The debate over asylum) - Viet Nam: End of an era”, <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/refugeemag/3b811f6e4/refugees-magazine-issue-113-europe-debate-asylum-viet-nam-end-era.html>

5. Countries' positions on the matter

5.1. Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)

The Republic of Vietnam, also known as South Vietnam, was the new anticommunist government that emerged after the State of Vietnam, associated with France. This independence and the anticommunist regime with authoritarian features was supported by the US American government, wherefore they had strong relations. The USA also supported the South Vietnam military in the fight against the Communist Party Viet Cong and against North Vietnam. In the context of the Cold War, the South Vietnamese delegate is expected to bond with the US American and the other allied capitalist countries.

5.2. Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)

The democratic Republic of Vietnam, or North Vietnam, was only recognized by the UN in 1975, meaning, at the time of our debate, in 1973, North Vietnam did not take place in UN meetings as a member. In our version of the UNHCR, North Vietnam is only going to participate as an observer: the delegate will be allowed to discuss normally, but does not have the right to vote or to sign resolutions. After the First Indochina War, the socialist government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was assisted by the Soviet Union and China in a program of socialist industrialization, thus, explaining their good international relations by the time, which delegates are supposed to maintain during the debate.

5.3. United States of America

The USA, with the intention of diminishing the communist influence in the world, in this case in Southeast Asia, intervened a lot in the Vietnam War, sending material, training and even troops. In 1968, they had 500,000 troops fighting in Vietnam, in comparison with the 600,000 South Vietnamese troops.²¹

²¹ William J. Duiker, "Vietnam", <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vietnam>



5.4. Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Due to ideological similarities, the Soviet Government gave moral, logistic, information, technical, financial and military support to North Vietnam and to Viet Cong during the War, being their main supplier, with the hope of expanding communism in Asia. Even though the USSR was at first urging peace, the US American involvement in the Vietnam War led to an increase in the Soviet participation. However, the government was not open about this support.

5.5. People's Republic of China

The Chinese participation in the Vietnam War was similar to the Soviet, however, not as significant. They were as well interested in the spread of communism in Asia, therefore their assistance to North Vietnam. While the Soviet Union was at first in favor of peace in the region, China encouraged North Vietnam to fight. China was mostly the supply route from the Soviet Union to North Vietnam, which was essential for them in the war.²²

5.6. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

The United Kingdom was also bonded, mostly ideologically and economically, with western capitalist powers such as the United States, therefore some sympathy towards South Vietnam despite trying to maintain diplomacy with North Vietnam. However, during the years 1964 to 1968, these relations weakened because they opposed the war and would not support the USA in Vietnam while trying to moderate the conflict. A 1965 British Foreign Office document noted that Britain's direct involvement in Vietnam was insignificant and stated "Our major interest in the situation [...] is to see that it does not escalate into a global or regional war in which we might be involved". However, it still recognized that British "interests as a non-communist power would be impaired if the United States Government were defeated in the field, or defaulted on its commitments", concluding, they should therefore act by "giving moral support to our major ally."

The British efforts in peacekeeping, even though not successful, are evident, for instance in 1967, when the Prime Minister tried to use a visit to London by the Soviet Premier to create contacts and

²² BBC, "The Vietnam War", <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z8kw3k7/revision/8#:~:text=The%20USSR%20was%20a%20major,the%20War%20of%20Liberation!>



discussions with the North Vietnamese.²³ However, the next Prime Minister was openly more supportive of the US military action in Vietnam, even though still interested in the peace of the area. He stated in a letter to the US American president months after the withdrawal from US troops in Cambodia that “I do not need to assure you that you have our fullest support in your search for peace in the area. We deeply admire the firmness and persistence which you have shown”.²⁴

5.7. French Republic

France was also bonded with the capitalist western powers. The country was the colonial power that ruled Indochina before the First Indochina War. This region then became North and South Vietnam, the Khmer Republic and Laos. Despite the decisive French participation in the First Indochina War, France, as well as the UK, refused to participate.²⁵

5.8. Kingdom of Laos

Laos was also a place where the Vietnam War took place, meaning the refugees from Laos should be remembered as well, and was allied with South Vietnam and the USA. King Savang Vatthana ruled the country and feared that the communist group Pathet Lao, supported by North Vietnam and Viet Cong, took over the government in the civil war that began in 1954 with the independence from France, the reason for the alliance with the United States.²⁶

5.9. Khmer Republic

Between 1965 and 1973, the Vietnam War expanded into Cambodia, it aggravated and radicalized internal Cambodian political disputes, these readily became armed contests characterized by shifting alliances, regional struggles for dominance (including the US, Soviet Union, China and Vietnam), and

²³ Jonathan Colman, “No Tea Party: The British-American Strain Over Vietnam”, <https://www.historynet.com/no-tea-party-british-american-strain-vietnam.htm>

²⁴ Mark Curtis, “Britain’s Secret Support For US Aggression: The Vietnam War”, <https://web.archive.org/web/20111005194328/http://markcurtis.wordpress.com/2007/02/01/britains-secret-support-for-us-aggression-the-vietnam-war/>

²⁵ Wikipedia, “Vietnam War”, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War

²⁶ BBC, “Laos profile - Timeline”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15355605>



Cambodian efforts to assert different varieties of militant nationalism (royalist, communist or otherwise), ending in a devastating result for civilians.²⁷

5.10. Kingdom of Thailand

On 14 October 1973 after the 1973 Thai popular uprising, the Supreme Court Judge “Sanya Dharmasakti”, then chancellor and dean of the faculty of law at Thammasat University, was appointed prime minister by royal decree, replacing the succession of staunchly pro-American and anti-Communist military dictatorships that had ruled Thailand previously.²⁸

5.11. Polish People's Republic

In October 1973, following the inclusion of a Polish military contingent in the second United Nations emergency force, Poland became the first socialist country to take part in peacekeeping operations directly under the US flag. The Polish presence marked the extension of the principle of political geographical representation to the UN peacekeeping operations, this was for a logical development for Poland’s role on the international commission for supervision and control in Vietnam 1954 to 1973.²⁹

²⁷ Mass Atrocity Endings, “U.S. Bombing & Civil War”, <https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2015/08/07/cambodia-u-s-bombing-civil-war-khmer-rouge/>

²⁸ Wikipedia, “Thailand in the Vietnam War”, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thailand_in_the_Vietnam_War

²⁹ AJPH, “Between Socialist Internationalism and Peaceful Coexistence: Poland and the Vietnam War”, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-8497.1984.tb00224.x>



6. Guiding Questions

Was your country involved in the Vietnam War? Why?

Who was the leader of your country at that time, and what was his position towards the situation?

Did your country tend more to the communist or to the capitalist side during the Cold War?

How did your country collaborate with the UNHCR?

Does your country have enough financial resources to donate to the UNHCR?

What are possible solutions to deal with the migration in the war regions (internal and external)?

How can the UNHCR help affected countries reconstruct?

What do you think could have been done better in the situation by that time?

What do you think that should be done to prevent future refugee crises after the War ends?

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