Vietnamese boat people crisis in Hong Kong
1975 – 2000
Carina Hoang
Vietnamese boat people (VBP)

- Causes:
  - Escape persecutions by the communist regime
  - Ethnic cleansing of Chinese-Vietnamese

- Statistics:
  - 840,000 VBP arrived in neighbouring countries
  - 1 out of 3 VBP perished
  - 2 out of 3 boats were attacked by pirates
VBP - Escape Routes

• South China Sea to South East Asia – small fishing boats with engines
• Gulf of Tonkin to Hong Kong - ancient Chinese design junk
South China Sea
Hong Kong Harbor
Escape routes from Vietnam

Estimated distance from Vietnam (in Nautical Miles)

- to Malaysia: 550 nm
- to Hong Kong: 620 nm
- to Indonesia: 650 nm
- to Thailand: 700 nm
- to Philippines: 900 nm
- to Australia: 2800 nm
VBP – a Global crisis

Involved: Host countries (first port of asylum), Settlement countries, the UNHCR, Financial supporters, the Rescuers, and NGOs
VBP Arrivals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Arrivals of VBP (number)</th>
<th>Arrivals of VBP (%)</th>
<th>Resettlements</th>
<th>Repatriations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>213,000</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>143,000</td>
<td>66,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>121,708</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>111,876</td>
<td>12,672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>254,495</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>248,781</td>
<td>9,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>51,722</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>49,559</td>
<td>2,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>117,321</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>108,121</td>
<td>11,751</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## VBP Resettlements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries of Resettlement</th>
<th>VBP</th>
<th>Orderly Departure Program</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>108,808</td>
<td>46,711</td>
<td>155,519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>100,012</td>
<td>60,285</td>
<td>160,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>21,421</td>
<td>19,264</td>
<td>40,685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>15,489</td>
<td>12,067</td>
<td>27,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>19,329</td>
<td>4,842</td>
<td>24,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>402,382</td>
<td>458,367</td>
<td>860,749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>717,918</td>
<td>623,509</td>
<td>1,341,427</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VBP crisis in Hong Kong
1975 - 2000

• 213,000 Arrivals, 143,000 Overseas settlements, 67,000 Repatriations & 1,400 Local settlements
• First Influx: during the first half of 1979 – 69,000 arrivals
• Second influx: during the second half of 1989 – 34,000 arrivals
General information about Hong Kong (in 1975)

- One of the most densely populated places in the world
  - land area: 1,059 square kilometres
  - population: over 5.5 million
  - overall density: 4,487 people per square kilometre (3.2 in Australia and 22 in the US)

- Lack of natural resources
The Challenges

• Constant arrivals – 500 plus per day
• Lack of space
  • Temporary accommodations: military camps, industrial buildings, hospital, prisons, government dock-yard and ferries
• Monsoons
• Difficulties in finding settlements (35% arrivals vs 12% departures)
Government Dockyard
The Challenges

- ECVII - Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrant
- Illegal traffic in human cargo: *Huey Fong, Skyluck, Sen On*
- Riots & disturbances in the camps
- Violent between North and South Vietnamese
The Challenges

• Local and International community outrages
• Appeals and Legal challenges lodged by the VBP
• Complex repatriation schemes
The Challenges

- Using up local resources
- Financial burden – HK$ 7.8 billion plus HK$ 1.16 billion unpaid debt from UNHCR
The Challenges for VBP

• Psychologically & emotionally vulnerable
• Poor camp conditions
• Long detention in prison-like camps
• Lack of communications with the outside world
A Detention Centre (High Island)
Detention Camps

Accommodated 25,000 VBP
The Challenges for VBP

- Have nothing to do with their time
- Being bullied & Exposed to violence
- Constant weapons search
- Fear of repatriation
Deterrence Measures

- 2 July 1982 - Closed camp policy
- 16 June 1988 - ‘Cut-off date’, Screening & Detention policy
- Dec 1989 – Forced Repatriation Program
VBP Arrivals in Hong Kong

- 1975: 1000
- 1976: 34,500
- 1977: 18,700
- 1978: 11,900
- 1979: 18,700
- 1980: 34,500
- 1981: 20,200
- 1982: 18,700
- 1983: 11,900
- 1984: 68,700
- 1985: 34,500
- 1986: 20,200
- 1987: 18,700
- 1988: 11,900
- 1989: 68,700
- 1990: 34,500
- 1991: 20,200
- 1992: 18,700
- 1993: 11,900
- 1994: 68,700
- 1995: 34,500
- 1996: 20,200
Geneva Indochinese Refugees Conference 1989
Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA)

- Reducing clandestine departures through information campaigns and legal migration (ODP)
- Providing first asylum to all asylum seekers until their status had been established
- Resettling those found to be genuine refugees in third countries
CPA – the framework to resolve the VBP crisis

- Determining the refugee status of all asylum seekers in accordance with international standards and criteria
- Repatriating those found not to be refugees and re-integrate them in their home countries.
Observations

• From former VBP: Grateful that the Government accepted them and did not push them back to sea.

• People who had first-hand experience with the administration of the VBP crisis: They learned a lot from the experience and they were proud that HK did not send any VBP away.
Conclusion

“The VBP crisis is a testament to HK people’s essential resilience and tolerance. HK showed the world that these huge migrations can be handled humanely.”

former British HK Government Security Bureau Official
Stories of the boat people in Hong Kong
Website: http://vietnamesebatpeople.hk/

THANK YOU!