



PRIME MINISTER

PRESS STATEMENT NO. 483

4 April 1975

VIETNAM ORPHANS

The Australian Government has chartered a Qantas 747 jet to help in the evacuation of Vietnamese children destined for adoption by Australian parents, the Prime Minister announced in Townsville today.

Mr Whitlam said the aircraft would leave Sydney at 4:00 p.m. today for Bangkok carrying three doctors and twenty nurses to look after the orphans on their flight to Australia.

It will also carry twenty-five tonnes of supplies for emergency relief in Vietnam for humanitarian purposes including rice, milk powder and corned beef.

Mr W. Morrison, the Minister assisting the Foreign Minister, will fly with the relief team to supervise the evacuation and report directly to the Prime Minister. The team will have as its medical director, Dr. W .A. Langsford, First Assistant Director-General of the Public Health Division of the Australian Department of Health.

The aircraft will wait in Bangkok to receive children being flown out of Saigon by RAAF Hercules aircraft. It will also bring back to Australia dependents and non-essential personnel being evacuated by the Australian Embassy in Saigon.

The children will leave Saigon as soon as possible. So far three Premiers, Mr Dunstan, Mr Hamer and Mr Bjelke-Petersen, have responded to the Prime Minister's message to State Premiers last night seeking guarantees about the care of the children brought into Australia and their agreement to the waiving of usual formalities.

Some delays are being experienced in Saigon in preparing the children for departure, but the Australian Embassy is working to overcome these and hopes the airlift of the children will be well underway tomorrow.

TOWNSVILLE AND CANBERRA

ATTACHMENT: Premiers' Replies on Vietnam Orphans

Mr Dunstan's reply states:

"South Australia gives the underaking and agreements sought in your message tonight and we will make the arrangements you ask."

Mr Hamer's reply reads as follows:

"I refer to your telegram of last night concerning the adoption of Vietnamese orphans. You have my assurance that we will receive orphans up to the number for whom there are approved families and that we will provide accommodation and care in the normal way for those children amongst these orphans who are not eventaully chosen for adoption because of their medical or physical condition.

Our Department of Social Welfare will maintain close and continuous liason with your Department of Labor and Immigration as requested. We would appreciate advice as early as possible of prospective numbers of children arriving in the next few days so that appropriate reception arrangements can be made. I have arranged for the Department of Social Welfare to send separate advice to your Department of Labor and Immigration about reception, placement, and ongoing care for these children."

Mr Bjelke-Petersen's reply reads as follows:

" Reference your telex re adoption of Vietnamese orphans by Queensland parents. Our Department of Children's Services is presently processing well over 200 applications for such adoptions and is giving very urgent priority to them. While it is anticipated further applications will be received I must emphasise that not every such application is necessarily from suitable adoptive parents and must be examined accordingly. As always, the future welfare of the child concerned must remain the department's paramount consideration. In accordance with your request I confirm that my Government would be prepared to accept without the normal medical check any number of such children up to the figure of 200 mentioned above. You may also be assured that the Department of Children's Services will maintain the closest liason with the Department of Labor and Immigration here."