

Paul <sup>1202</sup>



**PRIME MINISTER**

POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

The Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, today described as false and misleading suggestions made by the Opposition during Question Time that the Australian Government had proscribed the right of domestic political activity of Vietnamese refugees who have entered this country.

Mr Whitlam said that only nine of the nearly 1000 Vietnamese who have so far come to Australia had been asked to provide an undertaking that they would eschew political activity.

These nine persons were all admitted as special cases because of the high risks to their security caused by the change of Government. Each had been politically active and involved in the policies of the previous Government.

Mr Whitlam recalled that such undertakings were not novel. The policy was first developed by previous Liberal/Country Party Governments. He had been informed that Mr Mikis Theodorakis had been requested to give a similar undertaking. All Colombo Plan students were required by previous Governments to sign a guarantee that they would not engage in political activity during the period of their residence in this country.

"It is to be expected", said Mr Whitlam, "that refugees who were forced to leave their homeland will resent the fact and long remember it. But it cannot be accepted that this is justification for using Australia as a base for futile political activity intended to change political arrangements in their native land", he said. "For too long now Australians and Australia have had to suffer the violence and lawlessness of some emigre political groups who, in fantasy fashion, believe that by their efforts they can alter these political facts."

Mr Whitlam said that the Australian Government did not discriminate between refugees in its requirement for such undertakings. If Australian officials thought it possible that certain refugees could cause dissension, disruption or strife within ethnic groups, then they would be asked for such an undertaking whether, for instance, they were Chilean or Vietnamese. No discrimination between ethnic groups has been practised or will be practised. The requirement will continue to be put whenever it is justified and whatever the ethnic origin of the refugees.

Mr Whitlam said the Opposition charges were designed to mask its guilt over Australia's intervention in Vietnam. Mr Whitlam said that, unlike previous Governments, the present Australian Government granted citizenship to applicants irrespective of their political views. Quite obviously, he said, a written undertaking could not diminish the rights conferred by Australian citizenship which all of the refugees were now entitled to seek under Government policies. The requirement is justified by the need to maintain peace and order in the community. It is, he said, clear that upon becoming citizens they could ignore that undertaking as no such requirement can be made of an Australian citizen.

Mr Whitlam said no Government could tolerate its territory being used as a base for action designed to overthrow the recognised Government of another country. Whatever the Australian people or Government might think of another Government's policies, there is no choice but to prevent persons in Australia from taking action to remove such a Government. This is the only reason for such an undertaking being required. Its need is regrettably apparent because of events in certain of the migrant communities.

"As I have said before about other places, it is no kindness and in fact a delusion to suggest to refugees that there is any prospect of altering the political arrangements in their former homelands. Unfortunately, as we have seen often, such suggestions are promoted by the disaffected within ethnic communities, generally to the detriment of those communities and the wider Australian community", Mr Whitlam said.

Mr Whitlam said that he would like to assure any person who had been required to give an undertaking by the present or previous Governments, that they were entitled to all rights of political activity in the Australian community provided by Australian law. He said he regretted that yet again, by its deliberate tactics, the Opposition had set out to confuse migrants.

CANBERRA,

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