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Acting MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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AUSTRALIA AID TO REFUGEES IN INDO-CHINA

The Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Whitlam, announced today that a contribution of \$200,000 was being given as an initial response to an urgent appeal from the International Committee of the Red Cross for funds to assist its Indo-China Operational Group in making purchases for refugees in Cambodia and Vietnam. A cheque for this amount was given to the President of ICRC by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Senator Willesee, in Geneva yesterday.

The Australian Government is giving money to the ICRC and similar organisations because they are uniquely qualified to assist refugees on both sides of the existing lines of military control.

Clear information about the requirements of the vast numbers of displaced persons in Cambodia and Vietnam is difficult to obtain under present circumstances but the immediate cash grant will allow purchases of food, tents and medical supplies. As the situation develops, Australia will look sympathetically at the possibility of giving further aid through the Red Cross and similar organisations.

Mr Whitlam commended the extremely valuable work being carried out by the Red Cross and by other multilateral organisations in the very difficult conditions in Indo-China. Earlier contributions to the Red Cross for Indo-China relief made by Australia were \$277,000 in 1973/74 and \$100,000 in November 1974. Contributions were also made in November last to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (\$500,000) and to UNICEF (\$400,000).

Mr Whitlam said that the Australian Government was in close contact with all the international humanitarian organisations caring for refugees in Vietnam and Cambodia and he anticipated that substantial further contributions would be made by Australia if the situation so required.

Canberra

28 March 1975