

January 25, 1956

Mr. Bui-Van-Luong  
Commissioner-General  
Commissariat for Refugees  
Saigon

Dear Mr. Luong:

The Michigan State University Group welcomes the initiative of COMIGAL in organizing a training course for prospective Provincial Délégués, Center Chiefs, and Planning Officers. The choice of Cu-Chi as the locale of the conference was commendable on several grounds. The Refugee Center there illustrates careful planning and vigorous leadership. The site is located outside Saigon but is easily accessible by car. A school building was made available with classroom facilities such as desks and benches, a blackboard, and writing materials. The conference room was open to the light and to any movement of air. The arrangements for the group to eat and sleep at the school also deserve favorable notice.

In this setting the participants had an excellent opportunity to become acquainted, to share their individual experiences through discussion, and to compare notes concerning the progress of the conference. All this helps to create a bond of common experience between officials who will soon be working together in the field.

COMIGAL deserves congratulation for drawing up a training program and recruiting participants on short notice, enlisting officials from inside the organization to act as instructors, and borrowing lecturers from other governmental departments. Our Team is also glad to note that COMIGAL accepted suggestions for revising the schedule with a view to a more balanced coverage and a shortened training period. In brief we believe that this experiment of training officials for new tasks on a group basis was well worth the effort and congratulate COMIGAL for undertaking what was probably the first training conference of that type in Vietnam.

In view of the novelty of the project and the shortage of time available for planning, it is not surprising that the level of achievement was not uniformly high. In the hope that COMIGAL and other governmental agencies will want to have additional training conferences, we draw attention to certain aspects of the program which would require strengthening.

Care should be taken to select as lecturers those persons who are at the same time technically competent in their field and enthusiastic about discussing it with others. They should be notified in advance of the background and experience of the participants, who will be persons of proven worth. Any analogy to a classroom situation should be avoided. The lecturer should consider himself as the leader of a discussion and should make available a considerable portion of the allotted time for a question-and-answer period.

He should take sufficient time in advance of the meeting to assemble and arrange his information carefully, pitching his exposition at a high level. The participants should not be subjected to any dissertations on the general, the obvious, and the elementary. In particular, the relevance of the subject matter to the raison d'être of the conference (for example, refugee resettlement) should be established early in each lecture and maintained by the planned choice of examples drawn from experience and meaningful to the participants. It would be desirable to bring the lecturers together in advance of the training course for orientation sessions and a discussion of teaching techniques.

In keeping with the professional tone of the conference, the participants should ask themselves certain questions before taking the time of the group with an inquiry addressed to the lecturer:

1. Is my question of general interest? Would it be better to postpone the inquiry until the recess or after class?
2. Is this particular lecturer the one who can best answer my question? Does the subject lie within his field?

The participants should be encouraged to exercise self-discipline in another area as well. Before asking permission to leave the conference area overnight, each one should weigh the loss of the contribution which he could make to the group in informal discussions (and vice versa) against the importance of his personal business in Saigon.

Experience with training programs such as Cu-Chi has repeatedly demonstrated that without planned follow-up, training soon loses its effect on the trainees. So we suggest to you these additional ideas.

These next steps can be thought of in terms of, first, the objectives of the follow-up activities, and second, ways of meeting these objectives. The follow-up program would be to foster human communications so that all persons concerned understand what the others are doing. Difficulties and bottlenecks could be identified and corrected.

Further insight on objectives can be obtained by considering that communications within a large organization, like the Commissariat for Refugees, must flow freely both down and up, as well as horizontally. The specific objectives of downward communications are (1) to keep all field personnel uniformly informed about recent events--Presidential decisions, COMIGAL decisions, changes in AEA and USOM procedures, etc.; (2) to give the feeling to field personnel that they have the interest and support of COMIGAL; and (3) not to accept communications from priests and refugee centers directly but to insist that such messages and requests go through the proper channels. (Field personnel soon find out when they have been by-passed and then lose all desire to do a good job.)

The objectives of upward communications are (1) to maintain a flow upward of accurate, dependable information regarding field conditions as well as administrative bottlenecks so that the head of the organization can take corrective action; and (2) to make it easy for lower levels out in the field to let their problems and difficulties be known so that the head of the organization can help them when necessary.

Horizontal communications should be good enough that (1) persons doing the same job know the problems and solutions worked out by colleagues so that they can take advantage of this information; (2) persons at the same level should get emotional support from others going through the same difficult experiences and perhaps enjoying the same successes; and (3) properly supervised competition may provide increased motivation to do a good job.

A number of techniques could be devised to meet these objectives. One would be to set up a deadline system on the processing of sub-projects: so many days (a definite number) to get the form filled out for the first time, so many days to discuss with and inform the province officials, so many days in the planning office in Saigon, etc. Each office might be required to send daily sub-project status reports. Administrative bottlenecks could readily be spotted and measures devised to break them up. Much was made of this suggestion in the early MSU reports.

Field tours by COMIGAL personnel (and USOM and MSU personnel, as invited) would give an opportunity to observe and discuss specific problems of specific refugee centers on the spot. Roving expeditors, sent out by COMIGAL, might also be of help here. These were also mentioned in early MSU reports.

A newsletter, prepared by COMIGAL and answering the questions of field personnel, is another device. There is already material for the first such newsletter since you indicated that you had good questions which you did not have time to answer at Cu-Chi but which you intended to answer in writing. Also, as field personnel get experiences to share, they could be called together for brief national or regional meetings.

There are many other ways as well to meet the objectives. COMIGAL could continue to keep its own house in order in Saigon and put special emphasis on effective leadership in both the planning and implementation (execution) functions. As yet the Michigan State University Group has not found any provision in the planning or internal organization of COMIGAL to meet the problem of further resettlement of many refugees before economic rehabilitation can begin. COMIGAL could also act in such a way as to let field personnel know they were well thought of, e.g., respect communications channels, obtain higher and more reasonable travel indemnities, etc.

No doubt further objectives and techniques for meeting objectives could be found in order to continue the good work begun at Cu-Chi. Mr. Haney of our office is preparing a full report which we would be happy to send to you if you want it. The Michigan State University Group is at your disposition should you care to discuss next steps for following up on Cu-Chi and getting the solutions to the refugees' problems moving along.

Yours sincerely,

Walter W. Mode, Chief  
Field Administration Project

Enclosure: Summary of Dr. Wickert's Comments at Cu-Chi.

### Summary of Dr. Wickert's Comments at Cu-Chi

Following is a summary of the remarks made by Dr. Wickert at the January 21 meeting called by the Commissioner for Refugees to bring together the province planning officers and Msgr. Harnett's group of fathers. For us, these remarks represent the heart of what we hope was accomplished, with respect to the planning function, at the Cu-Chi course of instruction. For this reason, we wanted to make them a matter of record.

\* \* \*

In the planning job ahead, the help of everyone is needed. Msgr. Harnett's group of fathers can continue to contribute much. If, however, their work and the work of the planning officers is to be really useful, both groups must remember to prepare sub-projects that are limited to the needs of refugees. The sub-projects cannot include enough to grant refugees all their wishes as well. There simply is not enough money to do this.

The term "needs" requires further clarification. We mean by "needs" the equipment and the human work which the refugees in a center cannot create for themselves but which are essential for the refugees if they are to arrive at a minimum level of self-support. When refugees' "needs" have been met, the refugees can go forward on their own to get for themselves the things they want for a better life. These latter things may be called wishes, in contrast to needs.

What will be the effect if the fathers, and the planning officers, submit sub-projects which include refugees' wishes above and beyond their basic needs? In order to judge this effect, one must recognize that both the fathers and the planning officers are working as members of a large team. According to the organization plan that has been explained to you, the sub-project forms are sent by the planning officer, through several other officials (province refugee délégué, possibly the province chief and the appropriate province technicians) to COMIGAL in Saigon. If most, or even many, sub-projects received in Saigon are primarily requests to satisfy refugee wishes instead of needs, the small planning office in Saigon will be swamped with the job of checking the facts on many, many sub-projects received from all over Viet Nam, and trying as best it can to include refugee needs while cutting out the superfluous. At USOM, the same condition will exist. USOM is a complex, not a simple, organization. Thus, for example, the agricultural aspects of a sub-project are examined by agriculture specialists, public works aspects by public works specialists, etc. If these specialists, with much experience in Viet Nam, see that in general the sub-projects make reasonable requests--primarily to satisfy refugee needs--they can work fast. If most sub-projects make unreasonable requests--that is, they try to satisfy refugee wishes--their work will grind to a slow halt as they are forced to check and crosscheck.

All this affects you. You will wonder why it takes so long to get your sub-projects approved. The refugees under your wing will continue to wait impatiently. Nothing will seem to get done.

Moreover, collectively, the refugees will lose out. As you now know, funds not obligated by June 30, and funds obligated by June 30 but not spent by December 31, 1956, revert to a general fund and are no longer available to spend on refugee matters. These funds were intended by the U. S. to go to the aid of Viet Nam's refugees. But Viet Nam, and specifically this is your task, must organize itself very quickly to take advantage of these funds. If you cannot think and act quickly in terms of refugees' needs in preparing sub-projects, the whole process of approving sub-projects will not work and the money will be lost. Viet Nam's refugees will still not have their needs taken care of. What must be done is quite clear. Each of you, personally, must make your sub-projects reflect only refugee needs.

But for you to prepare sub-projects which reflect only refugee needs and not their wishes is not easy. We are as well aware as you that you are subject to tremendous pressure to include refugee wishes as well as needs. You live and work with these refugees every day. They look to you for support. They won't want to cooperate with you if they think you are not on their side. But herein lies your responsibility: you must get them to see the total operation and to see that there is no room for wishes, only room for needs, in this program.

It might help at this point to explain something out of the ordinary. Affecting this program is a strange American bureaucratic custom. This custom requires that requests made within a bureaucracy, and you will be operating within one of these, must be justified in writing. You must write out an explanation for why you want what you are asking for. You can immediately see that such a system immediately rewards those who are good at writing justifications. Even though this system, like many other systems, has its weaknesses, it also has its strengths. In general, requests that are justified in sufficient, convincing detail are worthy of granting. Moreover, in a program which gets away from giving equal amounts to each refugee, some system must be used which will clearly prove who must needs help. It is a system well worth your becoming acquainted with, as you work as a member of the bureaucracy trying to solve refugee problems.

You now know the rules for the game you are about to play. Each of you, by trying to get away with including refugee wishes as well as needs in your sub-projects, can sabotage the whole program. On the other hand, if each of you limits your sub-projects to include only refugee needs, the whole program can succeed.