



DEDICATION

In Memoriam... President Gerald R. Ford 1913 – 2006

It has been a practice of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants annual *World Refugee Survey* (the *Survey*) to recognize exceptional people whose efforts greatly helped refugees and asylum seekers around the world. Indeed, refugee communities are fortunate that many dedicated individuals have devoted their lives to protecting refugees and the dignity of asylum seekers.

This year, the 46th edition of the *Survey* recognizes the exceptional moral leadership and humanity of the 38th president of the United States, Gerald R. Ford. Three decades ago, despite strong opposition—including from

some in his own Administration, the congressional leadership, and some powerful governors—President Ford decided to rescue thousands of Vietnamese refugees from impending harsh imprisonment or execution by the new Government of Vietnam.

After the last helicopter took off from Saigon carrying embassy staff in 1975, thousands of frightened Vietnamese, mostly professionals and supporters of the U.S. Government who feared reprisal, were trapped as the merciless Viet Cong and the advancing North Vietnamese Army approached Saigon.

For most Americans, the war that was the cause of bitter domestic political division and that took the lives of thousands of Americans and more than a million Vietnamese may have formally ended on April 30, 1975; however, rescuing and supporting refugees was equally important for President Ford as ending the unpopular war. After the initial refusal of Congress to fund the program, the determined President established an interagency task force to resettle refugees. Later, the President signed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Act of 1975 to establish a domestic resettlement program. Two years later, Congress amended the

bill to allow refugees to adjust their status to permanent residence. Because of President Ford's moral leadership and the standard he instituted, his successors continued to resettle millions more from around the world. In the early eighties, I, too, became the beneficiary of his generosity.

On December 24, 1975, eight months after his decision to resettle refugees across America, the President told the weary nation about these new arrivals, "I am confident that they will follow the example of former immigrants who have so richly contributed to the character and strength of the American system. The warmth and gener-

osity that have characterized the welcome that Americans have given to the refugees serve as a reaffirmation of American awareness of the roots and the ideals of our society.”

At his memorial service, presidents, dignitaries, and people who knew him best spoke eloquently about his life and his many accomplishments in Congress and later as President. Historians, political leaders, and journalists marveled at his courageous decision to pardon President Nixon, end the Indochinese war, end the military draft, and restore the dignity of the White House. None, however, mentioned one of the most remarkable and enduring acts of his presidency: the rescuing of 134,000 frightened refugees from Vietnam. To this day, he remains the only president to visit and to welcome newly arriving refugees in Arkansas,

Florida, and California. It has been said that saving a single human being is like saving all of humanity. If so, President Ford saved humanity many times over. May those bestowed with power and responsibilities follow his moral leadership.

Thomas Jefferson once said, “My affections are first for my own country, and then, generally, for all mankind.” President Ford showed his affection for his country and to humanity through his courage and generosity in allowing thousands of vulnerable refugees to resettle in America.

On behalf of millions of refugees, thank you for your kindness.

Eskinder Negash,
USCRI Vice President and
Chief Operating Officer

“The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men the conviction and the will to carry on.”

Walter Lippmann (1889–1974)

President Gerald R. Ford talks to a Vietnamese refugee while holding a baby on a U.S. Air Force bus, April 4, 1975. The President later greeted the refugees at a California airbase. Credit: National Archives and Records Administration

