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# JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT

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*Office of the Honourable Senator Thanh Hai Ngo*

The Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo

**SENATE**



**CANADA**

**SÉNAT**

L'hon Thanh Hai Ngo

## **JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT**

### **FOREWORD**

Countless Vietnamese refugees risked their lives trying to escape Communist persecution after the fall of Saigon in 1975. Many were forced to flee and leave their lives and homeland behind in pursuit of freedom from the authoritarian regime. Canada was among the first countries to welcome Vietnamese refugees with open arms. Canadians from all walks of life responded without hesitation, as they became part of a vast international effort dedicated to finding a safe haven for over 120,000 refugees.

As Canada's first senator originally from Vietnam, I was honoured to introduce Bill S-219 on April 30, 2014, which passed as the Journey to Freedom Day Act on April 23, 2015 in the statutes of Canada under Chapter 14. The Act was enacted in time for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of Saigon, the beginning of the boat people exodus where Vietnamese-Canadians have gathered on April 30 every year since to remember a new beginning in their resettlement and to thank Canada for their new home. As a result, April 30 will now nationally commemorate the Vietnamese boat people's exodus, and remember Canada's humanitarian tradition of welcoming refugees during and after the Vietnam War.

I envisioned Journey to Freedom Day as a day to honour Canada's humanitarian tradition of accepting refugees during and after the Vietnam War, to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> milestone year, to thank Canada for saving our lives and to commemorate the Vietnamese refugees' new-found freedom. Freedom is not free, and the boat people paid for their freedom with their perilous journey.

I trust you will find this report useful in understanding the overview of the legislative process in Canada's Parliament, the importance of recognizing Canada's acclaimed humanitarian role, as well as the significance of the Vietnamese refugees' pursuit of freedom and desire to begin anew in Canada.

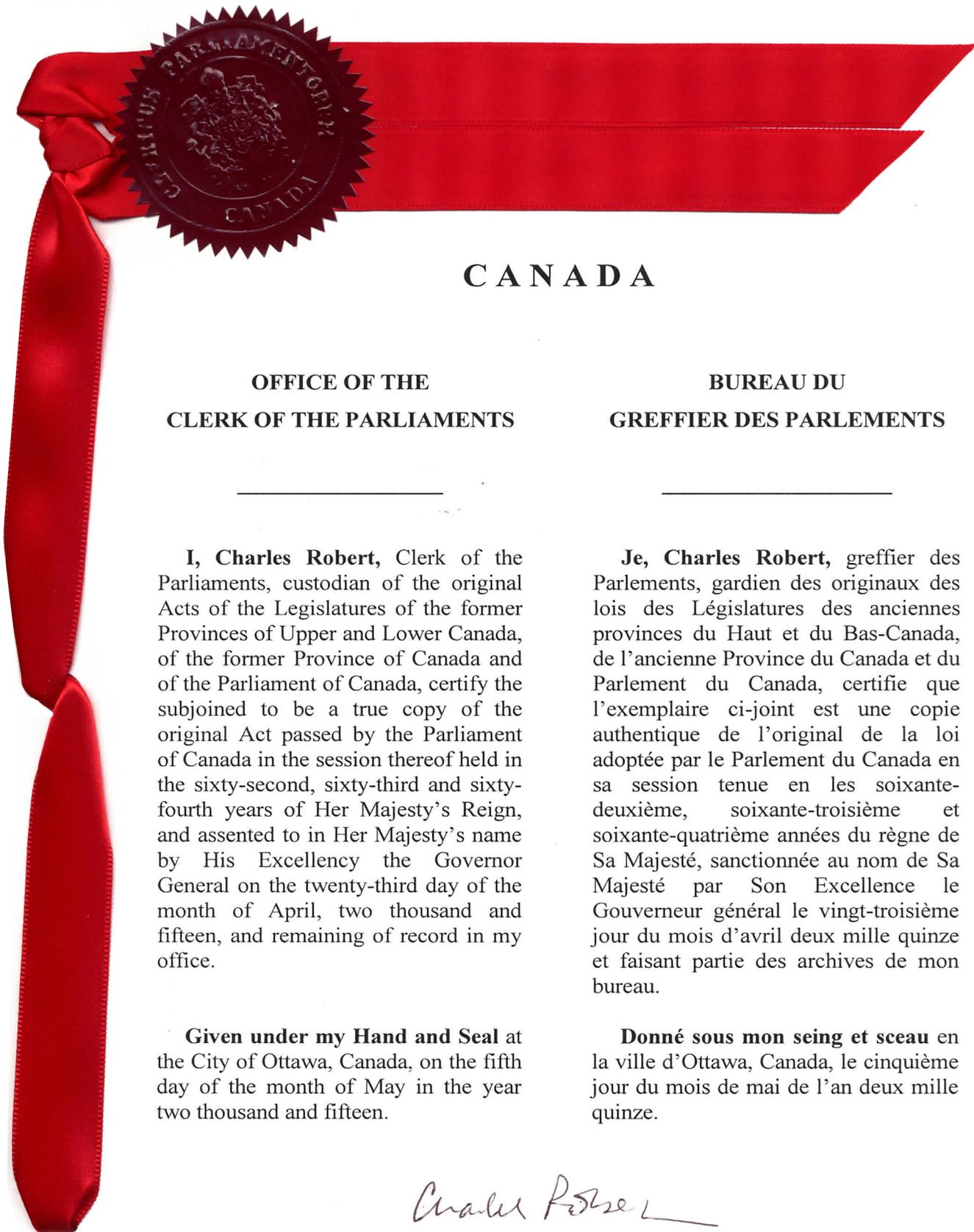
Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thanh Hai Ngo', written over a horizontal line.

Senator Thanh Hai Ngo

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# CANADA

**OFFICE OF THE  
CLERK OF THE PARLIAMENTS**

**BUREAU DU  
GREFFIER DES PARLEMENTS**

**I, Charles Robert,** Clerk of the Parliaments, custodian of the original Acts of the Legislatures of the former Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, of the former Province of Canada and of the Parliament of Canada, certify the subjoined to be a true copy of the original Act passed by the Parliament of Canada in the session thereof held in the sixty-second, sixty-third and sixty-fourth years of Her Majesty's Reign, and assented to in Her Majesty's name by His Excellency the Governor General on the twenty-third day of the month of April, two thousand and fifteen, and remaining of record in my office.

**Given under my Hand and Seal** at the City of Ottawa, Canada, on the fifth day of the month of May in the year two thousand and fifteen.

**Je, Charles Robert,** greffier des Parlements, gardien des originaux des lois des Législatures des anciennes provinces du Haut et du Bas-Canada, de l'ancienne Province du Canada et du Parlement du Canada, certifie que l'exemplaire ci-joint est une copie authentique de l'original de la loi adoptée par le Parlement du Canada en sa session tenue en les soixante-deuxième, soixante-troisième et soixante-quatrième années du règne de Sa Majesté, sanctionnée au nom de Sa Majesté par Son Excellence le Gouverneur général le vingt-troisième jour du mois d'avril deux mille quinze et faisant partie des archives de mon bureau.

**Donné sous mon seing et sceau** en la ville d'Ottawa, Canada, le cinquième jour du mois de mai de l'an deux mille quinze.

*Charles Robert*

Clerk of the Parliaments  
Greffier des Parlements

Second Session, Forty-first Parliament,  
62-63-64 Elizabeth II, 2013-2014-2015

Deuxième session, quarante et unième législature,  
62-63-64 Elizabeth II, 2013-2014-2015

## STATUTES OF CANADA 2015

## LOIS DU CANADA (2015)

### CHAPTER 14

### CHAPITRE 14

An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War

Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam

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#### ASSENTED TO

23rd APRIL, 2015

BILL S-219

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#### SANCTIONNÉE

LE 23 AVRIL 2015

PROJET DE LOI S-219

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## SUMMARY

This enactment designates the thirtieth day of April in each and every year as “Journey to Freedom Day”.

## SOMMAIRE

Le texte désigne le 30 avril comme « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté ».

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**CHAPTER 14**


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**CHAPITRE 14**

An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War

Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam

*[Assented to 23rd April, 2015]*

*[Sanctionnée le 23 avril 2015]*

Preamble

Whereas the Canadian Forces were involved in the Vietnam War with supervisory operations to support the aim of establishing peace and ending the Vietnam War by assisting in the enforcement of the Paris Peace Accords of 1973;

Whereas on April 30, 1975, despite the Paris Peace Accords, the military forces of the People's Army of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front invaded South Vietnam, which led to the fall of Saigon, the end of the Vietnam War and the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government;

Whereas the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that these events and the conditions faced by individuals in Vietnam, including deteriorating living conditions and human rights abuses, contributed to the exodus of approximately 840,000 Vietnamese people, who were referred to at the time as "Vietnamese boat people", to neighbouring countries in the ensuing years;

Whereas the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that at least 250,000 Vietnamese people lost their lives at sea during the exodus of the Vietnamese people for reasons that included drowning, illness, starvation and violence from kidnapping or piracy;

Preamble

Attendu :

que les Forces canadiennes ont pris part à la guerre du Vietnam dans le cadre d'opérations de surveillance menées pour appuyer l'objectif de rétablir la paix et de mettre fin à la guerre du Vietnam, en aidant à assurer le respect des Accords de paix de Paris de 1973;

que le 30 avril 1975, malgré les Accords de paix de Paris, les forces militaires de l'Armée populaire vietnamienne et du Front national de libération ont envahi le Vietnam du Sud, ce qui a entraîné la chute de Saïgon, la fin de la guerre du Vietnam et l'établissement du gouvernement de la République socialiste du Vietnam;

que, selon le Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés, ces événements ainsi que la situation vécue par les gens du Vietnam, notamment la détérioration des conditions de vie et les violations des droits de la personne, ont contribué à l'exode de quelque 840 000 d'entre eux — appelés à l'époque les « réfugiés de la mer vietnamiens » — vers les pays voisins au cours des années qui ont suivi;

que, d'après un rapport du Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés, au moins 250 000 Vietnamiens sont décédés en mer au cours de cet exode en raison

Whereas the sponsorship refugee program in Canada, assisted by the efforts of Canadian families, Canadian charities, religious groups and non-governmental organizations, contributed to Canada accepting more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees, among whom it has been estimated that 34,000 were privately sponsored and 26,000 were assisted by the Canadian government;

Whereas the major and sustained contribution by the people of Canada to the cause of refugees was recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees when it awarded the Nansen Refugee Award to the “People of Canada” in 1986;

And whereas April 30 is referred to by many members of the community of displaced Vietnamese people and their families in Canada as “Black April Day”, or alternatively as “Journey to Freedom Day”, and is, therefore, an appropriate day to designate as a day to remember and commemorate the lives lost and the suffering experienced during the exodus of Vietnamese people, the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees in Canada, the gratitude of Vietnamese people to the Canadian people and the Government of Canada for accepting them, and the contributions of Vietnamese-Canadian people — whose population is now approximately 300,000 — to Canadian society;

Now, therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

#### SHORT TITLE

Short title

**1.** This Act may be cited as the *Journey to Freedom Day Act*.

#### JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY

Journey to Freedom Day

**2.** Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the thirtieth day of April shall be known as “Journey to Freedom Day”.

notamment des noyades, de la maladie, de la famine et des violences liées aux enlèvements ou aux actes de piraterie;

que, grâce aux efforts des familles canadiennes et à ceux des groupes religieux, des organismes de bienfaisance et des organismes non gouvernementaux du Canada, le programme canadien de parrainage des réfugiés a permis d’accueillir au pays plus de 60 000 réfugiés vietnamiens, parmi lesquels, selon les estimations, 34 000 ont été parrainés par des organismes du secteur privé et 26 000 ont reçu l’aide du gouvernement canadien;

que le Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés a reconnu la contribution importante et soutenue de la population canadienne à la cause des réfugiés lorsqu’il a décerné la distinction Nansen pour les réfugiés au « peuple canadien » en 1986;

qu’il convient de désigner le 30 avril — que de nombreux membres de la communauté des Vietnamiens déplacés et leurs familles au Canada reconnaissent déjà comme « jour de l’Avril noir » ou encore comme « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté » — en tant que journée pour commémorer les vies perdues et la souffrance vécue lors de l’exode du peuple vietnamien, souligner l’accueil des réfugiés vietnamiens par la population et le gouvernement du Canada et la gratitude du peuple vietnamien à l’égard de cet accueil, et reconnaître les contributions apportées par les Vietnamo-Canadiens — aujourd’hui au nombre d’environ 300 000 — à la société canadienne,

Sa Majesté, sur l’avis et avec le consentement du Sénat et de la Chambre des communes du Canada, édicte :

#### TITRE ABRÉGÉ

**1.** *Loi sur la Journée du Parcours vers la liberté*.

Titre abrégé

#### JOURNÉE DU PARCOURS VERS LA LIBERTÉ

**2.** Le 30 avril est, dans tout le Canada, désigné comme « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté ».

Journée du Parcours vers la liberté

Not a legal  
holiday

**3.** For greater certainty, Journey to Freedom Day is not a legal holiday or a non-judicial day.

**3.** Il est entendu que la Journée du Parcours vers la liberté n'est pas une fête légale ni un jour non juridique.

Statut

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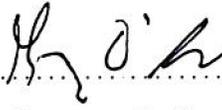
Available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:  
Disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :  
**<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

# Senate

# Sénat

Passed by the Senate, December 8, 2014

Adopté par le Sénat le 8 décembre 2014



Clerk of the Senate. Greffier du Sénat.

December 8, 2014

Le 8 décembre 2014

**ORDERED:** That the Clerk do carry this bill to the Commons and acquaint them that the Senate desires their concurrence thereto.

**ORDONNÉ:** Que le greffier porte ce projet de loi à la Chambre des communes, et l'informe que le Sénat demande son concours.



Clerk of the Senate. Greffier du Sénat.

## House of Commons

## Chambre des communes

Wednesday, April 22, 2015

Le mercredi 22 avril 2015

**ORDERED:**

**ORDONNÉ:**

That the Acting Clerk do carry back this Bill to the Senate and acquaint their Honours that this House has passed the same without amendment.

Que le Greffier par intérim reporte ce projet de loi au Sénat et informe Leurs Honneurs que cette Chambre a adopté ledit projet de loi sans amendement.



Acting Clerk of the House

Le Greffier par intérim de la Chambre

ASSENTED to in Her Majesty's name  
April 23, 2015.

SANCTIONNÉE au nom de Sa Majesté  
le 23 avril 2015.





CANADA

**JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT**

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SECOND READING AND VOTE

COMMITTEE'S FULL TESTIMONY

THIRD READING

VIETNAMESE TRANSLATION OF THE BILL

CITY OF OTTAWA PROCLAMATION



## JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT

### INTRODUCTION

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, Canadians graciously opened their homes and hearts to over 60,000 Vietnamese refugees who desperately needed a place to rebuild their lives. When the call came, Canadians from all walks of life responded without hesitation, becoming part of a vast international effort dedicated to finding a safe haven for these unfortunate people.

Without the warm and caring efforts of thousands of Canadians and the leadership, support and co-operation of federal, provincial and municipal governments, as well as Canadian and international refugee agencies, non-governmental organizations and religious groups, the movement of such large numbers of people under such urgent and difficult circumstances would not have been possible.<sup>1</sup>

### HISTORICAL SUMMARY

- Approximately 58,169 people were killed and 304,000 wounded out of the 2.59 million people who served in the Vietnam War.<sup>2</sup>
- April 30, 1975, was the day that Saigon fell to communism. On that day, the communist regime took over Vietnam as the Vietnam War came to an end. It marks the start of the exodus of millions of Vietnamese people from their homeland. People fled for various reasons, including harsh treatment and suppression of human rights by an authoritative government; ethnic, religious and political persecution; political execution of those associated with the former South Vietnamese government; forced resettlement in remote rural areas; and deteriorating living conditions brought about by food shortages, flooding, and drought.<sup>3</sup> By 1979, some 600,000 Vietnamese had fled.

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<sup>1</sup> Report prepared by Canada Employment and Immigration Commission entitled "Indochinese Refugees: The Canadian Response, 1979 and 1980"

<sup>2</sup> [http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=200920100SCR29](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=200920100SCR29)

<sup>3</sup> Yen Tran "The closing of the saga of the Vietnamese Asylum Seekers: The Implications on International Refugees and Human Rights Law" Houston Journal of International Law



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**JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT**

- Over the next three years, the refugee label “boat people” became familiar as Vietnamese began trying to escape from their homeland—many of them unsuccessfully—aboard small watercraft.<sup>4</sup>
- Within four years of the fall of South Vietnam, the surge of Vietnamese boat people reached the level of a major crisis. In response to mass arrivals of boat people, countries in the region refused to allow them to land, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Vietnamese in the South China Sea.
- To date, a total of 2 million people have fled Vietnam in search of asylum and resettlement. The majority of the boat people departed illegally on crowded, unseaworthy boats. By 1992, more than 800,000 Vietnamese had travelled the perilous journey across the South China Sea to neighbouring countries that provided temporary refuge.<sup>5</sup>
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that at least 250,000 Vietnamese people lost their lives at sea as the result of drowning, illness, starvation and violence from kidnapping or piracy while attempting to escape.
- Without the warm and caring efforts of thousands of Canadians and the leadership, support and co-operation of federal, provincial and municipal governments, as well as Canadian and international refugee agencies, non-governmental organizations and churches, the movement of such large numbers of people under such urgent and difficult circumstances would not have been possible.<sup>6</sup>
- In October 1976, Canada agreed to accept 180 boat people; in August 1977, there was a further commitment for 450.<sup>7</sup>
- The number of Vietnamese refugees in Canada increased dramatically in 1975–76 when Canada opened its doors to a first wave of some 6,500 political refugees who had left Vietnam after the fall of Saigon.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Report prepared by Canada Employment and Immigration Commission entitled “Indochinese Refugees: The Canadian Response, 1979 and 1980”

<sup>5</sup> Fauziah Ismail, United Nations: “Urgent Action Needed to Protect Refugees,” BUS. TIMES (Malaysia) November 18, 1993, Lexis World Library

<sup>6</sup> Report prepared by Canada Employment and Immigration Commission entitled “Indochinese Refugees: The Canadian Response, 1979 and 1980”

<sup>7</sup> Report prepared by Canada Employment and Immigration Commission entitled “Indochinese Refugees: The Canadian Response, 1979 and 1980”



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**JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT**

- In 1978, the government agreed to accept 50 boat families per month. This reflected the belief that by demonstrating an ongoing concern, Canada could encourage countries of first asylum to keep their doors open.
- Public awareness of the plight of the Vietnamese refugees heightened in November 1978 when Canada airlifted 604 escapees stranded on the overcrowded freighter Hai Hong. Between 1975 and 1978, a total of 9,060 Southeast Asian refugees were resettled in Canada.
- In July 1979, the United Nations Secretary General convened a conference in Geneva on international joint action to tackle the problems in Southeast Asia. Just prior to this conference, Canada announced that up to 50,000 Indochinese refugees would be accepted for resettlement by the end of 1980; this target was increased by 10,000 on April 2, 1980.<sup>9</sup>
- The federal government developed a sponsorship program whereby institutions such as churches and groups of at least five adult citizens could take a refugee family under their charge for a year. For each person thus sponsored, the government accepted another refugee under its own care.
- Between 1979 and 1980, Canadians graciously opened their homes and hearts to 60,000 Indochinese refugees who desperately needed a place to rebuild their lives. When the call came, Canadians from all walks of life responded without hesitation, becoming part of a vast international effort dedicated to finding a safe haven for these unfortunate refugees.
- Canada welcomed 60,000 Vietnamese refugees during 1979 and 1980. It was the highest number per capita taken by any country in the world during this period.<sup>10</sup>
- Of the total 60,000 Vietnamese refugees admitted to Canada between 1979 and 1980, roughly 26,000 were government-assisted, while some 34,000 were sponsored privately by volunteers and relatives. Among these refugees were special groups of unaccompanied minors, tuberculosis victims and other difficult cases helped jointly by the federal government, private groups, and, in some instances, by provincial governments.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Adelman, Howard "Canada and the Indochinese Refugees" L.A. Weigl Educational Associates Ltd. 1982



### **JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT**

- During the following decade, from 1982 to 1991, over 79,695 more Vietnamese refugees entered the country.
- In 1986 the people of Canada were awarded the Nansen medal by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in “recognition of their major and sustained contribution to the cause of refugees.”
- There are now approximately 300,000 people of Vietnamese origin living in Canada, and more than 100,000 of them live in the Greater Toronto Area.<sup>11</sup>

### **GENERAL AIM OF THE JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT**

- To designate April 30 as Journey to Freedom Day to commemorate the fall of Saigon—the capital of South Vietnam—to the People’s Army of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam on April 30, 1975.
- To recognize the thirtieth day of April in each and every year as “Journey to Freedom Day.” This day marks the start of the exodus of millions of Vietnamese people from their homeland.
- To recognize the great tragedy, suffering and loss of life during the exodus of millions of Vietnamese people from their homeland.
- To recognize the fulfillment of Canada’s international legal obligation toward refugees and to help those in need of resettlement.
- To recognize in particular Canada’s international leadership role in the Indochinese refugee crisis.
- To commemorate the approximately 60,000 Vietnamese boat people who reached Canada between 1979 and 1980.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=0&PID=105396&PRID=0&PTYPE=105277&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2013&THEME=95&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF>



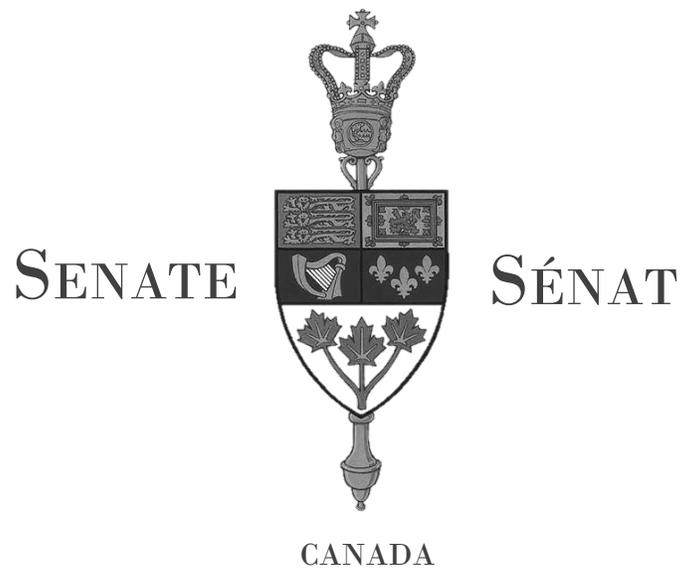
**CANADA**

### **JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT**

- To recognize that Canada pioneered the private sponsorship refugees, which was in itself a movement that enabled our country to take much larger numbers of refugees than usual and reduce the cost to government.
- To recognize the leadership role played by the churches of Canada in mobilizing their congregations to welcome and support the refugees.
- To recognize the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award given to the people of Canada for their extraordinary efforts on behalf of the Indochinese refugees. This is the only time a country has ever been awarded the Nansen medal.

### **JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY**

- The short title “Journey to Freedom Day” reflects Canada’s humanitarian role in welcoming thousands of Vietnamese refugees during the exodus of the boat people following the fall of Saigon. This new title pays homage to the more than two million Vietnamese refugees who fled Vietnam because of retribution from the North, and pays tribute to their perilous journey in search of freedom.
- The short title also commemorates the Canadian individuals, families, volunteer agencies, communities, and religious groups who successfully sponsored Vietnamese refugees through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program. In fact, the UNHCR recognized this wondrous achievement by awarding Canada the Nansen medal.
- The Vietnamese-Canadian community, just like the wider Vietnamese diaspora, still refers to this day as Black April Day. This day reflects a sad day of commemoration of the refugees’ perilous journey. Many of them fled in small, leaky boats into the South China Sea, where they perished from drowning, starvation or violence at the hands of pirates.



# SENATE

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# PROCEEDINGS

**S-219**

Second Session, Forty-first Parliament,  
62-63 Elizabeth II, 2013-2014

**SENATE OF CANADA**

## **BILL S-219**

An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War

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FIRST READING, APRIL 10, 2014

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THE HONOURABLE SENATOR NGO

**S-219**

Deuxième session, quarante et unième législature,  
62-63 Elizabeth II, 2013-2014

**SÉNAT DU CANADA**

## **PROJET DE LOI S-219**

Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam

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PREMIÈRE LECTURE LE 10 AVRIL 2014

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L'HONORABLE SÉNATEUR NGO

## SUMMARY

This enactment designates the thirtieth day of April in each and every year as “Black April Day”.

## SOMMAIRE

Le texte désigne le 30 avril comme « Jour de l’Avril noir ».

SENATE OF CANADA

SÉNAT DU CANADA

## BILL S-219

## PROJET DE LOI S-219

An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War

Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam

Preamble

Whereas the Canadian Forces were involved in the Vietnam War with supervisory operations to support the aim of establishing peace and ending the Vietnam War by assisting in the enforcement of the Paris Peace Accords of 1973;

Whereas on April 30, 1975, despite the Paris Peace Accords, the military forces of the People's Army of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front invaded South Vietnam, which led to the fall of Saigon, the end of the Vietnam War and the establishment of a single-party socialist government;

Whereas the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that these events and the conditions faced by individuals in Vietnam, including deteriorating living conditions and human rights abuses, contributed to the exodus of approximately 840,000 Vietnamese people, who were referred to at the time as "Vietnamese boat people", to neighbouring countries in the ensuing years;

Whereas the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that at least 250,000 Vietnamese people lost their lives at sea during the exodus of the Vietnamese people for reasons that included drowning, illness, starvation and violence from kidnapping or piracy;

Attendu :

que les Forces canadiennes ont pris part à la guerre du Vietnam dans le cadre d'opérations de surveillance menées pour appuyer l'objectif de rétablir la paix et de mettre fin à la guerre du Vietnam, en aidant à assurer le respect des Accords de paix de Paris de 1973;

que le 30 avril 1975, malgré les Accords de paix de Paris, les forces militaires de l'Armée populaire vietnamienne et du Front national de libération ont envahi le Vietnam du Sud, ce qui a entraîné la chute de Saïgon, la fin de la guerre du Vietnam et l'établissement d'un gouvernement socialiste à parti unique;

que, selon le Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés, ces événements ainsi que la situation vécue par les gens du Vietnam, notamment la détérioration des conditions de vie et les violations des droits de la personne, ont contribué à l'exode de quelque 840 000 d'entre eux — appelés à l'époque les « réfugiés de la mer vietnamiens » — vers les pays voisins au cours des années qui ont suivi;

que, d'après un rapport du Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés, au moins 250 000 Vietnamiens sont décédés en mer au cours de cet exode en raison

Préambule

Whereas the sponsorship refugee program in Canada, assisted by the efforts of Canadian families, Canadian charities, religious groups and non-governmental organizations, contributed to Canada accepting more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees, among whom it has been estimated that 34,000 were privately sponsored and 26,000 were assisted by the Canadian government;

Whereas the major and sustained contribution by the people of Canada to the cause of refugees was recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees when it awarded the Nansen Refugee Award to the “People of Canada” in 1986;

And whereas April 30 is referred to by many members of the community of displaced Vietnamese people and their families in Canada as “Black April Day” and is, therefore, an appropriate day to designate as a day to remember and commemorate the lives lost and the suffering experienced during the exodus of Vietnamese people, the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees in Canada, the gratitude of Vietnamese people to the Canadian people and the Government of Canada for accepting them, and the contributions of Vietnamese-Canadian people — whose population is now approximately 300,000 — to Canadian society;

Now, therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

#### SHORT TITLE

Short title

**1.** This Act may be cited as the *Black April Day Act*.

#### BLACK APRIL DAY

Black April Day

**2.** Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the thirtieth day of April shall be known as “Black April Day”.

Not a legal holiday

**3.** For greater certainty, Black April Day is not a legal holiday or a non-juridical day.

notamment des noyades, de la maladie, de la famine et des violences liées aux enlèvements ou aux actes de piraterie;

que, grâce aux efforts des familles canadiennes et à ceux des groupes religieux, des organismes de bienfaisance et des organismes non gouvernementaux du Canada, le programme canadien de parrainage des réfugiés a permis d’accueillir au pays plus de 60 000 réfugiés vietnamiens, parmi lesquels, selon les estimations, 34 000 ont été parrainés par des organismes du secteur privé et 26 000 ont reçu l’aide du gouvernement canadien;

que le Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés a reconnu la contribution importante et soutenue de la population canadienne à la cause des réfugiés lorsqu’il a décerné la distinction Nansen pour les réfugiés au « peuple canadien » en 1986;

qu’il convient de désigner le 30 avril — que de nombreux membres de la communauté des Vietnamiens déplacés et leurs familles au Canada reconnaissent déjà comme « jour de l’Avril noir » — en tant que journée pour commémorer les vies perdues et la souffrance vécue lors de l’exode du peuple vietnamien, souligner l’accueil des réfugiés vietnamiens par la population et le gouvernement du Canada et la gratitude du peuple vietnamien à l’égard cet accueil, et reconnaître les contributions apportées par les Vietnamiens — aujourd’hui au nombre d’environ 300 000 — à la société canadienne,

La Sa Majesté, sur l’avis et avec le consentement du Sénat et de la Chambre des communes du Canada, édicte :

#### TITRE ABRÉGÉ

**1.** *Loi sur le Jour de l’Avril noir.*

Titre abrégé

#### JOUR DE L’AVRIL NOIR

**2.** Le 30 avril est, dans tout le Canada, désigné comme « Jour de l’Avril noir ».

Jour de l’Avril noir

**3.** Il est entendu que le Jour de l’Avril noir n’est pas une fête légale ni un jour non juridique.

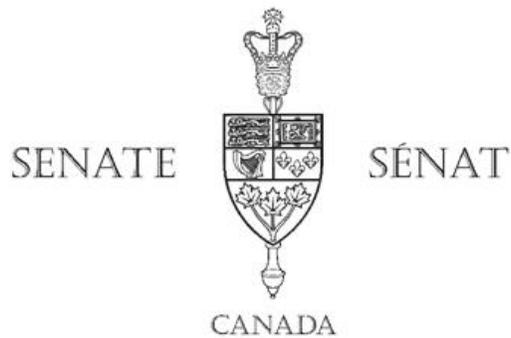
Statut





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Disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>



# Debates of the Senate

Bill S-219 Second Reading

OFFICIAL REPORTS  
(HANSARD)

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Part 1: VOLUME 149 • NUMBER 54 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

**Wednesday, April 30, 2014**

**Speech by: The Honourable Thanh Hai Ngo**

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Part 2: VOLUME 149 • NUMBER 57 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

**Wednesday, May 7, 2014**

**Speaker: The Honourable Noël A. Kinsella**

## THE SENATE

Wednesday, April 30, 2014

### BLACK APRIL DAY BILL

#### SECOND READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo moved second reading of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise today with immense privilege and honour to summon your support on Bill S-219, An Act recognizing April 30 as a national day of commemoration of the exodus of the Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and at the end of the Vietnam War.

Bill S-219 will recognize April 30 as Black April Day. This commemoration day will bring the attention of all Canadians to the events and suffering that followed the fall of Saigon after the Vietnam War in 1975. It would also shed light on the fundamental role that Canadians played in rescuing and welcoming thousands of Vietnamese refugees.

. (1450)

Many might wonder about the significance of the end of the Vietnam War and the impact it had on Canadian history. Some might also ask why April 30 deserves a day of commemoration. In truth, too little is known about the struggles and atrocities that followed the devastating Vietnam War. Even fewer are aware of Canada's humanitarian role in the aftermath of the war. Unlike the Cold War and both world wars taught in schools across the country, Canada's implication with the Vietnam War and its boat people are often overlooked and forgotten.

The Vietnam War was very much driven by opposing ideologies between the two different political systems. The Cold War brought the Vietnam communists in the north against the Vietnam democratic south in an 18-year-long war. The Republic of South Vietnam courageously fought to defend freedom and democracy for over two decades in order to prevent the spread of communism. This prolonged struggle between the north and the south of Vietnam was an attempt from the communist north to invade the democratic south in order to bring South Vietnam under its rule.

The north communist forces broke the Paris Peace Accord by invading South Vietnam and by establishing a ruthless totalitarian regime throughout the country after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, a dark day that shook the world and forced millions of Vietnamese to leave their war-torn homes in search of safety and freedom.

Even if Canada was not directly implicated in the war, it showed its involvement in other ways. Although the Canadian Forces were not directly involved in the combat or in the conflict, they undertook a supervisory operational role during the Vietnam War in order to support the aim of establishing peace and ending the war by assisting the enforcement of the Paris Accord of 1973. Canada also served on two international truth commissions and provided medical supplies and technical assistance.

From 1954 to 1973, Canada was a member of the International Control Commission that oversaw truce agreements in Vietnam and was limited to neutral nations. Canadian diplomats were further renowned for their involvement in negotiations between Washington and Hanoi. It was always maintained and agreed that Ottawa was an impartial actor and acted as an objective and respected peacekeeper while it administered humanitarian aid to the victims and refugees of the war.

After long battles and endless losses on both sides of the war, the fall of Saigon took place with the capture of the capital of South Vietnam by the People's Army of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front on April 30, 1975. This dark day marked the end of the Vietnam War and the beginning of the formal reunification of North Vietnam and South Vietnam into a communist state ruled by a one-party regime.

For the current Vietnamese Socialist Republic, April 30 is celebrated as a day of military victory over the Americans. However, April 30, 1975, marks a sad day for far many more people, especially for those from South Vietnam.

For Canadians of Vietnamese origin and the wide Vietnamese diaspora now living abroad, April 30 depicts a day when South Vietnam fell under the power of an authoritarian and oppressive communist regime that pays no heed to human rights. We remember April 30 as a black day, because it represents the sad day we lost our country, our families, our friends, our homes, our freedom, and our democratic rights. It commemorates a day of loss and grief.

After the Vietnam War, over 65,000 Vietnamese were executed and over 1 million were sent to prison and rehabilitation camps where it was estimated that around 165,000 died because of retribution from North Vietnamese communists.

The years after the fall of Saigon from 1975 to 1996 were known to be the largest mass migration in modern history with more than 1.5 million people leaving the war-torn country in search of freedom.

What was unique about the Vietnamese exodus was that unlike most other migrations that often are displaced through mountains, deserts and oceans, the only route of escape for Vietnamese fleeing the country was by navigating the sea. This is why this group of refugees has become known to the world as the "boat people." Many Vietnamese people had to sail in rickety broken boats from the South China Sea, where they faced constant, unimaginable peril. They had to navigate not only through deadly storms but also through diseases and starvation.

The primary cause of death of the boat people was drowning, and being attacked by pirates, being murdered or sold into slavery and prostitution. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, over 250,000 perished in the seas looking for a brighter future and freedom.

Honourable senators, many Vietnamese Canadians' journeys and arrivals to Canada are not part of our national heritage. I

want to share with you a few stories of survival of the Vietnamese boat people on their journey to Canada.

One wrote:

On the eighth day, my three-year-old daughter died, on the ninth day my eight-year-old son died, and on the tenth, my wife's smallest niece died.... We were on the sea without food or water for about 13 days. Then I wrote a letter, put it in a bottle and threw it overboard, hoping someone would find it and let my family know I died at sea.

Another story:

It began one morning, when we set out to sea, heading into the unknown. As a fourteen-year-old boy, there I was with my sixteen-year-old brother and 150 other people on a small wooden boat designed to carry a third of that number when we arrived at one of Malaysia's Terumbu islands. The journey had taken four days and three nights, during which time we experienced two major storms and an angry sea that threatened to swallow us all. We witnessed many painful things during that trip, one of the most affecting being that an infant was crushed on and died, and his body was thrown overboard.

Another:

The lid was closed, and we were told to be quiet because the police would be inspecting the boat before it could leave to go out fishing. I did not expect to be put in a very small secret compartment of the boat underneath an icebox. It was dark and hot in there and I had no room to move. Other bodies were weighing down on me. Then the air became so thick it was almost impossible to breathe. Children started to cry, and their parents tried frantically to cover their mouths. I wanted to cry out also because I was so hot, so uncomfortable and so desperate for air. And I began to seriously fear for myself and my brother. Then it occurred to me that breath is life, and without it there would be no freedom. I told myself to hold on for one breath, and another one, and another one....

[Translation]

Honourable senators, these are but a few of the thousands of stories told by survivors. I could spend hours reading these stories about the Vietnam exodus, but I am sure that these few descriptions will give you an idea of what the Vietnamese boat people endured in their search for refuge and freedom.

[English]

What is even more unfortunate is that some countries turned the boat people away, even when a boat full of refugees managed to reach land. These refugees often had to travel even farther from their homeland and settle in Canada, France, Australia, the United States and United Kingdom. The United States accepted 800,000 refugees, Britain accepted 20,000 and France 96,000. Australia and Canada accepted 137,000 each. The Vietnamese diaspora across the globe now amounts to approximately 3.5 million.

. (1500)

Honourable senators, Bill S-219 is not only about commemorating the boat people who lost their lives during the exodus. It is also a commemoration of how Canada welcomed these refugees with open arms. Canada's role has often been forgotten with the passing years.

[Translation]

In light of the growing migration of Vietnamese refugees, the federal government created a private sponsorship program under which it would invite volunteer organizations, churches and groups of at least five adult citizens to welcome a family of refugees and provide them with support for one year. For each privately sponsored person, the government would sponsor another refugee.

Without the kind and attentive efforts of thousands of Canadians and without the leadership, support and cooperation of the federal, provincial and municipal governments, Canadian and international refugee agencies, non-governmental organizations and religious groups, the migration of such a large number of people in such urgent and dire circumstances would not have been possible.

[English]

I first arrived in Canada with other Vietnamese refugees. In a moment of great need, this country welcomed us after we lived through a devastating war, suffering in refugee camps and enduring long boat trips to escape the place we could no longer call home. Like many others, I had to struggle and work hard to support myself and my family in the new environment.

In July 1979, the Canadian government, under then Prime Minister Joe Clark, made its historic announcement of a target figure of 50,000 Vietnamese refugees to be admitted to Canada by the end of the 1980s. But in February 1980, the government announced that this figure would be increased from 50,000 to 60,000.

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, Canadians graciously opened their homes and hearts to over 60,000 Vietnamese refugees who desperately needed a place to rebuild their lives. Canadians from all walks of life responded without hesitation, and they became part of a vast international effort dedicated to finding a safe haven for these unfortunate people.

[Translation]

Of the 60,000 Vietnamese refugees welcomed to Canada between 1979 and 1980, roughly 26,000 were sponsored by the government and 34,000 were sponsored by private agencies.

[English]

In 1986, the people of Canada were awarded the Nansen Medal by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in recognition of their major and sustained contribution to the cause of refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Nansen Medal was awarded to the people of Canada for their extraordinary efforts on behalf of the Vietnamese refugees. This was the only time a country has ever been awarded this Nansen award.

Without Canada's generosity and humanity, I never could have achieved what I have today. I proudly rise as a senator and defend freedom, human rights and democracy without fearing for my life. Today, I can look at my family and know that I have been able to provide for them and ensure their well-being.

For 39 years, every year on April 30, Vietnamese who live in exile throughout the world gather to remember the loss of their country. For all Vietnamese-Canadians, April 30 marks a day of remembrance. We remember the acts of brutality and the inhumanity with which the communists treated their adversaries. While there are certainly no positive outcomes from the brutal Vietnam War, there is one good ending. The Vietnamese boat people who escaped from Vietnam during and after the conflict have had a huge, positive impact on the countries in which they settled. Vietnamese immigrants and refugees integrated quickly and extremely well in the fabric of their new homelands. Since their establishment, they have made immense economic contributions to their adopted countries. Many of them are now lawyers, doctors, judges, directors, artists, journalists.

Canada is now home to more than 300,000 Vietnamese-Canadians, with now three proud generations who celebrate an important heritage in a great nation. Since coming to Canada, the Vietnamese communities have constantly shown that they are hard-working Canadians capable of becoming an integral part of Canadian society. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese people lost their lives in an attempt to find a better future and the pursuit of freedom. These men, women and children fought for democracy, human rights, justice and freedom. For the younger Canadian generation who were born and raised in a free society, freedom is like air.

We hardly ever think about the importance and delicate nature of freedom because it is always here for us. But to the 90 million Vietnamese living in a communist country full of oppression and prohibition, freedom does not exist.

Bill S-219 will not only remember the atrocities that followed the fall of Saigon but also commemorate the achievement of Vietnamese-Canadians concurrently to highlight a new chapter in Canada. While remembering the past, we are able to focus on the present and future as well. Canada is a wonderful country because we recognize that each generation has a responsibility to make the future better for the next generation, and every one of us has an individual responsibility to do our share.

April 30 is now a day when the Vietnamese diaspora in Canada dedicates itself to restoring those fundamental values and to reminding us and raising awareness about the freedoms and liberties that define our society and this great institution. April 30 is also remembered as the day that commemorates the struggles, courage and heroism of those who fought for democracy, human rights and freedom. April 30 is a day when we thank Canada for saving our lives.

I would like to point out that without Canada's generosity and humanity, I and thousands of Vietnamese refugees could never have achieved what we have today.

We are now allowed to live in a wonderful country where we can enjoy freedom and democracy as proud Canadians. It is the openness of the people, the opportunities and the democratic values that inspire us to make our home here in Canada. These are the same values we wish to promote for the millions of Vietnamese whose basic human rights are close to non-existent. To this day, the human rights situation in Vietnam has deteriorated significantly. This year alone marked an intensifying crackdown on religious freedoms, fundamental human rights and the rule of law. This is why today brings the Vietnamese people together to remember the suffering, express gratitude and advocate on behalf of the Vietnamese who don't enjoy the basic human rights and religious freedoms we enjoy here in Canada.

I urge both sides of the Senate, as well as our colleagues in the other chamber, to regard this bill as an integral part of Canadian heritage and as a testimony to human rights, freedom and democracy.

Honourable senators, it is my great honour to be speaking a second time about this bill, on the exact day the bill seeks to recognize. It is my hope that next year we will be able to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Black April Day.

[Translation]

Honourable senators, I want to thank you for your support in making April 30 "Black April Day."

(On motion of Senator Fraser, debate adjourned.)

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## BLACK APRIL DAY BILL

## SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

## On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Ngo, seconded by the Honourable Senator Ogilvie, for the second reading of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War.

Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer: Honourable senators, I rise to speak about Bill S-219, the Black April Day act. I would like to thank Senator Ngo for tabling this bill. I'm certain there are many in the Vietnamese community who would like to thank him, as well, so thank you, Senator Ngo.

For the Vietnamese communities around the world, Black April Day is one of the most significant days of their collective history. It recognizes the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the takeover of South Vietnam by the North, and the beginning of the mass exodus of millions of Vietnamese people from their beloved homeland.

During this exodus, many Vietnamese were forced to leave their homeland, and by any means necessary. Sadly, this meant the use of overcrowded, poorly constructed boats.

At the time, approximately 840,000 Vietnamese who fled became known as "Vietnamese boat people" because of their use of those dangerous boats. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that at least 215,000 people lost their lives at sea in the desperate attempt to flee Vietnam. Many died by drowning, illness and starvation. In other cases, boats were hijacked by pirates, their passengers kidnapped and sold into slavery.

Senator Ngo has stated several stories about the suffering of the Vietnamese boat people. I would like to tell you one that really struck me. It is the story of a girl named Thuy Trang Lai. She writes:

I was 11 years old when I fled my homeland in a frenetic whirlwind of madness, confusion, and fear. What I recall most vividly was a sudden devastating realisation that my mother wasn't coming with me.

She stayed to look after the rest of the family. She could afford only to send one of her children out of the country, and I was the eldest. But no one had told me any of this — I had no idea I was leaving. It wasn't until the moment when my seventeen-year-old cousin grabbed me by the hand and the two of us ran off that I had any inkling my life was about to change. It was a moment that has me in tears even to this day.

I have tried to block out the horrors of that boat trip during the first terrible seventy-two hours. The South China Sea is merciless at the best of times, and it was as though our boat would be swallowed at any moment. I clutched at my stomach to keep the vomit down. I held desperately onto my knees and shut my eyes tight to stop myself from thinking too much about my mother.

But there was one thing I couldn't block out. A dream, a particular dream. How I cried when I awoke from it! It was the hard damp timber I had been sleeping on that woke me. Then I would feel the tears pour from my eyes, down my cheeks and into the hands that desperately craved to reach out to my mother. In the dream I was drinking lemonade Mum would make at home and, as always, she was there beside me.

It felt so real, and it was so beautiful that it turned into a real nightmare when I woke. In that sad moment I remembered how her arms would reach out for me whenever I needed her, and I cried until I ached.

The boat cut a sad figure on the furious sea. The half-broken vessel carried the weight of hundreds of people and their heavy hearts. We had to sit on top of each other, and couldn't even see our own arms and legs. Babies who resembled rag dolls howled day and night as people twenty years older than I was cried for their mothers too.

I was constantly shivering from being drenched in seawater, but at least it washed other people's vomit off me.

As the days passed, the boat began to stink of desperation. All around me were the hungry bodies and haunted faces of people deteriorating before my eleven-year-old eyes. The cramped conditions make it hard for us to move even an inch, so we often sat in the same position for days on end. It was as if Death visited me more times than I could count on one shivering hand.

. (1450)

Honourable senators, to be a refugee is one of the most difficult trials a person can face. There is an overwhelming helplessness that you feel when you are in the hands of the good will of the international community. I thank Canada and the policies of Prime Minister Trudeau which allowed my family and me to find a home here in Canada in 1975.

It was around that time when Senator Ngo also arrived in Canada as a refugee.

Those of us who have been refugees share an unspoken bond. We are acutely aware of the varying levels of suffering that each refugee undergoes. Some of us, through sheer chance, were put in a position where a country welcomed us with open arms, such as Canada. We are the lucky ones. Others were forced to spend their time in refugee camps or roam from one country to the next hoping that they would be accepted or, at the very least, allowed to remain in humane conditions.

For those of us, like Senator Ngo and myself, who were fortunate enough to have a country such as Canada accept us, we know that it could have very well been us on that boat or in a refugee camp. We could still be in a refugee camp.

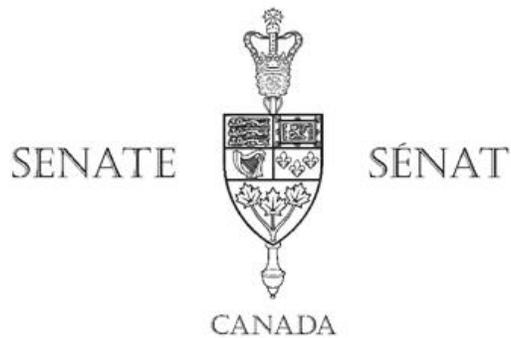
It is because of this understanding that Senator Ngo, you senators and I work hard to raise the awareness of the plight of refugees around the world.

Recognizing April 30 as Black April Day is a recognition of Canada's acceptance of 137,000 Vietnamese refugees between 1976 and 1991.

In particular, it is recognition of the Canadian families, religious groups, charitable groups and the non-governmental organizations that sponsored an estimated 34,000 Vietnamese refugees to come to Canada. It is also an acknowledgment of the suffering that many Vietnamese refugees, like the 11-year-old Thuy Trang Lai, underwent during their exodus or a boat ordeal.

Honourable senators, Bill S-219 is an important bill, not only for the Vietnamese community in Canada, but for anyone who has suffered the loss of one's beloved homeland and had to endure the status of refugee. It is for this reason that I would urge honourable senators to speak in favour of Bill S-219 and eventually vote for it.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)



# **Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights**

**OFFICIAL REPORTS  
(HANSARD)**

**EVIDENCE**

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Part 1: ISSUE 12 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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**Thursday, October 30, 2014  
Thursday, November 6, 2014**

**Chair: The Honourable Mobina S. B. Jaffer**

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Part 2: ISSUE 13 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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**Thursday, November 20, 2014**

**Chair: The Honourable Mobina S. B. Jaffer**

SENATE



SÉNAT

Second Session  
Forty-first Parliament, 2013-14

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*Proceedings of the Standing  
Senate Committee on*

## Human Rights

*Chair:*

The Honourable MOBINA S. B. JAFFER

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Thursday, October 30, 2014  
Thursday, November 6, 2014

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Issue No. 12

*Fifth meeting:*

Examine and report on how the mandates and practices of the UNHCR and UNICEF have evolved to meet the needs of displaced children in modern conflict situations, with particular attention to the current crisis in Syria

and

*First meeting:*

Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War

and

*Tenth meeting:*

Study the international mechanisms toward improving cooperation in the settlement of cross-border family disputes, including Canada's actions to encourage universal adherence to and compliance with the Hague Abductions Convention, and to strengthen cooperation with non-Hague State Parties with the purpose of upholding children's best interests

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WITNESSES:  
(See back cover)

Deuxième session de la  
Quarante et unième législature, 2013-2014

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*Délibérations du Comité  
sénatorial permanent des*

## Droits de la personne

*Présidente :*

L'honorable MOBINA S. B. JAFFER

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Le jeudi 30 octobre 2014  
Le jeudi 6 novembre 2014

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Fascicule n° 12

*Cinquième réunion :*

Étudier, pour en faire rapport, la façon dont les mandats et les méthodes de l'UNHCR et de l'UNICEF ont évolué pour répondre aux besoins des enfants déplacés dans les situations de conflits contemporains, en prêtant une attention particulière à la crise qui secoue actuellement la Syrie

et

*Première réunion :*

Projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam

et

*Dixième réunion :*

Étude sur les mécanismes internationaux visant à accroître la coopération pour régler les disputes familiales transfrontalières, notamment les efforts du Canada pour favoriser l'adhésion et la conformité universelles à la convention de La Haye sur l'enlèvement et renforcer la coopération avec les États non signataires, afin de défendre les intérêts des enfants

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TÉMOINS :  
(Voir à l'endos)

STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The Honourable Mobina S. B. Jaffer, *Chair*

The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, *Deputy Chair*

and

The Honourable Senators:

Andreychuk	Eaton
* Carignan, P.C. (or Martin)	Eggleton, P.C.
* Cowan (or Fraser)	Hubley
	Ngo
	Tannas

\*Ex officio members

(Quorum 4)

*Changes in membership of the committee:*

Pursuant to rule 12-5, membership of the committee was amended as follows:

The Honourable Senator Tannas replaced the Honourable Senator Raine (*October 2, 2014*).

The Honourable Senator Hubley replaced the Honourable Senator Cowan (*October 2, 2014*).

COMITÉ SÉNATORIAL PERMANENT DES DROITS DE LA PERSONNE

*Présidente* : L'honorable Mobina S. B. Jaffer

*Vice-présidente* : L'honorable Salma Ataullahjan

et

Les honorables sénateurs :

Andreychuk	Eaton
* Carignan, C.P. (ou Martin)	Eggleton, C.P.
* Cowan (ou Fraser)	Hubley
	Ngo
	Tannas

\* Membres d'office

(Quorum 4)

*Modifications de la composition du comité :*

Conformément à l'article 12-5 du Règlement, la liste des membres du comité est modifiée, ainsi qu'il suit :

L'honorable sénateur Tannas a remplacé l'honorable sénatrice Raine (*le 2 octobre 2014*).

L'honorable sénatrice Hubley a remplacé l'honorable sénateur Cowan (*le 2 octobre 2014*).

## ORDER OF REFERENCE

Extract from the *Journals of the Senate*, of Wednesday, October 29, 2014:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Ngo, seconded by the Honourable Senator Ogilvie, for the second reading of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War.

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

The bill was then read the second time.

The Honourable Senator Martin moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Nancy Ruth, that the bill be referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights.

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

## ORDRE DE RENVOI

Extrait des *Journaux du Sénat* du mercredi 29 octobre 2014 :

Reprise du débat sur la motion de l'honorable sénateur Ngo, appuyée par l'honorable sénateur Ogilvie, tendant à la deuxième lecture du projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam.

La motion, mise aux voix, est adoptée.

Le projet de loi est alors lu pour la deuxième fois.

L'honorable sénatrice Martin propose, appuyée par l'honorable sénatrice Nancy Ruth, que le projet de loi soit renvoyé au Comité sénatorial permanent des droits de la personne.

La motion, mise aux voix, est adoptée.

*Le greffier du Sénat,*

Gary W. O'Brien

*Clerk of the Senate*

## MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

OTTAWA, Thursday, October 30, 2014  
(20)

[English]

The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights met this day at 8:30 a.m., in room 9, Victoria Building, the chair, the Honourable Mobina S. B. Jaffer, presiding.

*Members of the committee present:* The Honourable Senators Andreychuk, Ataullahjan, Eaton, Eggleton, P.C., Jaffer, Nancy Ruth, Ngo and Tannas (8).

*In attendance:* Mark Palmer, Acting Procedural Clerk; Julia Nicol, Jean-Philippe Duguay, Analysts, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament.

*Also present:* The official reporters of the Senate.

Pursuant to the order of reference adopted by the Senate on Wednesday, October 29, 2014, the committee began its examination of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War.

## WITNESS:

The Honourable Senator Thanh Hai Ngo, sponsor of the bill.

The chair made a statement.

The Honourable Senator Ngo made a statement and answered questions.

At 8:57 a.m., the committee suspended.

At 9:09 a.m., the committee resumed, and pursuant to the order of reference adopted by the Senate on Tuesday, May 6, 2014, the committee continued its study to examine and report on how the mandates and practices of the UNHCR and UNICEF have evolved to meet the needs of displaced children in modern conflict situations, with particular attention to the current crisis in Syria. (*For the complete text of the order of reference, see proceedings of the committee, Issue No. 9.*)

## WITNESSES:

*Refugees International:*

Jeff Crisp, Senior Director for Policy and Advocacy (by video conference).

*Mercy Corps:*

Matt Streng, Senior Youth Development Advisor (by video conference).

Messrs. Crisp and Streng each made a statement and answered questions.

## PROCÈS-VERBAUX

OTTAWA, le jeudi 30 octobre 2014  
(20)

[Traduction]

Le Comité sénatorial permanent des droits de la personne se réunit aujourd'hui, à 8 h 30, dans la pièce 9 de l'édifice Victoria, sous la présidence de l'honorable Mobina S. B. Jaffer (*présidente*).

*Membres du comité présents :* Les honorables sénateurs Andreychuk, Ataullahjan, Eaton, Eggleton, C.P., Jaffer, Nancy Ruth, Ngo et Tannas (8).

*Également présents :* Mark Palmer, greffier à la procédure par intérim; ainsi que Julia Nicol et Jean-Philippe Duguay, analystes, Service d'information et de recherche parlementaires, Bibliothèque du Parlement.

*Aussi présents :* Les sténographes officiels du Sénat.

Conformément à l'ordre de renvoi adopté par le Sénat le mercredi 29 octobre 2014, le comité commence son étude du projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saigon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam.

## TÉMOINS :

L'honorable sénateur Thanh Hai Ngo, parrain du projet de loi.

La présidente ouvre la séance.

L'honorable sénateur Ngo fait une déclaration et répond aux questions.

À 8 h 57, la séance est suspendue.

À 9 h 9, la séance reprend et, conformément à l'ordre de renvoi adopté par le Sénat le mardi 6 mai 2014, le comité poursuit son étude, en vue d'en faire rapport, sur la façon dont les mandats et les méthodes de l'UNHCR et de l'UNICEF ont évolué pour répondre aux besoins des enfants déplacés dans les situations de conflits contemporains, en prêtant une attention particulière à la crise qui secoue actuellement la Syrie. (*Le texte intégral de l'ordre de renvoi figure au fascicule n° 9 des délibérations du comité.*)

## TÉMOINS :

*Refugees International :*

Jeff Crisp, directeur principal, Politiques et défense des intérêts (par vidéoconférence).

*Mercy Corps :*

Matt Streng, conseiller principal, Développement des jeunes (par vidéoconférence).

MM. Crisp et Streng font chacun une déclaration et répondent aux questions.

At 10:04 a.m., the committee adjourned to the call of the chair.

*ATTEST:*

OTTAWA, Thursday, November 6, 2014  
(21)

[English]

The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights met this day at 8:04 a.m., in room 9, Victoria Building, the chair, the Honourable Mobina S. B. Jaffer, presiding.

*Members of the committee present:* The Honourable Senators Andreychuk, Ataullahjan, Eaton, Jaffer, Nancy Ruth, Ngo and Tannas (7).

*In attendance:* Mark Palmer, Acting Procedural Clerk; Julia Nicol, Jean-Philippe Duguay and Shauna Troniak, Analysts, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament.

*Also in attendance:* The official reporters of the Senate.

Pursuant to the order of reference adopted by the Senate on Thursday, February 27, 2014, the committee continued its study of the international mechanisms toward improving cooperation in the settlement of cross-border family disputes, including Canada's actions to encourage universal adherence to and compliance with the Hague Abductions Convention, and to strengthen cooperation with non-Hague State Parties with the purpose of upholding children's best interests. (*For the complete text of the order of reference, see proceedings of the committee, Issue No. 3.*)

*WITNESSES:*

*As an individual:*

Nigel Lowe, Emeritus Professor, Cardiff Law School (by video conference).

*Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada:*

Bill Crosbie, Assistant Deputy Minister and Legal Adviser;

Béatrice Maillé, Director General, Consular Policy;

Leeann McKechnie, Director General, Consular Operations Bureau.

*Justice Canada:*

Kathryn Sabo, General Counsel and Director, International Private Law Section;

Marie Riendeau, Counsel, International Private Law Section;

Sandra Zed Finless, Office of the Canadian Federal Central Authority for the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, Legal Services Unit at Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada.

À 10 h 4, le comité s'ajourne jusqu'à nouvelle convocation de la présidence.

*ATTESTÉ :*

OTTAWA, le jeudi 6 novembre 2014  
(21)

[Traduction]

Le Comité sénatorial permanent des droits de la personne se réunit aujourd'hui, à 8 h 4, dans la pièce 9 de l'édifice Victoria, sous la présidence de l'honorable Mobina S. B. Jaffer (*présidente*).

*Membres du comité présents :* Les honorables sénateurs Andreychuk, Ataullahjan, Eaton, Jaffer, Nancy Ruth, Ngo et Tannas (7).

*Également présents :* Mark Palmer, greffier à la procédure par intérim; Julia Nicol, Jean-Philippe Duguay et Shauna Troniak, analystes, Service d'information et de recherche parlementaires, Bibliothèque du Parlement.

*Aussi présents :* Les sténographes officiels du Sénat.

Conformément à l'ordre de renvoi adopté par le Sénat le jeudi 27 février 2014, le comité poursuit son étude sur les mécanismes internationaux visant à accroître la coopération pour régler les disputes familiales transfrontalières, notamment les efforts du Canada pour favoriser l'adhésion et la conformité universelles à la convention de la Haye sur l'enlèvement et renforcer la coopération avec les États non signataires, afin de défendre les intérêts des enfants. (*Le texte intégral de l'ordre de renvoi figure au fascicule n° 3 des délibérations du comité.*)

*TÉMOINS :*

*À titre personnel :*

Nigel Lowe, professeur émérite, faculté de droit de l'Université de Cardiff (par vidéoconférence).

*Affaires étrangères, Commerce et Développement Canada :*

Bill Crosbie, sous-ministre adjoint et juriste;

Béatrice Maillé, directrice générale, Politique consulaire;

Leeann McKechnie, directrice générale, Opérations consulaires.

*Justice Canada :*

Kathryn Sabo, avocate générale et directrice, Section du droit privé international;

Marie Riendeau, avocate, Section du droit privé international;

Sandra Zed Finless, avocate-conseil, Bureau de l'Administration centrale fédérale du Canada pour la Convention de la Haye sur les aspects civils de l'enlèvement international d'enfants, Direction des services juridiques au ministère des Affaires étrangères, du Commerce et du Développement.

*Citizenship and Immigration Canada:*

Laurie-Anne Kempton, Director of Foreign Operations,  
Passport Program Integrity Branch;

Robert Stevenson, Operational Coordinator for Perimeter  
Implementation, Strategic Projects Office.

*Canada Border Services Agency:*

Calvin Christiansen, Director General, National Border  
Operations Centre.

The chair made a statement.

Mr. Lowe made a statement and answered questions.

At 9:04 a.m., the committee suspended.

At 9:08 a.m., the committee resumed.

Mr. Crosbie, Ms. Sabo, Ms. Kempton and Mr. Christiansen  
each made a statement and, together with Ms. Maillé,  
Ms. McKechnie, Ms. Riendeau, Ms. Zed Finless and  
Mr. Stevenson, answered questions.

At 9:58 a.m., the committee adjourned to the call of the chair.

*ATTEST:*

*Citoyenneté et Immigration Canada :*

Laurie-Anne Kempton, directrice des opérations à l'étranger,  
Direction générale de l'intégrité du Programme de  
passeport;

Robert Stevenson, coordinateur opérationnel du Plan d'action  
sur le périmètre, Bureau des projets stratégiques.

*Agence des services frontaliers du Canada :*

Calvin Christiansen, directeur général. Centre national des  
opérations frontalières.

Le président ouvre la séance.

M. Lowe fait une déclaration et répond aux questions.

À 9 h 4, la séance est suspendue.

À 9 h 8, la séance reprend.

M. Crosbie, Mme Sabo, M. Kempton et M. Christiansen  
font chacun une déclaration puis, avec Mme Maillé,  
Mme McKechnie, Mme Riendeau, Mme Zed Finless et  
M. Stevenson, répondent aux questions.

À 9 h 58, le comité s'ajourne jusqu'à nouvelle convocation de la  
présidence.

*ATTESTÉ :*

*Le greffier du comité,*

Adam Thompson

*Clerk of the Committee*

## EVIDENCE

OTTAWA, Thursday, October 30, 2014

The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, to which was referred Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, met this day at 8:30 a.m. to give consideration to the bill; and to examine and report on how the mandates and practices of the UNHCR and UNICEF have evolved to meet the needs of displaced children in modern conflict situations, with particular attention to the current crisis in Syria.

Senator Mobina S. B. Jaffer (*Chair*) in the chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Honourable senators, welcome to the twentieth meeting of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights during the Second Session of the Forty-First Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Our committee has been mandated by the Senate to study issues pertaining to human rights, both in Canada and abroad. My name is Mobina Jaffer, and I am the chair of this committee. I am pleased to welcome you to this meeting.

[*English*]

Before I continue, I would like my colleagues to introduce themselves, and I will start with our deputy chair, Senator Ataullahjan.

Senator Ataullahjan: Senator Salma Ataullahjan from Ontario.

Senator Eaton: Good morning. Senator Nicky Eaton from Ontario.

Senator Tannas: Scott Tannas from Alberta.

Senator Nancy Ruth: Nancy Ruth from Toronto.

The Chair: Thank you, senators. Today we are looking at Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War.

This bill was introduced in the Senate by Senator Ngo, who is originally from Vietnam, and he's the sponsor of this bill. We have him as the first witness this morning. Senator Ngo, may I please ask you to make your remarks.

Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo, sponsor of the bill: Thank you, Madam Chair.

## TÉMOIGNAGES

OTTAWA, le jeudi 30 octobre 2014

Le Comité sénatorial permanent des droits de la personne, auquel a été renvoyé le projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saigon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam, se réunit aujourd'hui, à 8 h 30, pour étudier le projet de loi et étudier, pour en faire rapport, la façon dont les mandats et les méthodes de l'UNHCR et de l'UNICEF ont évolué pour répondre aux besoins des enfants déplacés dans les situations de conflits contemporains, en prêtant une attention particulière à la crise qui se secoue actuellement la Syrie.

La sénatrice Mobina S. B. Jaffer (*présidente*) occupe le fauteuil.

[*Traduction*]

La présidente : Chers collègues, bienvenue à la 20<sup>e</sup> séance de la deuxième session de la 41<sup>e</sup> législature du Comité sénatorial permanent des droits de la personne.

[*Français*]

Le Sénat a confié à notre comité le mandat d'examiner les questions liées aux droits de la personne au Canada et à l'étranger. Je m'appelle Mobina Jaffer, et je suis la présidente du comité. J'ai l'honneur de vous souhaiter la bienvenue à cette réunion.

[*Traduction*]

Avant de poursuivre, j'invite mes collègues à se présenter, en commençant par la vice-présidente du comité, la sénatrice Ataullahjan.

La sénatrice Ataullahjan : Je suis la sénatrice Salma Ataullahjan, de l'Ontario.

La sénatrice Eaton : Bonjour. Je suis la sénatrice Nicky Eaton, de l'Ontario.

Le sénateur Tannas : Scott Tannas, de l'Alberta.

La sénatrice Nancy Ruth : Nancy Ruth, de Toronto.

La présidente : Merci, chers collègues. Aujourd'hui nous examinons le projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saigon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam.

Ce projet de loi a été déposé au Sénat par son auteur, le sénateur Ngo, d'origine vietnamienne, qui sera notre premier témoin, ce matin. Sénateur Ngo, puis-je vous demander de nous faire entendre vos observations.

L'honorable Thanh Hai Ngo, parrain du projet de loi : Merci, madame la présidente.

Honourable senators, I am pleased to be here this morning to speak about Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War.

It is with great appreciation that I appear before you with the hope of earning your support for this commemorative bill that seeks to recognize April 30 as the day marking the end of the fall of Saigon, commemorating the Vietnamese boat people's saga, and recognizing the fundamental role played by Canadians who welcomed thousands of Vietnamese refugees with open arms. As I expand on these important things, I hope to shed light on how meaningful the recognition of this important day would be for Canada and the 300,000 Vietnamese Canadians who trace their roots and history to the boat people saga.

I am confident that this commemoration day would bring the attention of all Canadians to the events and the suffering that followed the fall of Saigon after the Vietnam War in 1975. It would also shed light on the fundamental role that Canadians played in rescuing and welcoming thousands of the Vietnamese refugees who now proudly celebrate their heritage and freedom in Canada.

The Vietnam War was driven by opposing ideologies between two very different political systems. This prolonged struggle between North and South Vietnam was an attempt by the communist north to invade the democratic south in order to bring South Vietnam under its rule. After long battles and endless losses for both sides of the war, the fall of Saigon took place with the capture of the capital of South Vietnam by the People's Army of North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front on April 30, 1975. This dark day marked the end of the Vietnam War and the beginning of the communist state ruled by a one-party communist regime.

For Canadians of Vietnamese origin and for the wide Vietnamese diaspora now living abroad, April 30 depicts the day when South Vietnam fell and the beginning of their journey to freedom. After the Vietnam War, over 65,000 Vietnamese were executed and over 1 million Vietnamese were sent to prison and re-education camps, where it is estimated that around 165,000 died because of retribution by North Vietnamese communists.

The years following the fall of Saigon, from 1975 to 1996, were known to be the largest mass migration in modern history, with more than 1.5 million people leaving their war-torn country in search for freedom. What was unique about the Vietnamese exodus was that, unlike most other forced migration that often displace through mountains and deserts, the only route for escape for Vietnamese fleeing the country was by navigating the sea. This is why this group of refugees has become known to the world as the "boat people."

Chers collègues, je suis heureux de vous parler du projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saigon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam.

C'est avec beaucoup de reconnaissance que je compare devant vous, dans l'espoir d'obtenir votre appui pour ce projet de loi commémoratif qui vise à faire reconnaître le 30 avril comme journée marquant la fin de la chute de Saigon et l'histoire mouvementée des réfugiés vietnamiens de la mer, et reconnaissant le rôle fondamental des Canadiens qui ont accueilli à bras ouverts des milliers de ces réfugiés. En parlant de ces faits importants, j'espère éclairer le sens qu'aurait la reconnaissance de cette journée importante pour le Canada et les 300 000 Vietnamo-Canadiens dont les racines et l'histoire remontent jusqu'à l'épisode de ces réfugiés.

J'ai bon espoir que cette journée commémorative attirera l'attention de tous les Canadiens sur les événements et les souffrances qui ont suivi la chute de Saigon après la guerre du Vietnam, en 1975. Elle éclairera aussi le rôle fondamental des Canadiens dans le sauvetage et l'accueil de milliers de réfugiés vietnamiens qui, aujourd'hui, célèbrent fièrement leur patrimoine et leur liberté au Canada.

La guerre du Vietnam a été conduite au nom d'idéologies opposées, entre deux systèmes politiques très différents. La lutte prolongée entre le Vietnam du Nord et le Vietnam du Sud a résulté de la tentative des communistes du Nord, d'envahir le Sud démocratique pour l'assujettir. Après de longues batailles et des pertes innombrables des deux côtés, Saigon, la capitale du Vietnam du Sud, est finalement tombée, le 30 avril 1975, capturée par l'Armée populaire vietnamienne nordiste et le Front national de libération. Cette sombre date marque la fin de la guerre du Vietnam et le début de l'État dirigé par un régime communiste à parti unique.

Pour les Canadiens d'origine vietnamienne et la nombreuse diaspora vietnamienne, le 30 avril rappelle la chute du Vietnam du Sud et le début de la fuite vers la liberté. Après la guerre du Vietnam, plus de 65 000 Vietnamiens ont été exécutés et plus d'un million d'autres ont été jetés en prison ou envoyés dans des camps de rééducation, où on estime que les châtiments infligés par les communistes du Nord en ont tué 165 000.

La période de 1975 à 1996 qui suit la chute de Saigon coïncide avec la plus grande migration de masse de l'histoire moderne, alors que plus de 1,5 million d'habitants quittent leur pays déchiré par la guerre pour trouver la liberté. Dans cet exode, qui se distingue des autres migrations forcées qui traversent souvent des montagnes et des déserts, la mer offre la seule issue aux Vietnamiens en fuite. Voilà pourquoi on les connaît dans le monde entier sous l'appellation de « boat people », les réfugiés de la mer.

Many Vietnamese people had to sail in rickety, broken boats from the South China Sea, where they faced constant, unimaginable peril. They had to navigate not only through deadly storms but also through disease and starvation. The primary causes of death of the boat people was drowning, attacks by pirates, murder or by being sold into slavery or prostitution. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, over 250,000 people perished in the seas looking for freedom.

Honourable colleagues, Bill S-219 is not only about commemorating the refugees that lost their lives during the exodus; it is also a recognition and an expression of gratitude to Canada for welcoming so many refugees with open arms.

With the passing years, Canada's role during the post-Vietnam War era has often been forgotten. This is truly unfortunate, because without the warm and caring effort of thousands of Canadians and without the leadership, support and cooperation of federal, provincial and municipal governments, as well as Canadians, international refugee agencies, non-governmental organizations and religious groups, the movement of such a large number of people under such urgent and difficult circumstances would not have been possible.

Some countries turned the boat people away, even when their boat of refugees managed to reach land. So these refugees often had to travel further away from their homeland and settle in Canada, France, Australia, United States and the United Kingdom. The United States accepted 823,000 refugees. Britain accepted 19,000; France accepted 96,000; and Australia and Canada accepted 137,000 each.

Following the growing migration of Vietnamese refugees, Canada developed a private sponsorship program, where it would seek the assistance of voluntary organizations, churches and groups of at least five adult citizens who could sponsor and provide for a refugee's family through their church for a year. For each person they sponsored, the government accepted another refugee under its own care.

In July 1979, the Canadian government, under then Prime Minister Joe Clark, made the historic announcement of a target figure of 50,000 Vietnamese refugees to be admitted to Canada by the end of 1980. In February 1980, the government then announced that the admittance figure would be increased from 50,000 to 60,000.

[Translation]

Following the fall of Saigon in 1975, thousands of Canadians opened their homes and their hearts to more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees who desperately needed a place to rebuild their lives. Canadians from all walks of life showed no hesitation in answering the call and contributing to the huge international effort to find safe havens for those refugees.

Beaucoup de Vietnamiens ont été forcés de naviguer dans des bateaux délabrés de la mer de Chine méridionale où ils ont dû affronter un péril constant et inimaginable. Non seulement a-t-il fallu qu'ils traversent des tempêtes mortelles, mais ils ont aussi dû affronter la maladie et la famine. Noyades, attaques des pirates, meurtres, réduction en esclavage ou prostitution forcée, pour lesquels certains ont été vendus, voilà ce qu'ont été les principales causes de leur mortalité. D'après le Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés, plus de 250 000 sont morts en mer pendant leur quête de liberté.

Chers collègues, le projet de loi S-219 ne vise pas seulement à commémorer les réfugiés morts pendant l'exode, mais aussi l'accueil à bras ouverts que le Canada a réservé à tant de réfugiés et à exprimer leur gratitude.

Au fil des ans, le rôle du Canada après la guerre du Vietnam a souvent été oublié. C'est vraiment malheureux, parce que, sans la chaleur et la sollicitude de milliers de Canadiens et sans le leadership, l'appui et la coopération des autorités fédérales, provinciales et municipales, ainsi que des Canadiens, des organismes internationaux pour les réfugiés, des organisations non gouvernementales et des groupes religieux, le déplacement de tant de personnes, dans des circonstances aussi urgentes et aussi difficiles aurait été impossible.

Certains pays ont fermé la porte aux réfugiés de la mer, même quand leurs bateaux parvenaient à s'y rendre. C'est pourquoi ces réfugiés ont souvent dû s'éloigner de plus en plus de leur patrie et s'établir au Canada, en France, en Australie, aux États-Unis et au Royaume-Uni. Les États-Unis en ont accepté 823 000; la Grande-Bretagne, 19 000; la France, 96 000; l'Australie et le Canada, 137 000 chacun.

Après la migration d'un nombre de plus en plus grand de réfugiés vietnamiens, le Canada a élaboré un programme de parrainages privés, par lequel il cherchait à obtenir l'aide d'organisations de bénévoles, d'églises et de groupes constitués d'au moins cinq citoyens adultes qui pouvaient parrainer une famille de réfugiés et subvenir à leurs besoins, par l'entremise de leur église pendant un an. Pour chaque réfugié ainsi parrainé, le gouvernement en acceptait un autre, aux soins duquel il subvenait.

En juillet 1979, le gouvernement canadien, par le premier ministre Joe Clark, faisait l'annonce historique d'un objectif de 50 000 réfugiés vietnamiens qu'il se proposait d'admettre au Canada avant la fin de 1980. En février 1980, il annonçait que l'objectif était porté à 60 000.

[Français]

Après la chute de Saigon en 1975, des milliers de Canadiens ont ouvert leur foyer et leur cœur à plus de 60 000 réfugiés vietnamiens qui avaient désespérément besoin d'un endroit pour reconstruire leur vie. Des Canadiens de tous les horizons ont répondu à l'appel sans hésiter pour participer à cet immense effort international visant à trouver des lieux d'asile pour ces réfugiés.

Of the 60,000 refugees taken in by Canada between 1979 and 1980, about 26,000 were sponsored by the government, and 34,000 were hosted by private organizations, individuals and relatives. Over the course of the next decade — from 1982 to 1991 — more than 80,000 Vietnamese refugees came to Canada.

In 1986, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded the Nansen Refugee Award to the people of Canada for their major and sustained contribution to the cause of refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded Canadians the Nansen Award for the extraordinary efforts they invested in helping Indochinese refugees. This was the only time an entire country received the award.

Without the generosity and humanity of Canadians, I never could have had what I have today — an opportunity to live in a great country where I can benefit from freedom and democracy, and defend them without fearing for my life.

*[English]*

Bill S-219 would not only remember the sufferings that followed the fall of Saigon; it will also commemorate the achievements of Vietnamese-Canadians concurrently to highlight their new chapter in Canada.

For the past 39 years, every year, on April 30, Vietnamese-Canadians gather to remember a day of loss of their country and a new beginning. We remember April 30 as Black April Day because it represents the sad day we lost our country, our family, our friends, our home, our freedom and our democratic rights. It also commemorates a day of loss and grief.

I myself arrived in Canada with other Vietnamese refugees in a moment of great need. Canada welcomed us after we lived through a devastating war, suffered in refugee camps, and endured long boat trips to escape a place we could no longer call home. Like many others, I had to struggle and work hard to establish myself and my family in a new environment.

The Vietnamese boat people who escaped from Vietnam after the conflict have had an immense and positive impact on Canada. Vietnamese immigrants and refugees integrated quickly and extremely well into the fabric of their new homeland. They now proudly contribute to the Canadian multicultural mosaic.

My honourable colleagues, the Vietnamese-Canadians' journey and arrival to Canada are part of our national heritage. Since their establishment, they have made immense economic contribution to their adopted country. Many of them are now lawyers, doctors, judges, movie directors, artists, journalists and so on. Canada is now home to more than 300,000 Vietnamese-Canadians, 100,000 in the GTA alone, now with three proud generations who celebrate an important heritage in a great nation.

Sur les 60 000 réfugiés canadiens accueillis au Canada entre 1979 et 1980, environ 26 000 ont été parrainés par le gouvernement, tandis que 34 000 ont été accueillis par des organismes privés et des particuliers, et par des membres de leur parenté. Au cours de la décennie suivante, c'est-à-dire à partir de 1982 jusqu'à 1991, plus de 80 000 autres sont entrés au Canada.

En 1986, le Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés a décerné la distinction Nansen au peuple canadien pour sa contribution importante et soutenue à la cause des réfugiés. Cette distinction a été accordée par le Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés aux Canadiens pour les efforts extraordinaires qu'ils ont déployés en faveur des réfugiés d'Indochine; c'est la seule fois qu'un pays entier ait reçu cette distinction.

Sans la générosité et l'humanité des Canadiens, je n'aurais jamais pu avoir ce que j'ai aujourd'hui, c'est-à-dire la chance de vivre dans un magnifique pays où je peux bénéficier de la liberté et de la démocratie, et les défendre sans craindre pour ma vie.

*[Traduction]*

Le projet de loi S-219 ne commémore pas seulement les souffrances qui ont suivi la chute de Saigon, mais, aussi, les accomplissements des Vietnamo-Canadiens, pour souligner leur nouvelle vie au Canada.

Chaque année, le 30 avril, les Vietnamo-Canadiens se sont réunis pendant 39 ans pour se rappeler le deuil de leur pays et leur nouveau début ici. Cette date, pour nous, est le Jour de l'Avril noir, parce qu'il représente le triste jour où nous avons perdu notre pays, notre famille, nos amis, notre foyer, notre liberté et nos droits démocratiques. Ce jour commémore aussi une journée de pertes et de chagrins.

Moi-même, je suis arrivé au Canada en compagnie d'autres réfugiés vietnamiens, dans un moment de grande nécessité. Le Canada nous a accueillis après une guerre dévastatrice, des séjours douloureux dans des camps de réfugiés et de longs déplacements en bateau pour nous échapper d'un endroit que nous ne pouvions plus appeler notre patrie. Comme beaucoup d'autres, il nous a fallu nous démener et travailler fort pour nous établir, ma famille et moi, dans un nouveau milieu.

Les réfugiés de la mer qui se sont échappés du Vietnam après la guerre ont eu un apport immense et positif pour le Canada. Les immigrants et les réfugiés vietnamiens se sont intégrés rapidement et extrêmement bien dans leur nouvelle patrie. Ils contribuent maintenant fièrement à la mosaïque multiculturelle canadienne.

Chers collègues, la quête des Vietnamo-Canadiens et leur arrivée au Canada font partie de notre patrimoine national. Depuis leur installation, ils ont eu un apport économique immense pour leur pays d'adoption. Beaucoup sont avocats, médecins, juges, réalisateurs de films, artistes, journalistes et ainsi de suite. Plus de 300 000 Vietnamo-Canadiens vivent au Canada, 100 000 dans la seule région du Grand Toronto métropolitain, et ce sont trois générations fières de célébrer ce patrimoine important dans un grand pays.

Without Canada's generosity and humanity, neither myself nor thousands of Vietnamese refugees could ever have achieved what we have today. We are now allowed to live in a beautiful country where we can enjoy freedom and democracy as proud Canadians.

In closing, this bill officially recognizing April 30 provides Vietnamese-Canadians with an opportunity to remember the suffering of their past, allowing them to officially express gratitude to Canada, and enabling them to advocate on behalf of those in Vietnam who don't enjoy the basic human rights and religious freedom we enjoy here.

In 2015, the Vietnamese-Canadian community will celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the boat people's resettlement to Canada. It is my hope to have this bill passed in time to acknowledge their milestone celebration.

Finally, I would like to share, and I wish to share, that I intend to move amendments to this bill in this committee at the appropriate date. After careful consultation and consideration, I believe it is appropriate to change the short title of this bill from "Black April Day" to "Journey to Freedom Day."

[*Translation*]

I believe it is appropriate to change the French title of the bill from "Jour de l'Avril noir" to "Journée du parcours vers la liberté."

[*English*]

These amendments would illustrate the gratefulness Vietnamese-Canadians express towards Canada and acknowledge the will and courage of the boat people.

Indeed, April 30 depicts a dark day that shook the world and forced millions of Vietnamese to leave their war-torn home in search of safety and freedom. However, I believe these amendments would bring focus to the hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese boat people who lost their lives at sea in an attempt to pursue freedom.

Honourable senators, freedom isn't free, and the boat people paid for their freedom with their perilous journey.

It is with these brief comments I humbly ask for your support as we move Bill S-219 forward to recognize Vietnamese-Canadian heritage.

Thank you very much. It will be my pleasure to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Senator Ataullahjan: Thank you, Senator Ngo, for being here. I wanted to ask you about Project 4000. The City of Ottawa recognized Black April Day this year due to its involvement in Project 4000 in the early 1980s. What is Project 4000 and what effect has it on the city of Ottawa today?

Sans la générosité et l'humanité du Canada, des milliers de réfugiés vietnamiens, moi compris, n'auraient jamais pu obtenir ce que nous avons aujourd'hui. Nous pouvons maintenant vivre dans un magnifique pays où nous pouvons jouir fièrement, comme Canadiens, de la liberté et de la démocratie.

En conclusion, ce projet de loi, en reconnaissant le 30 avril, donne aux Vietnamo-Canadiens l'occasion de se souvenir des souffrances de leur passé, d'exprimer officiellement leur gratitude pour le Canada et de plaider en faveur des Vietnamiens qui ne jouissent pas des droits humains fondamentaux et de la liberté religieuse comme nous ici.

En 2015, collectivement, les Vietnamo-Canadiens célébreront le 40<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de l'établissement des réfugiés vietnamiens de la mer au Canada. J'ai bon espoir de faire adopter ce projet de loi à temps pour reconnaître leur célébration historique.

Enfin, je tiens à vous annoncer que j'ai l'intention de proposer au comité un amendement au projet de loi, à une date convenable. En effet, après consultations et prise en considération prudentes, je crois qu'il convient de modifier le titre abrégé du projet de loi pour y remplacer l'expression « Jour de l'Avril noir » par « Journée du parcours vers la liberté ».

[*Français*]

Je crois qu'il conviendrait de remplacer le titre en français de « Jour de l'Avril noir » par celui de « Journée du parcours vers la liberté ».

[*Traduction*]

Cette modification soulignerait la gratitude des Vietnamo-Canadiens pour le Canada et elle reconnaîtrait la volonté et le courage des réfugiés de la mer.

En effet, le 30 avril correspond à une sombre journée qui a ébranlé le monde et obligé des millions de Vietnamiens à quitter leur patrie déchirée par la guerre pour trouver ailleurs la sécurité et la liberté. Cependant, je crois que cette modification rappellerait à notre mémoire les centaines de milliers de réfugiés vietnamiens morts en mer en essayant d'obtenir la liberté.

Chers collègues, la liberté n'est pas gratuite, et les réfugiés de la mer, pour l'acquérir, ont dû vaincre des périls.

C'est par ces brèves observations que je demande humblement votre appui pour adopter le projet de loi S-219 visant à reconnaître le patrimoine vietnamo-canadien.

Merci beaucoup. Je serai heureux de répondre à vos questions.

La présidente : Je vous remercie beaucoup pour votre exposé.

La sénatrice Ataullahjan : Merci, sénateur Ngo, d'être ici. Je tenais à vous questionner sur le projet 4000. La Ville d'Ottawa a reconnu, cette année, le Jour de l'Avril noir, en raison de sa participation au projet 4000, au début des années 1980. En quoi a consisté ce projet, et quel effet a-t-il, aujourd'hui, sur la ville d'Ottawa?

Senator Ngo: Thank you for your question. Project 4000 is a project spearheaded by former mayor Marion Dewar. At that time we had the boat people arriving with such mass migrations, and the City of Ottawa, including other cities in Canada, accepted 4,000.

What we had to do first was to find churches, non-profit organizations and private sponsors to sponsor these people. The Government of Canada accepted them with the condition that for each family sponsored privately by a church or non-profit organization, or by ordinary Canadians, the Government of Canada would accept another refugee family. If you sponsored one family, the Canadian government would accept another family under its own care.

At that time I was the president of the Vietnamese association in Ottawa. I even travelled to Almonte and talked to the churches, to the priests, to the ministers and so on and asked them to sponsor Vietnamese refugees at that time.

With the 4,000 people at that time and the population of the city of Ottawa at that time, the number of the Vietnamese increased up to about 6,000 to 10,000 people. But later on, because of the work and job situation, more of them moved to Toronto. The older generation like us moved to Montreal because we speak French, and, at that time, I think it only 1 or 2 per cent went to Alberta and British Columbia.

Senator Eggleton: You mentioned changes. You did spell out one of them, which a more positive title for the bill. Are there any other changes you are proposing?

Senator Ngo: No, I didn't say anything political in the preamble; I just referred to the suffering of the Vietnamese refugees, the recognition of their journey, the recognition of the Canadian government, and so on. The Vietnamese diaspora overseas call April 30 "Black April Day" because "black" means the darkest day of their lives. They don't know anything else so they call it "Black April Day." When I spoke to them about introducing the bill, they said to do it as "Black April Day" because everybody knows about it. I told them that the bill is only not for the Vietnamese diaspora but also for the Canadian people.

After consultations I asked if we should change it to "Journey to Freedom Day" because we escaped and we have our freedom here in Canada? I think they all agreed that it was a good term. So anywhere we have the words "Black April Day" in the title, it will be changed to "Journey to Freedom Day."

Senator Eggleton: Yes, "Journey to Freedom." It seems to be encompassing other refugees perhaps at other times. Is it part of your intention here to make this more recognition of refugees and the plight of refugees in general? There have been other circumstances in Canadian history where we have taken in large

Le sénateur Ngo : Je vous remercie pour votre question. Le projet 4000, mené à l'époque par la mairesse Marion Dewar, alors que les réfugiés de la mer arrivaient en grand nombre, a fait que la Ville d'Ottawa, y compris d'autres grandes villes canadiennes, en a accepté 4 000.

Tout d'abord, il a fallu trouver des églises, des organismes sans but lucratif et des particuliers pour parrainer ces arrivants. Le gouvernement du Canada les a acceptés à la condition que, pour chaque famille ainsi acceptée, une autre serait parrainée à titre privé par une église ou une organisation sans but lucratif ou par des Canadiens ordinaires. Si vous aviez parrainé une famille, le gouvernement en acceptait une autre, à ses propres frais.

À l'époque, j'étais le président de l'association vietnamienne à Ottawa. Je suis même allé à Almonte pour m'adresser aux églises, aux prêtres, aux ministres et ainsi de suite, leur demander de parrainer des réfugiés vietnamiens.

Ces 4 000 personnes et la population de la ville d'Ottawa, à la même époque... le nombre de Vietnamiens est passé à environ 6 000 à 10 000 personnes. Mais, plus tard, à cause de la situation de l'emploi, beaucoup sont allés s'installer à Toronto. La vieille génération, comme la mienne, s'est installée à Montréal, parce que nous parlions français, et je pense que, à l'époque, seulement 1 ou 2 p. 100 de réfugiés sont allés s'installer en Alberta et en Colombie-Britannique.

Le sénateur Eggleton : Vous avez parlé de modifications. Vous nous en avez dévoilé une, qui donne au titre du projet de loi un ton plus positif. Proposez-vous d'autres modifications?

Le sénateur Ngo : Non. Dans le préambule, je n'ai tenu aucun propos politique; j'ai seulement fait allusion aux souffrances des réfugiés vietnamiens, à la reconnaissance de leurs déplacements, de l'apport du gouvernement canadien, et ainsi de suite. La diaspora vietnamienne appelle le 30 avril le Jour de l'Avril noir, parce que c'est la journée la plus sombre de la vie de ses membres. C'est la seule appellation qu'elle connaît pour cette journée. Quand j'ai parlé de mon projet de faire adopter cette loi, ses membres ont préconisé le « Jour de l'Avril noir » parce que tout le monde sait de quoi il s'agit. Je leur ai dit que le projet de loi ne visait pas seulement la diaspora vietnamienne mais aussi le peuple canadien.

Après consultations, j'ai demandé si nous devons plutôt parler, dans le projet de loi, de « Journée du parcours vers la liberté », parce que nous avons fui et nous avons gagné notre liberté ici, au Canada. Je pense que tous étaient d'accord. On remplacera donc partout l'expression « Jour de l'Avril noir » figurant dans le titre, par « Journée du parcours vers la liberté ».

Le sénateur Eggleton : Oui. « Journée du parcours vers la liberté », cette expression semble englober d'autres réfugiés, peut-être d'autres époques. Avez-vous l'intention de mieux faire reconnaître les réfugiés et leur détresse en général? Dans son histoire, notre pays a-t-il accueilli de nombreux réfugiés à la fois.

numbers of groups of people who are refugees. I don't know that we have named any days for those, so is this an opportunity here to make this broader and inclusionary?

Senator Ngo: Thank you for your question, senator. This was particularly for the recognition of the Vietnamese refugees. The day they started is April 30. They have this exact date because that's the date they lost the country.

Senator Eggleton: Right.

Senator Ngo: Other refugees have a continual influx. They leave daily, for example, in Libya and Syria. They don't have an exact day for their departure. This bill reflects the situation for the Vietnamese diaspora in Canada and overseas.

Senator Eaton: Senator Ngo, did you come over in 1975? Were you a boat person?

Senator Ngo: Unfortunately, the boat people started only in 1979. I came here in 1975. I came here as a refugee. I was in Bangkok at that time. I worked for the Vietnamese embassy in Bangkok. After the fall of the government, however, we became stateless; there was no recognition by the government, or whatever. I stayed there until May 27.

From April 30 to May 27, I am the person who went to the Thai ports where the boats escaped from Vietnam came. I helped them to secure their landing rights and to ensure that the Thai government would accept them temporarily, because at that time even the Thai government didn't know what to do with the Vietnamese refugees. I communicated with the Thai government officials and asked them to accept them as they were and then we would proceed from there.

At that time, the majority of the Vietnamese escaped to Bangkok, to Thailand. After that they went to Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The Chair: Senator Ngo, as you are aware, we have had a number of people write to us about issues on this bill. One of the things we have been asked is: Will this affect our relationships with Vietnam?

Senator Ngo: The diplomatic relations between Canada and Vietnam have existed since 1974, when the government of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau recognized the existence of North Vietnam, although in 1973 Canada was one of the countries in the Paris Accord.

This bill has nothing to do with the diplomatic relationships between Canada and Vietnam. If you read the preamble, you will see that I tried my best and did not put anything political in there regarding Vietnam and Canada. I just said let's recognize the exodus the Vietnamese people and the sufferance, the loss at sea, and so on. I never put anything political in this bill.

If someone is saying that it will harm diplomatic relations between Canada and Vietnam, well, the people who oppose the bill by saying that mostly come from the Vietnamese embassy in

J'ignore si nous leur avons consacré des journées spéciales. Est-ce donc une occasion pour élargir la portée de la commémoration, pour n'écarter personne?

Le sénateur Ngo : Je vous remercie de votre question. C'était particulièrement pour la reconnaissance des réfugiés vietnamiens. Le premier jour de leur départ est le 30 avril. Ce jour-là correspond à la date à laquelle ils ont perdu leur pays.

Le sénateur Eggleton : D'accord.

Le sénateur Ngo : D'autres réfugiés arrivent de façon continue. Ils partent chaque jour, par exemple, de Libye et de Syrie. Aucune date précise ne correspond à leur départ. Ce projet de loi traduit la situation de la diaspora vietnamienne au Canada et à l'étranger.

La sénatrice Eaton : Sénateur Ngo, êtes-vous arrivé en 1975? Étiez-vous un réfugié de la mer?

Le sénateur Ngo : Malheureusement, les premiers réfugiés de la mer ne datent que de 1979. Je suis arrivé ici en 1975. J'étais réfugié. Je venais de Bangkok, où je travaillais à l'ambassade du Vietnam. Après la chute du gouvernement, cependant, nous sommes devenus apatrides; nous n'avons pas été reconnus par le gouvernement ni aucune autre autorité. Je suis demeuré là-bas jusqu'au 27 mai.

Du 30 avril au 27 mai, j'ai visité les ports thaïs. C'est là qu'arrivaient les bateaux qui s'étaient enfuis du Vietnam. J'ai aidé ces réfugiés à obtenir leur droit d'escale et à les faire recevoir temporairement par le gouvernement thaï, qui, même lui, alors, ne savait que faire des réfugiés vietnamiens. J'ai demandé aux fonctionnaires thaïs de les accepter dans la situation où ils se trouvaient, après quoi nous verrions ce qu'il faudrait faire.

À l'époque, la majorité des Vietnamiens se sont enfuis vers Bangkok, vers la Thaïlande. Après, ils sont allés en Malaisie, en Indonésie, aux Philippines, à Hong Kong et à Singapour.

La présidente : Sénateur Ngo, comme vous savez, nous avons reçu du courrier sur le projet de loi. On y demandait notamment s'il modifiera nos relations avec le Vietnam.

Le sénateur Ngo : Les relations diplomatiques entre le Canada et le Vietnam existent depuis 1974, lorsque le gouvernement de l'ancien premier ministre Pierre Elliott Trudeau a reconnu l'existence du Nord-Vietnam, bien qu'en 1973, le Canada était l'un des pays dans l'Accord de Paris.

Le projet de loi n'a rien à voir avec les relations diplomatiques entre le Canada et le Vietnam. Si vous lisez le préambule, vous constaterez que j'ai fait de mon mieux et que je n'ai inclus aucun élément politique lié au Vietnam et au Canada. J'ai seulement dit qu'il serait bien de reconnaître l'exode du peuple vietnamien et leurs souffrances, les pertes en mer, et cetera. Je n'ai inclus aucun élément politique dans le projet de loi.

Si une personne soutient que mon projet de loi portera préjudice aux relations diplomatiques entre le Canada et le Vietnam, eh bien, les gens qui s'opposent au projet de loi en disant

Canada. They also had an interview in *Embassy* newspaper and everything they said in that article is not true. If you look at the bill, I didn't mention hatred or the atrocity of the North Vietnamese toward the Vietnamese people in South Vietnam; I didn't touch on any of that. If they said that, I don't think it's true.

The Chair: Can I ask you to elaborate on passing this bill? What will it mean for the community? What's the importance to the Vietnamese community?

Senator Ngo: For the Vietnamese community, it will acknowledge the day that they lost the country, the day they left Vietnam to come to Canada and the day Canada accepted them with open arms.

Basically, this is the day when all the Vietnam refugees will think, "I'm the lucky one because I came here and Canada accepted me with open arms." They wish to express their gratitude to Canada, and so on. Those are the things that the Vietnamese people would like to express and they have done it every single year.

The Chair: Senator Ngo, I want to thank you for your presentation and for taking this initiative. I'm sure we will hear again from you. Thank you very much for your presentation.

cela viennent surtout de l'ambassade du Vietnam au Canada. Ces gens ont également donné une entrevue dans le journal *Embassy* et tout ce qu'ils ont dit dans cet article est faux. Si vous examinez le projet de loi, vous constaterez que je n'ai pas mentionné la haine ou les atrocités des Nord-Vietnamiens à l'égard des habitants du Vietnam du Sud; je n'ai pas abordé ce sujet. S'ils ont dit cela, je pense que ce n'est pas vrai.

La présidente : Pourriez-vous nous en dire plus sur l'adoption du projet de loi? Que signifiera-t-il pour la communauté? Quelle est l'importance du projet de loi pour la communauté vietnamienne?

Le sénateur Ngo : Il reconnaîtra le jour où les membres de la communauté vietnamienne ont perdu leur pays, le jour où ils ont quitté le Vietnam pour venir au Canada et le jour où le Canada les a accueillis à bras ouverts.

Essentiellement, ce sera un jour où tous les réfugiés vietnamiens se diront qu'ils sont chanceux, car ils sont venus au Canada et le pays les a accueillis à bras ouverts. Ils souhaitent exprimer leur gratitude au Canada, et cetera. Ce sont les choses que le peuple vietnamien aimerait exprimer et ils l'ont fait chaque année.

La présidente : Sénateur Ngo, j'aimerais vous remercier d'avoir livré votre exposé et d'avoir entrepris cette initiative. Je suis sûre que nous vous entendrons à nouveau. Merci beaucoup de votre exposé.

SENATE



SÉNAT

CANADA

Second Session  
Forty-first Parliament, 2013-14

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Deuxième session de la  
quarante et unième législature, 2013-2014

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*Proceedings of the Standing  
Senate Committee on*

*Délibérations du Comité  
sénatorial permanent des*

HUMAN RIGHTS

DROITS DE LA PERSONNE

*Chair:*

The Honourable MOBINA S. B. JAFFER

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*Présidente :*

L'honorable MOBINA S. B. JAFFER

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Thursday, November 20, 2014

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Le jeudi 20 novembre 2014

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Issue No. 13

Fascicule n° 13

*Second (final) meeting:*

Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War

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*Deuxième (dernière) réunion :*

Projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam

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INCLUDING:  
THE NINTH REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE  
(Bill S-219)

---

Y COMPRIS :  
LE NEUVIÈME RAPPORT DU COMITÉ  
(Projet de loi S-219)

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WITNESSES:  
(See back cover)

TÉMOINS :  
(Voir à l'endos)

STANDING SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
HUMAN RIGHTS

The Honourable Mobina S. B. Jaffer, *Chair*

The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, *Deputy Chair*

and

The Honourable Senators:

Andreychuk	Eaton
* Carignan, P.C. (or Martin)	Eggleton, P.C. Nancy Ruth
* Cowan (or Fraser)	Ngo Tannas

\*Ex officio members

(Quorum 4)

*Change in membership of the committee:*

Pursuant to rule 12-5, membership of the committee was amended as follows:

The Honourable Senator Cowan replaced the Honourable Senator Hubley (*November 19, 2014*).

COMITÉ SÉNATORIAL PERMANENT DES  
DROITS DE LA PERSONNE

*Présidente* : L'honorable Mobina S. B. Jaffer

*Vice-présidente* : L'honorable Salma Ataullahjan

et

Les honorables sénateurs :

Andreychuk	Eaton
* Carignan, C.P. (ou Martin)	Eggleton, C.P. Nancy Ruth
* Cowan (ou Fraser)	Ngo Tannas

\* Membres d'office

(Quorum 4)

*Modification de la composition du comité :*

Conformément à l'article 12-5 du Règlement, la liste des membres du comité est modifiée, ainsi qu'il suit :

L'honorable sénateur Cowan a remplacé l'honorable sénatrice Hubley (*le 19 novembre 2014*).

**MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

OTTAWA, Thursday, November 20, 2014  
(22)

[English]

The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights met this day at 8 a.m., in room 9, Victoria Building, the deputy chair, the Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, presiding.

*Members of the committee present:* The Honourable Senators Andreychuk, Ataullahjan, Cowan, Eaton, Nancy Ruth, Ngo and Tannas (7).

*In attendance:* Mark Palmer, Acting Procedural Clerk; Julia Nicol and Jean-Philippe Duguay, Analysts, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament.

*Also in attendance:* The official reporters of the Senate.

Pursuant to the order of reference adopted by the Senate on Wednesday, October 29, 2014, the committee continued its study of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War. (*For the complete text of the order of reference, see proceedings of the committee, Issue No. 12.*)

**WITNESSES:**

*Canadian Immigration Historical Society:*

Mike Molloy, President.

*Vietnamese Canadian Federation:*

Can Le, Former Secretary General.

The chair made a statement.

Mr. Molloy and Mr. Le each made a statement and answered questions.

At 8:45 a.m., the committee suspended.

At 8:51 a.m., the committee resumed.

It was agreed that the committee proceed to clause-by-clause consideration of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War.

It was agreed that the title stand postponed.

It was agreed that the preamble stand postponed.

It was agreed that clause 1, which contains the short title, stand postponed.

**PROCÈS-VERBAL**

OTTAWA, le jeudi 20 novembre 2014  
(22)

[Traduction]

Le Comité sénatorial permanent des droits de la personne se réunit aujourd'hui, à 8 heures, dans la salle 9 de l'édifice Victoria, sous la présidence de l'honorable Salma Ataullahjan (*vice-présidente*).

*Membres du comité présents :* Les honorables sénateurs Andreychuk, Ataullahjan, Cowan, Eaton, Nancy Ruth, Ngo et Tannas (7).

*Également présents :* Mark Palmer, greffier à la procédure par intérim; Julia Nicol et Jean-Philippe Duguay, analystes, Service d'information et de recherche parlementaires, Bibliothèque du Parlement.

*Aussi présents :* Les sténographes officiels du Sénat.

Conformément à l'ordre de renvoi adopté par le Sénat le mercredi 29 octobre 2014, le comité poursuit son étude du projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam. (*Le texte intégral de l'ordre de renvoi figure au fascicule n° 12 des délibérations du comité.*)

**TÉMOINS :**

*Société historique de l'immigration canadienne :*

Mike Molloy, président.

*Vietnamese Canadian Federation :*

Can Le, ancien président.

La présidente prend la parole.

MM. Molloy et Le font chacun une déclaration, puis répondent aux questions.

À 8 h 45, la séance est suspendue.

À 8 h 51, la séance reprend.

Il est convenu que le comité procède à l'étude article par article du projet de loi S-19, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam.

Il est convenu de reporter l'étude du titre.

Il est convenu de reporter l'étude du préambule.

Il est convenu de reporter l'étude de l'article 1, qui contient le titre abrégé.

The chair asked whether clause 2 shall carry.

The Honourable Senator Ngo moved:

That Bill S-219 be amended in clause 2, on page 2, by replacing line 37 with the following:

““Journey to Freedom Day”.”.

After debate, the question being put on the motion in amendment, it was adopted.

It was agreed that clause 2, as amended, carry.

The chair asked whether clause 3 shall carry.

The Honourable Senator Ngo moved:

That Bill S-219 be amended in clause 3, on page 2, by replacing line 38 with the following:

“3. For greater certainty, Journey to Freedom Day is”.

After debate, the question being put on the motion in amendment, it was adopted.

It was agreed that clause 3, as amended, carry.

The chair asked whether clause 1, which contains the short title, shall carry.

The Honourable Senator Ngo moved:

That Bill S-219 be amended in clause 1, on page 2, by replacing line 33 with the following:

“1. This Act may be cited as the *Journey to Freedom*”.

After debate, the question being put on the motion in amendment, it was adopted.

It was agreed that clause 1, which contains the short title, as amended, carry.

The chair asked whether the preamble shall carry.

The Honourable Senator Ngo moved:

That Bill S-219 be amended in the preamble, on page 2, by replacing line 19 with the following:

“as “Black April Day”, or alternatively as “Journey to Freedom Day”, and is, therefore, an”.

After debate, the question being put on the motion in amendment, it was adopted.

After debate, it was agreed that Bill S-219 be amended, on page 1, in the preamble by replacing lines 12 and 13 with the following:

“War and the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government;”.

La présidente demande si l'article 2 est adopté.

L'honorable sénateur Ngo propose :

Que le projet de loi S-219 soit modifié à l'article 2, à la page 2, par substitution, à la ligne 39, de ce qui suit :

« désigné comme « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté ».

Après débat, la motion d'amendement, mise aux voix, est adoptée.

Il est convenu d'adopter l'article 2 modifié.

La présidente demande si l'article 3 est adopté.

L'honorable sénateur Ngo propose :

Que le projet de loi S-219 soit modifié à l'article 3, à la page 2, par substitution, à la ligne 40, de ce qui suit :

« 3. Il est entendu que la Journée du Parcours vers la liberté ».

Après débat, la motion d'amendement, mise aux voix, est adoptée.

Il est convenu d'adopter l'article 3 modifié.

La présidente demande si l'article 1, qui contient le titre abrégé, est adopté.

L'honorable sénateur Ngo propose :

Que le projet de loi S-219 soit modifié à l'article 1, à la page 2, par substitution, à la ligne 37, de ce qui suit :

« 1. *Loi sur la Journée du Parcours vers la liberté*. ».

Après débat, la motion d'amendement, mise aux voix, est adoptée.

Il est convenu d'adopter l'article 1, qui contient le titre abrégé, modifié.

La présidente demande si le préambule est adopté.

L'honorable sénateur Ngo propose :

Que le projet de loi S-219 soit modifié dans le préambule, à la page 2, par substitution, à la ligne 24, de ce qui suit :

« l'Avril noir » ou encore comme « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté » — en tant que journée pour ».

Après débat, la motion d'amendement, mise aux voix, est adoptée.

Après débat, il est convenu que le projet de loi S-219 soit modifié, dans le préambule, à la page 1, par substitution, aux lignes 13 et 14, de ce qui suit :

« La guerre du Vietnam et l'établissement du gouvernement de la République socialiste du Vietnam; »

After debate, the question being put on the motion in amendment, it was adopted.

It was agreed that the preamble, as amended, carry.

It was agreed that the title carry.

It was agreed that the bill, as amended, carry.

It was agreed that Bill S-219 be reported with amendments to the Senate.

At 9:02 a.m., the committee adjourned to the call of the chair.

*ATTEST:*

Après débat, la motion d'amendement, mise aux voix, est adoptée.

Il est convenu d'adopter le préambule modifié.

Il est convenu d'adopter le titre.

Il est convenu d'adopter le projet de loi modifié.

Il est convenu de faire rapport du projet de loi S-219, avec les propositions d'amendement, au Sénat.

À 9 h 2, le comité s'ajourne jusqu'à nouvelle convocation de la présidence.

*ATTESTÉ :*

*Le greffier du comité,*

Adam Thompson

*Clerk of the Committee*

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE**

Thursday, November 20, 2014

The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights has the honour to present its

**NINTH REPORT**

Your committee, to which was referred Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, has, in obedience to the order of reference of October 29, 2014, examined the said Bill and now reports the same with the following amendments:

*Preamble, page 1:* Replace lines 12 and 13 with the following:

“War and the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government;”.

*Preamble, page 2:* Replace line 19 with the following:

“as “Black April Day”, or alternatively as “Journey to Freedom Day”, and is, therefore, an”.

*Clause 1, page 2:* Replace line 33 with the following:

“1. This Act may be cited as the *Journey to Freedom*”.

*Clause 2, page 2:* Replace line 37 with the following:

““Journey to Freedom Day”.”.

*Clause 2, page 2:* Replace line 38 with the following:

“3. For greater certainty, Journey to Freedom Day is”.

Respectfully submitted,

*La vice-présidente,*

**SALMA ATAULLAHJAN**

*Deputy Chair*

**RAPPORT DU COMITÉ**

Le jeudi 20 novembre 2014

Le Comité sénatorial permanent des droits de la personne a l'honneur de présenter son

**NEUVIÈME RAPPORT**

Votre comité, auquel a été renvoyé le projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam, a, conformément à l'ordre de renvoi du 29 octobre 2014, examiné ledit projet de loi et en fait maintenant rapport avec les modifications suivantes :

*Préambule, page 1 :* Remplacer les lignes 13 et 14 par ce qui suit :

« la guerre du Vietnam et l'établissement du gouvernement de la République socialiste du Vietnam; ».

*Préambule, page 2 :* Remplacer la ligne 24 par ce qui suit :

« l'Avril noir » ou encore comme « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté » — en tant que journée pour ».

*Article 1, page 2 :* Remplacer la ligne 37 par ce qui suit :

« 1. Loi sur la Journée du Parcours vers la liberté. ».

*Article 2, page 2 :* Remplacer la ligne 39 par ce qui suit :

« désigné comme « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté ». ».

*Article 3, page 2 :* Remplacer la ligne 40 par ce qui suit :

« 3. Il est entendu que la Journée du Parcours vers la liberté ».

Respectueusement soumis,

**EVIDENCE**

OTTAWA, Thursday, November 20, 2014

The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, to which was referred Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, met this day at 8 a.m. to give consideration to the bill.

**Senator Salma Ataullahjan** (*Deputy Chair*) in the chair.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Chair:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. We are at the twenty-second meeting of the Human Rights Committee and today we're looking at Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War.

I am deputy chair of Human Rights, Senator Salma Ataullahjan. Senator Jaffer couldn't be here today. I would like the senators to introduce themselves.

**Senator Eaton:** Good morning, thank you very much for coming. I'm Nicky Eaton from Ontario.

**Senator Nancy Ruth:** I'm Senator Nancy Ruth from Toronto.

**Senator Tannas:** Scott Tannas, Alberta.

**Senator Ngo:** Thanh Hai Ngo, from Ontario.

**Senator Cowan:** Jim Cowan, from Nova Scotia.

**The Deputy Chair:** Honourable senators, I would like to acknowledge that the Vietnamese ambassador submitted additional materials for the committee's consideration subsequent to his letter to the chair, which you have already received. His submission will be filed by the committee and distributed as soon as it is translated.

This morning, we have two witnesses. From the Canadian Immigration Historical Society, we have Mike Molloy, President; and from the Vietnamese Canadian Federation, Dr. Can Le, the former president.

I understand, Mr. Molloy, you will speak first.

**Mike Molloy, President, Canadian Immigration Historical Society:** Thank you, honourable chair and senators. I am very honoured to have been asked to speak today to you about Bill S-219 and the proposal to designate April 30 as a day to remember the exodus of Indochinese refugees and the remarkable circumstances that attended their resettlement in Canada.

**TÉMOIGNAGES**

OTTAWA, le jeudi 20 novembre 2014

Le Comité sénatorial permanent des droits de la personne, auquel a été renvoyé le projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam, se réunit aujourd'hui, à 8 heures, pour étudier le projet de loi.

La sénatrice **Salma Ataullahjan** (*vice-présidente*) occupe le fauteuil.

[*Traduction*]

**La vice-présidente :** Bonjour, mesdames et messieurs. C'est la 22<sup>e</sup> réunion du Comité des droits de la personne. Nous examinons aujourd'hui le projet de loi S-219, Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam.

Je suis la sénatrice Salma Ataullahjan, vice-présidente du comité. La sénatrice Jaffer a été retenue aujourd'hui. J'invite les sénateurs à se présenter.

**La sénatrice Eaton :** Bonjour, je vous remercie de votre présence au comité. Je suis Nicky Eaton, de l'Ontario.

**La sénatrice Nancy Ruth :** Je suis la sénatrice Nancy Ruth, de Toronto.

**Le sénateur Tannas :** Scott Tannas, de Alberta.

**Le sénateur Ngo :** Thanh Hai Ngo, de l'Ontario.

**Le sénateur Cowan :** Jim Cowan, de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

**La vice-présidente :** Honorables sénateurs, je voudrais signaler que l'ambassadeur du Vietnam a transmis au comité une documentation supplémentaire pour donner suite à sa lettre à la présidente, que vous avez déjà reçue. Cette documentation sera déposée au comité et distribuée aussitôt qu'elle aura été traduite.

Ce matin, nous avons deux témoins représentant la Société historique de l'immigration canadienne : M. Mike Molloy, président, et M. Can Le, ancien président.

Monsieur Molloy, je crois que vous devez prendre la parole en premier.

**Mike Molloy, président, Société historique de l'immigration canadienne :** Merci, madame la présidente et honorables sénateurs. Je suis très honoré d'avoir été invité à m'adresser à vous aujourd'hui au sujet du projet de loi S-219 et de la proposition visant à désigner le 30 avril comme journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et des circonstances remarquables qui ont marqué leur établissement au Canada.

I had the privilege of meeting Senator Thanh Hai Ngo a year ago at York University where over a hundred people gathered, including former refugees, former sponsors, officials, political leaders and others, for three days of remembrance and reflection on the Indochinese movement and the launch of Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program. I was delighted to hear from the senator about this bill. My interest in this matter is threefold.

First of all, as a rather young officer in the 1970s, I was heavily involved in implementing the refugee provisions of the Immigration Act, 1976, which was the first act that had specific refugee provisions in it. They included, among other things, the basis of Canada's famous private refugee sponsorship system and a designated class making the selection of Indochinese refugees much simpler than that of regular convention refugees.

I was subsequently assigned to be senior coordinator, in the summer of 1979, of a task force set up by the deputy minister of the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission to manage the movement of 60,000 Indochinese refugees to Canada in 1979 and 1980. As senior coordinator, the best way to describe me was that I the lowest man on the totem pole responsible for everything from overseeing selection to transportation, reception, matching with sponsors, sending the people to their final destinations and the settlement arrangements that were in place for them there.

Second, within the Canadian Immigration Historical Society, we are in the final stages of writing the first comprehensive history of the Indochinese refugee movement since 1983. We decided, since we were all getting old and hadn't told all of the war stories from that time, that it was good to capture them now. We are hoping the book will come out in 2015. It will focus on what it took to move the 60,000 people in a period of 18 months from one side of the world to the other.

Third, coming out of the conference I mentioned earlier at York University, the Centre for Refugee Studies at York, the Sponsorship Agreement Holders Association of Canada and the Canadian Immigration Historical Society are involved with members of the Indochinese community in a multi-year project to ensure that the history of a truly remarkable period in Canadian history is recorded and preserved. I have a handout here that describes that project.

To briefly trace what happened and why it was so remarkable, as Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam fell to the communist onslaught in the spring of 1975, a very large number of young Vietnamese from Montreal arrived on Parliament Hill, terrified about what would be happening to their families back home. The government of the day, shocked to see so many people on the front lawn, agreed that they could return home to Montreal, we would keep

J'ai eu le privilège de faire la connaissance du sénateur Thanh Hai Ngo, il y a un an, à l'Université York où s'étaient réunies une centaine de personnes comprenant d'anciens réfugiés, d'anciens parrains, des fonctionnaires, des dirigeants politiques et d'autres pour trois jours de commémoration et de réflexion sur le mouvement indochinois et le lancement du Programme de parrainage privé de réfugiés du Canada. J'ai été enchanté lorsque le sénateur m'a parlé de ce projet de loi. Je m'y suis intéressé pour trois raisons.

Premièrement, comme jeune agent dans les années 1970, j'ai consacré beaucoup d'énergie à la mise en œuvre de la Loi sur l'immigration de 1976, qui était la première mesure législative comportant des dispositions précises relatives aux réfugiés. Ces dispositions comprenaient entre autres la base du fameux régime de parrainage privé de réfugiés et d'une catégorie désignée qui facilitait considérablement la sélection des réfugiés indochinois par rapport aux réfugiés ordinaires au sens de la convention.

Par la suite, au cours de l'été 1979, j'ai été nommé coordonnateur principal d'un groupe de travail formé par le sous-ministre de la Commission de l'emploi et de l'immigration du Canada afin de gérer le transport et l'établissement au Canada de 60 000 réfugiés indochinois en 1979 et 1980. À titre de coordonnateur principal, j'étais au bas de l'échelle hiérarchique, mais je n'en étais pas moins responsable de toute l'opération, depuis la supervision de la sélection jusqu'au transport, à l'accueil, au jumelage avec les parrains, à l'envoi des gens à leur destination finale et aux dispositions d'établissement à prendre aux lieux de destination.

Deuxièmement, à la Société historique de l'immigration canadienne, nous en sommes aux dernières étapes de la rédaction de la première histoire complète du mouvement des réfugiés indochinois depuis 1983. Nous avons pensé, parce que nous avançons en âge et que nous n'avions pas raconté tous les événements qui s'étaient produits alors, qu'il serait bon de le faire maintenant. Nous espérons faire paraître le livre en 2015. Il parlera surtout de ce qu'il a fallu faire pour amener au Canada, en 18 mois, 60 000 personnes qui se trouvaient à l'autre bout de la planète.

Troisièmement, depuis la fin de la conférence de l'Université York que je viens de mentionner, le Centre d'études sur les réfugiés de l'université, l'Association des signataires d'ententes de parrainage du Canada et la Société historique de l'immigration canadienne participent avec les membres de la communauté indochinoise à un projet pluriannuel destiné à consigner et à préserver le souvenir d'une période vraiment remarquable de l'histoire du Canada. J'ai ici un document à distribuer qui décrit ce projet.

Permettez-moi de passer brièvement en revue les événements et les raisons pour lesquelles cette période a été tellement remarquable. Tandis que le Laos, le Cambodge et le Vietnam tombaient sous le joug communiste au printemps 1975, un très grand nombre de jeunes Vietnamiens de Montréal s'étaient rassemblés devant les édifices du Parlement, terrifiés par les risques que couraient les membres de leur famille dans leur pays

the immigration offices open 24 hours a day and, whether they had status in Canada or not, they were allowed to sponsor their relatives in the hopes that we could get at them.

In a matter of a few weeks, they submitted 10,000 sponsorships for 17,000 people, and these were all sent by telex — remember what that was? — to Hong Kong. They came in such numbers that repeatedly the rolls on the telex machine were exhausted and things had to be repeated.

The immigration staff in Hong Kong attempted to extract people from Vietnam at that time. The government provided three Hercules aircraft, but in the dying days of the government of South Vietnam, they refused to issue people with exit permits. All we were able to do — it was not a small thing — was to extract about 90 babies who were brought to Canada for placement in Canadian homes.

When Saigon fell, about 130,000 people got into boats of all sorts and headed out to sea where they were rescued by the United States Navy. The navy moved them first to Hong Kong and then the monsoons came, so they moved them to Guam. Then the monsoons came and they moved them to military camps in the southern United States. In all of those places, a Canadian team based in Hong Kong moved in to try and rescue as many of the people who had Canadian connections as we could and another 3,000 on top of that. In all, in the four or five months following the fall of Saigon, we moved 7,000 people to Canada.

Over the next two years, there was a bit of a lull. It is in that period of time that we brought into effect the Immigration Act, 1976, which included two things that were going to be really important in the subsequent years. One was the sponsorship program and the second was the ability for the government to pass what was called a designated class, which greatly simplified the business of selecting refugees from Indochina.

Over the winter of 1978-79, the number of people heading out to sea in overcrowded small fishing boats to escape worsening conditions in Vietnam — where there was famine and various other natural disasters, and where the government had embarked on the ethnic cleaning of the Chinese minority — escalated to the point where they went from a few thousand a month to a few 10,000 a month, to several 10,000 a month, to 60,000 people taking to the boats in the month of June 1979.

natal. Le gouvernement d'alors, saisi devant le nombre des manifestants, leur avait dit de rentrer chez eux à Montréal après avoir pris l'engagement de garder les bureaux de l'immigration ouverts 24 heures sur 24 et de leur permettre, indépendamment de leur statut de résidence au Canada, de parrainer des parents dans l'espoir que nous pourrions les faire venir.

En quelques semaines, 10 000 demandes de parrainage couvrant 17 000 personnes avaient été déposées. Elles avaient alors été toutes transmises par télex — vous vous souvenez peut-être encore de cet appareil — à Hong Kong. Les demandes étaient tellement nombreuses qu'il fallait constamment remplacer les rouleaux de papier des télex, qui s'épuisaient rapidement, et recommencer la transmission des messages perdus.

À Hong Kong, le personnel de l'immigration s'efforçait de faire sortir des gens du Vietnam. Les autorités canadiennes avaient fourni trois avions Hercules, mais, dans les derniers jours du gouvernement sud-vietnamien, les responsables refusaient de délivrer des visas de sortie. Tout ce que nous avons réussi à faire — et ce n'était pas peu de chose —, c'est arracher au Vietnam quelque 90 bébés, que nous avons fait venir au Canada pour les placer dans des foyers canadiens.

Après la chute de Saïgon, près de 130 000 personnes se sont entassées dans toutes sortes d'embarcations et ont pris la direction du large où des bâtiments de la Marine américaine les ont recueillis. La marine a d'abord emmené ces gens à Hong Kong, mais, à l'arrivée de la mousson, il a fallu les transférer à Guam. Poursuivis encore par la mousson, les réfugiés ont ensuite été accueillis dans des camps militaires du sud des États-Unis. À tous ces endroits, une équipe canadienne venue de Hong Kong intervenait pour essayer de sauver le maximum de personnes ayant des liens avec le Canada. Après avoir réussi à le faire, l'équipe a ajouté 3 000 autres personnes au groupe. En tout, dans les quatre ou cinq mois qui ont suivi la chute de Saïgon, nous avons fait venir 7 000 personnes au Canada.

Les deux années suivantes ont été marquées par une certaine accalmie. C'est alors que nous avons mis en vigueur la Loi sur l'immigration de 1976, qui contenait deux dispositions qui revêtaient une grande importance dans les années suivantes. La première était le programme de parrainage et la seconde, la possibilité pour le gouvernement d'établir ce qu'on avait appelé une « catégorie désignée », qui simplifiait considérablement la sélection des réfugiés d'Indochine.

Pendant l'hiver 1978-1979, le nombre de personnes prenant la mer dans de petits bateaux de pêche surchargés pour échapper aux conditions de plus en plus graves qui régnaient au Vietnam — où sévissaient la famine et différentes catastrophes naturelles et où le gouvernement avait lancé une campagne d'épuration ethnique contre la minorité chinoise — a augmenté à un rythme exponentiel, passant de quelques milliers par mois à quelques dizaines de milliers par mois, puis à 60 000 personnes en juin 1979.

The countries in the area, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore, were so alarmed by this, as these people came ashore, that they closed the shores. For the 60,000 people that came out that one month, probably another 40,000 died along the way. As people were pushed off, the death rate went up.

In reaction to this, the United Nations — not the United Nations High Commissioner, but the United Nations Secretary-General — got involved. The very month that the government of Joe Clark assumed power in Canada, the Secretary-General called for an emergency meeting in Geneva that was to take place in the middle of July 1979.

In that time, the Canadian Mennonite Committee, which was the first community in Canada to sign an agreement on the sponsorship of refugees, held a series of consultations with the new foreign affairs minister, Flora MacDonald, suggesting — perhaps even demanding — that Canada do something spectacular.

Initially, the Conservative government upped the quota from 5,000 to 8,000, and suggested that maybe another 4,000 could be brought in by sponsors. That was in June. In July, in response to the worsening situation and the fact that we were going to have to make an announcement in Geneva, the cabinet met again. The new immigration minister, Ron Atkey, brought into cabinet a copy of Irving Abella's book, *None is Too Many*, the famous book about that infamous episode in Canadian history where we turned away an oceanliner of Jews in the late 1930s, most of whom perished in the subsequent Holocaust.

Mr. Atkey read from that book when the cabinet meeting opened, and he turned to his colleagues and said, "How do we want to be remembered?" It was kind of a dramatic moment, I'm told. We met with Mr. Atkey some months ago and it was the first time I'd heard that story.

When Flora MacDonald went to Geneva a few days later, she announced that Canada would be accepting 50,000 refugees. When you compare that with the Hungarians' 37,000; the Czechs' 11,000; the Ugandans' 6,000; and the Chileans' by that time about 7,000, this was a staggering number. It certainly staggered those of us who were in the Immigration Department in the business of that at that time. We had no idea they were going to bring in such an enormous number.

As an interesting side note, the original plan was for 60,000, but you might recall that the Clark government ran on the platform of reducing the civil service by 60,000. They thought the

Les pays de la région — Malaisie, Thaïlande, Indonésie et Singapour — étaient tellement alarmés par cet exode qu'ils avaient interdit leurs côtes aux réfugiés. Pour les 60 000 personnes qui ont réussi à quitter le pays pendant ce mois, il y a probablement 40 000 autres qui ont trouvé la mort en essayant de fuir. À mesure que les pressions exercées s'intensifiaient, le nombre de morts augmentait.

Réagissant aux événements, les Nations Unies — pas le haut-commissaire aux réfugiés, mais le secrétaire général lui-même — sont intervenues. Au cours du mois dans lequel le gouvernement Joe Clark a assumé le pouvoir au Canada, le secrétaire général a convoqué une réunion d'urgence pour la mi-juillet 1979.

À ce moment, le Comité mennonite canadien, premier groupe du Canada à signer une entente de parrainage de réfugiés, a tenu une série de consultations avec la nouvelle ministre des Affaires étrangères, Flora MacDonald, pour lui suggérer — peut-être même pour exiger — que le Canada prenne des mesures spectaculaires.

Au départ, le gouvernement conservateur a fait passer le quota établi de 5 000 à 8 000, ajoutant que 4 000 autres pourraient peut-être être parrainés. Cela se passait en juin 1979. En juillet, en réaction à l'aggravation de la situation et au fait que le Canada devait faire une annonce à Genève, le Cabinet s'est réuni à nouveau. Le nouveau ministre de l'Immigration, Ron Atkey, avait apporté avec lui un exemplaire du fameux livre d'Irving Abella, *None is Too Many*, qui racontait la tristement célèbre histoire du paquebot chargé de juifs allemands que le Canada avait renvoyé vers la fin des années 1930, condamnant ainsi la plupart des passagers à mourir dans les camps de concentration nazis.

M. Atkey avait donné lecture de quelques extraits du livre à l'ouverture de la séance du Cabinet. Ensuite, il s'était tourné vers ses collègues et leur avait demandé : « Quel souvenir voulez-vous laisser à la postérité? » Ce fut un moment dramatique, m'a-t-on dit. Nous avons eu un entretien avec M. Atkey, il y a quelques mois. C'est alors que j'ai entendu cette histoire pour la première fois.

Lorsque Flora MacDonald est allée à Genève quelques jours plus tard, elle a annoncé que le Canada accepterait 50 000 réfugiés. Les Hongrois s'étaient engagés à en prendre 37 000, les Tchèques 11 000, les Ougandais 6 000 et les Chiliens près de 7 000. Par rapport à ces nombres, le chiffre canadien semblait ahurissant. Il a certainement stupéfié ceux d'entre nous qui travaillaient alors pour le ministère de l'Immigration. Nous ne savions pas du tout que le gouvernement avait décidé de prendre un nombre aussi énorme de Vietnamiens.

Il est intéressant de noter à cet égard que le plan initial prévoyait 60 000 réfugiés, mais vous vous souviendrez peut-être du fait que, dans sa campagne électorale, le gouvernement Clark

juxtaposition of 60,000 disappearing civil servants and 60,000 incoming refugees might not go down all that well in the press.

The UN High Commission for Refugees was delighted by the number that Canada announced, but expressed alarm in writing — I have seen the correspondence — that so much of the Canadian commitment would depend on private citizens. The announcement required that there be 21,000 privately sponsored people, matched by 21,000 government-sponsored people. UNCHR didn't think we would be able to carry it through.

Then, the citizens of Canada did something that was quite amazing. In July, the month of the announcement, 359 groups came forward to sponsor 2,200 refugees. In August, 1,420 groups came forward to sponsor 8,000 refugees. When the program closed in December 1980, 7,675 groups had sponsored just short of 40,000 refugees, twice as many as the government had asked for, which caused the people in the Department of Finance to have a conniption, I must say. It was complicated. That was quite something, really something amazing, an unusual moment in our history.

In that 18-month period, small teams of very young Canadian visa officers operated. We had to send the youngsters out there because the conditions were so difficult. Anybody over 30 probably would have perished in the process. Visa offices operating in Thailand and Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Hong Kong and Macau put 60,049 refugees on 181 charter flights that came to Canada, landing in Edmonton or Montreal.

Of the 60,000, 1,700 were sponsored by relatives; 26,000 were sponsored by the government; and 33,000 were sponsored by private citizens. The citizens of Canada took the biggest part of the burden.

It was an amazing achievement. It was made possible by outstanding leadership at all levels of government, from mayors and aldermen right up to cabinet ministers, both federal and provincial, and by hardworking public servants. I will tell you how hardworking it was. The book we are writing is called *Running on Empty*. When I tell the veterans of the Vietnam movement that, yes, we're calling it *Running on Empty*, they all say, "Yes, that's right."

The real heroes of this were literally hundreds of thousands of Canadians who sponsored refugees through their churches and synagogues, service clubs, unions and ad hoc groups of friends and neighbours that got together to take advantage of this program.

s'était engagé à réduire les effectifs de la fonction publique canadienne de 60 000 fonctionnaires. Les responsables avaient pensé à l'époque que la juxtaposition des deux chiffres — 60 000 congédiements et 60 000 réfugiés — serait plutôt mal accueillie dans la presse.

Le Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés avait été enchanté par la décision canadienne. Toutefois, il s'était inquiété par écrit — j'ai vu les lettres en cause — du fait qu'une aussi grande partie de l'engagement canadien dépendait de la générosité de simples citoyens. L'annonce faite se fondait sur l'hypothèse que 21 000 personnes feraient l'objet d'un parrainage privé et qu'en contrepartie, le gouvernement s'occuperait lui-même de 21 000 autres personnes. Le haut commissariat ne croyait pas que le Canada serait en mesure d'honorer cet engagement.

Pourtant, la réaction de la population canadienne a été tout simplement renversante. En juillet, mois de l'annonce, 359 groupes se sont engagés à parrainer 2 200 réfugiés. En août, 1 420 groupes ont dit qu'ils allaient s'occuper de 8 000 réfugiés. À la fin du programme, en décembre 1980, 7 675 groupes avaient promis de parrainer un tout petit peu moins de 40 000 réfugiés, soit près du double de ce que le gouvernement avait demandé. Je dois dire que les responsables du ministère des Finances étaient au bord de la syncope. C'était vraiment compliqué. Ce fut un moment étrange, un moment stupéfiant de notre histoire.

Dans cette période de 18 mois, de petites équipes de très jeunes agents canadiens des visas ont été formées. Il était indispensable de recourir à des jeunes parce que les conditions étaient extrêmement difficiles. Toute personne de plus de 30 ans se serait probablement tuée à la tâche. Les bureaux des visas de la Thaïlande, de la Malaisie, de l'Indonésie, des Philippines, de Hong Kong et de Macao ont réussi à faire embarquer 60 049 réfugiés à bord de 181 vols nolisés qui ont atterri soit à Edmonton soit à Montréal.

Sur les 60 000, 1 700 étaient parrainés par des membres de leur famille, 26 000 par le gouvernement et 33 000 par de simples particuliers. Les citoyens du Canada avaient assumé le plus gros du fardeau.

Ce fut une réalisation extraordinaire. Elle a été rendue possible par le leadership exceptionnel qui s'est manifesté à tous les échelons du gouvernement, des maires et des conseillers municipaux aux ministres fédéraux et provinciaux et aux infatigables fonctionnaires. Je vais vous dire à quel point les gens ont travaillé fort. Le livre que nous écrivons aura pour titre *Running on Empty*, ou *Courir à bout de souffle*. Quand je dis aux vétérans du mouvement du Vietnam que c'est ainsi que nous appellerons le livre, ils me répondent que oui, c'est vrai, nous avançons à toute vitesse, mais nous étions à bout de souffle.

Les vrais héros de l'histoire, ce sont les centaines de milliers de Canadiens qui ont parrainé des réfugiés par l'entremise de leurs églises, de leurs synagogues, de leurs cercles d'entraide, de leurs syndicats et de groupes spéciaux d'amis et de voisins qui se sont réunis pour participer à ce programme.

As you know, the UN was so impressed by the Canadian accomplishment that in 1986 the people of Canada were awarded the Nansen Medal, the refugee equivalent of the Nobel Prize. We are the first people and the only people to have been so honoured.

We have probably settled over a half a million refugees in this country since the Second World War. Why should we be thinking about singling out this group for special recognition?

First, the Indochinese movement ran from 1975 well into the 1990s and was eventually supplemented by a really vigorous family unification program from Vietnam. It was by far, and remains by far, the largest resettlement operation we have ever undertaken. It brought us close to 200,000 new citizens when all was said and done. The refugees and their dependents now account for over 300,000 of our fellow Canadians.

Second, the astonishing reaction of hundreds of thousands of Canadians who took up the government's challenge and sponsored twice as many refugees as they were asked to sponsor in the first place is an outstanding example of our people living up to our best values.

If approved by Parliament, this special day will affirm to our fellow Indochinese citizens that we are proud that they are now part of our society, and it will provide an ongoing reminder of what we can do in this country when we follow our best instincts.

**Can Le, Former Secretary General, Vietnamese Canadian Federation:** Good morning, Madam Deputy Chair, members of the Senate Human Rights Committee, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to come here and express my view regarding Bill S-219, concerning the proposal for a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees, their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War on April 30, 1975.

I believe that a national day of commemoration in Canada, on April 30 each year, for the exodus of close to a million Vietnamese refugees after the end of the Vietnam War and for Canada's acceptance of more than 60,000 of these refugees will enshrine an important event in Canadian history and will enrich the cultural and social mosaic of this country.

The Vietnamese Canadian Federation, of which I am one of the co-founders and a former secretary general, is an umbrella organization founded in 1980 to represent Vietnamese community organizations from coast to coast. At present, the federation includes organizations in the Vietnamese communities in Halifax, Sherbrooke, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Windsor, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver. Its national office is located in Ottawa.

Comme vous le savez, l'ONU a été tellement impressionnée par cette réalisation du Canada qu'en 1986, elle a décerné aux Canadiens la médaille Nansen qui, dans le domaine des réfugiés, est l'équivalent du prix Nobel. Nous sommes le premier et le seul peuple à avoir reçu cet honneur.

Nous avons probablement aidé plus d'un demi-million de réfugiés à s'établir dans notre pays depuis la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Pourquoi envisageons-nous d'accorder une reconnaissance spéciale à ce groupe particulier?

Tout d'abord, le mouvement indochinois, qui a commencé en 1975, s'est poursuivi jusqu'aux années 1990 pour être plus ou moins remplacé par un programme vraiment énergique de réunification des familles vietnamiennes. C'est de loin la plus grande opération d'établissement que nous ayons jamais entreprise. Elle nous a donné dans l'ensemble près de 200 000 nouveaux citoyens. Les réfugiés et leurs personnes à charge représentent maintenant plus de 300 000 de nos concitoyens.

Ensuite, la réaction étonnante de centaines de milliers de Canadiens qui ont relevé le défi du gouvernement en parrainant deux fois plus de réfugiés qu'on ne leur en avait demandé constitue un exemple extraordinaire de ce que notre population peut faire en s'appuyant sur nos meilleures valeurs.

Si elle est adoptée par le Parlement, cette journée spéciale dira à nos concitoyens d'Indochine que nous sommes fiers de les voir s'intégrer dans notre société et nous rappellera en permanence ce que notre pays peut réaliser quand les Canadiens écoutent leur cœur.

**Can Le, ancien secrétaire général, Vietnamese Canadian Federation :** Madame la vice-présidente, membres du Comité sénatorial des droits de la personne, mesdames et messieurs, bonjour.

Je vous remercie de me donner l'occasion de vous présenter mon point de vue sur le projet de loi S-219, qui propose d'instituer une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam, le 30 avril 1975.

Je crois que l'observation, au Canada, le 30 avril de chaque année, d'une journée nationale pour commémorer l'exode de près d'un million de réfugiés vietnamiens après la fin de la guerre du Vietnam et l'accueil dans ce pays de plus de 60 000 de ces réfugiés inscrira un important événement dans l'histoire du Canada et enrichira la mosaïque culturelle et sociale du pays.

La Vietnamese Canadian Federation dont je suis l'un des fondateurs et un ancien secrétaire général, est une organisation-cadre fondée en 1980 pour représenter les organisations communautaires vietnamiennes d'un océan à l'autre. À l'heure actuelle, elle compte des organisations représentant les communautés vietnamiennes de Halifax, Sherbrooke, Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto, Windsor, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary et Vancouver. Son siège social est situé à Ottawa.

Throughout its 34-year history, the federation has helped thousands of Vietnamese refugees resettle in Canada, in addition to promoting cultural mutual understanding and advocating for democracy, freedom and human rights in Vietnam.

I would like to share with you my observations with regard to the background of the exodus of refugees from Vietnam in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which led me to support this bill.

Following the invasion of South Vietnam by the North Vietnamese Communists in 1975, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, members of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam, government officials or supporters, religious leaders and intellectuals were put into hard labour concentration camps, officially called "re-education camps," where thousands would eventually die due to execution, diseases or malnutrition.

Many others were exiled to the so-called "new economic zones" in remote regions of Vietnam. In addition, ethnic Chinese Vietnamese were forced to relocate or expelled to the country due to the political conflict between China and Vietnam in 1979.

Under these circumstances, people rushed to flee the country by the thousands. There was a famous saying in Vietnam at that time "If lamp posts could walk, they would flee, too."

The flow of refugees from Vietnam reached a critical phase in late 1978 due to the refusal of some neighbouring Asian countries to admit the boat people, who are so-called because most fled in small leaky boats into the perilous Eastern Sea, formerly called the South China Sea. Hundreds of thousands of these refugees perished at sea by drowning or starvation, or were raped or killed by pirates.

Dennis McDermott, President of the Canadian Labour Congress at the time summarized the situation as follows:

It is crystal clear to us that the Vietnamese refugee problem has ballooned into a humanitarian crisis of global proportion and the only human way to react to such a situation is through decisive and immediate action.

In response to the plight of these refugees in 1979, Mayor Marion Dewar of the City of Ottawa called meetings of community organizations, church groups and social service agencies in her office to discuss ways to help them. As a result, Project 4000 was formed with the objective of campaigning for the admission of up to 4,000 Indochinese refugees, the majority who came from Vietnam to the city of Ottawa through the private sponsorship program of the federal government.

Au cours de ses 34 années d'existence, la fédération a aidé des milliers de réfugiés vietnamiens à s'établir au Canada tout en favorisant la compréhension mutuelle au niveau culturel et en défendant la démocratie, la liberté et les droits de la personne au Vietnam.

Je voudrais vous faire part de quelques observations concernant le contexte de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens à la fin des années 1970 et au début des années 1980, observations qui m'ont amené à appuyer ce projet de loi.

Après l'invasion du Sud-Vietnam par les communistes nord-vietnamiens en 1975, des centaines de milliers de Vietnamiens, de membres des forces armées de la République du Vietnam, de responsables ou de partisans du gouvernement, de dirigeants religieux et d'intellectuels ont été envoyés dans des camps de travail officiellement baptisés « camps de rééducation », où des milliers ont trouvé la mort par suite d'exécutions sommaires ou à cause de maladies et de malnutrition.

De nombreux autres ont été exilés dans ce qu'on a appelé les « nouvelles zones économiques », c'est-à-dire les régions isolées du Vietnam. De plus, les Vietnamiens d'origine chinoise ont été forcés à se réinstaller ailleurs ou ont été expulsés du pays en raison du conflit politique de 1979 entre la Chine et le Vietnam.

Dans ces circonstances, des milliers ont cherché à fuir le pays. On disait souvent alors que si les réverbères avaient eu des pieds, ils auraient aussi pris la fuite.

L'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens est entré dans une phase critique vers la fin de 1978 quand certains pays asiatiques voisins ont refusé d'accueillir les *boat-people*, ainsi baptisés parce que la plupart avaient quitté le pays à bord de petites embarcations en mauvais état pour entreprendre un dangereux voyage dans la mer de Chine orientale. Des centaines de milliers de ces réfugiés ont péri en mer noyés, sont morts de faim ou ont été violés et tués par des pirates.

Le président du Congrès canadien du travail avait alors bien résumé la situation en disant ce qui suit :

Il est parfaitement clair pour nous que le problème des réfugiés vietnamiens s'est aggravé au point de se transformer en crise humanitaire mondiale. Nous croyons que la seule façon humaine de réagir est de prendre immédiatement des mesures décisives.

Émue par la situation critique de ces réfugiés en 1979, la mairesse d'Ottawa, Marion Dewar, avait organisé à son bureau des réunions auxquelles elle avait invité des représentants d'organisations communautaires, de groupes religieux et d'organismes de services sociaux afin de discuter des moyens d'aider les réfugiés. C'est ainsi qu'a été lancé le Projet 4000 dont l'objectif était de faire campagne pour admettre un nombre de réfugiés indochinois pouvant atteindre 4 000. La majorité de ces réfugiés sont venus à Ottawa dans le cadre du Programme de parrainage privé du gouvernement fédéral.

Similar community initiatives followed elsewhere in Canada, most notably the Operation Lifeline, spearheaded by professor Howard Adelman in Toronto. Little more than two weeks elapsed from the initial meeting of church leaders, ethnic community representatives and immigration officials in Mayor Dewar's office on June 27, 1979, until the rally at the Ottawa Civic Centre on July 12.

In this short period, the structure of one of the largest grassroots social movements in Canada's history was formed. Within a month of that rally, which attracted close to 3,000 people, many more originally expected, most of the 347 sponsor groups had been formed and registered at the local immigration office.

Subsequently, the federal government under Prime Minister Joe Clark decided to accept 50,000 refugees, as Mr. Molloy just mentioned, mostly Vietnamese but also including Cambodians and Laotians who fled the newly established communist regimes in their countries.

Project 4000 was Ottawa's response to the boat people crisis of 1979. Canadians from across the country were quick to offer help, involving thousands of volunteers from all walks of life. I had the honour and privilege to serve as a member of the board of directors of this project from 1979 to 1983. I learned a lot by working with hundreds of volunteers on the project. I also came to understand the plight of refugees, those who left everything in Vietnam and risked their lives and the lives of their loved ones in search of freedom.

In the words of two former volunteers from Project 4,000, Eleanor Ryan and Sue Pike, it was a huge risk for both refugees and sponsors. It required a leap of faith by both parties, but, in the end, Ottawa emerged greatly enriched from the experience.

The same thing can be said of the work done by hundreds of sponsor groups set up elsewhere in Canada to help Vietnamese refugees rebuild their lives in freedom. The story of this outstanding project was well documented in the book entitled *Gift of Freedom*. I have a copy here, if you would like to take a look afterward. It was written by Brian Buckley and disseminated in 2008 by the Vietnamese Canadian Federation.

Since their arrival in Canada, all of these refugees have, over the years, rapidly integrated themselves into Canadian society and made important contributions to the prosperity of this country. As well, they helped in the preservation of its great values. There are now thousands of Canadians of Vietnamese origin, the children and grandchildren of these refugees, who now work as professionals in various fields such as medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, engineering, law, economics, education, information technology, accounting and so on. Hundreds of Vietnamese

Des initiatives communautaires semblables ont été prises ailleurs au Canada, notamment l'opération Lifeline dirigée par Howard Adelman à Toronto. Deux semaines à peine s'étaient écoulées depuis la réunion initiale des chefs religieux, des représentants des communautés ethniques et des responsables de l'immigration au bureau de la mairesse Dewar, le 27 juin 1979, quand a eu lieu le grand rassemblement du Centre municipal d'Ottawa, le 12 juillet.

Cette courte période avait suffi pour mettre en place la structure de l'un des plus importants mouvements sociaux de la base de l'histoire du Canada. Dans le mois qui a suivi le rassemblement, auquel avaient participé près de 3 000 personnes, la plupart des 347 groupes de parrainage qui ont finalement vu le jour avaient déjà été formés et enregistrés au bureau local de l'immigration.

Par la suite, le gouvernement du premier ministre Joe Clark avait décidé, comme vient de le mentionner M. Molloy, d'accepter 50 000 réfugiés surtout vietnamiens, mais comprenant aussi des Cambodgiens et des Laotiens qui avaient fui les régimes communistes récemment établis dans leur pays.

Le Projet 4000 était la réponse d'Ottawa à la crise des *boat-people* de 1979. Des Canadiens de tous les coins du pays, comprenant des milliers de volontaires de toutes les couches sociales, se sont empressés d'offrir leur aide. J'ai eu l'honneur et le privilège de faire partie du conseil d'administration de ce projet entre 1979 et 1983. J'ai beaucoup appris en m'occupant du projet de concert avec des centaines de volontaires. J'ai pu mieux comprendre la situation des réfugiés qui avaient renoncé à tout ce qu'ils possédaient au Vietnam et avaient risqué leur vie et celle de leurs proches dans leur quête de la liberté.

Selon deux anciennes volontaires du Projet 4000, Eleanor Ryan et Sue Pike, c'était un grand risque aussi bien pour les réfugiés que pour leurs parrains. Il a fallu que les deux parties fassent un acte de foi, mais, au bout du compte, l'expérience a considérablement enrichi Ottawa.

On peut en dire autant du travail fait par les centaines de groupes de parrainage établis ailleurs au Canada pour aider les réfugiés vietnamiens à retrouver leur vie et leur liberté. L'histoire de ce projet exceptionnel est bien documentée dans le livre *Gift of Freedom*. J'en ai apporté un exemplaire pour le cas où vous souhaiteriez jeter un coup d'œil plus tard. Il a été écrit par Brian Buckley et a été distribué en 2008 par la Vietnamese Canadian Federation.

Depuis qu'ils sont au Canada, tous ces réfugiés ont réussi au fil des ans à s'intégrer dans la société canadienne et à contribuer sensiblement à la prospérité du pays. De plus, ils ont participé à la préservation de ses grandes valeurs. Il y a maintenant des milliers de Canadiens d'origine vietnamienne ainsi que les enfants et petits-enfants de ces réfugiés qui font carrière en médecine, en dentisterie, en pharmacie, en génie, en droit, en économie, en éducation, en informatique, en comptabilité, et cetera. Des centaines d'entreprises vietnamiennes se sont développées

businesses are blooming cross the country. As well, the community has started to become involved in politics with representatives at both provincial and federal levels.

By approving this bill, Parliament will assure newcomers and future generations of their place in this country and will prove that Canada's inclusiveness is the foundation of its strength and prosperity.

The resettlement of thousands of refugees in the aftermath of the Vietnam War is yet another shining chapter in the history of Canada. It has once again showed the compassion and generosity of the Canadian people in response to the sufferings of people around the world, including those who fled radical regimes in search of freedom. This shining chapter should be honoured and enshrined in Canadian history. This, I believe, is the main reason for Bill S-219.

Madam deputy chair, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, I have the honour to support this bill.

**Senator Nancy Ruth:** Thank you very much for your presentations. We have a letter from the Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in front of us, and in it he says that he believes strongly this bill does not represent the views of the majority of Vietnamese Canadians. How would you respond to that?

**Mr. Le:** I don't know where he got the information from, but we, in the Vietnamese Canadian Federation, are not aware of any opposition to this bill except perhaps from the embassy. All the information that we have received so far is overwhelmingly supported by members of the Vietnamese community in Canada.

**Senator Tannas:** Gentlemen, thank you for your presentations today. I enjoyed your story. It was excellent. Thank you very much for that history.

Doctor, I understand that we accepted a couple of dozen refugees from Vietnam just this weekend here in Canada.

**Mr. Le:** Twenty-eight, yes.

**Senator Tannas:** Twenty-eight. So this story is not finished. What would those 28, who arrived this weekend, think about this bill and on reflection would they be supportive of it?

**Mr. Le:** Thank you very much, senator, for your question. I want to add a couple of pieces of information to your question. These 28 refugees who arrived in Canada last week were from Thailand. They were stranded in Thailand for over 20 years. The Vietnamese Canadian Federation, with an organization in the United States called VOICE, worked together from 2002 until 2007 when we got the announcement from Minister Diane Finley on the humanitarian compassionate program for the refugees, but those are the refugees for the Philippines, stranded in Philippines for 20 years.

partout dans le pays. De plus, des membres de la communauté ont commencé à s'intéresser à la politique tant provinciale que fédérale.

En approuvant ce projet de loi, le Parlement donnera aux nouveaux venus et aux générations futures l'assurance qu'ils ont leur place dans le pays et montrera que l'inclusivité est à la base de la force et de la prospérité du Canada.

L'établissement de milliers de réfugiés au lendemain de la guerre du Vietnam constitue un autre brillant chapitre de l'histoire du Canada. Ces événements montrent une fois de plus la compassion et la générosité dont les Canadiens font preuve face aux souffrances des autres peuples du monde et de ceux qui fuient des régimes totalitaires pour retrouver la liberté. Il convient d'honorer ce brillant chapitre et de l'inscrire en permanence dans l'histoire du Canada. C'est, je crois, la principale raison d'être du projet de loi S-219.

Madame la vice-présidente, membres du comité, mesdames et messieurs, je suis honoré d'exprimer mon appui au projet de loi.

**La sénatrice Nancy Ruth :** Je vous remercie de vos exposés. Nous avons en main une lettre de l'ambassadeur de la République socialiste du Vietnam qui dit qu'il est fermement convaincu que ce projet de loi ne reflète pas le point de vue de la majorité des Canadiens d'origine vietnamienne. Qu'avez-vous à répondre à cela?

**M. Le :** Je ne sais pas où il prend ses informations, mais nous, membres de la Vietnamese Canadian Federation ne sommes au courant d'aucune opposition au projet de loi, sauf peut-être à l'ambassade. D'après tous les renseignements que nous avons reçus jusqu'ici, les membres de la communauté vietnamienne du Canada appuient en très grande majorité cette mesure législative.

**Le sénateur Tannas :** Messieurs, je vous remercie des exposés que vous nous avez présentés. J'ai beaucoup aimé votre histoire. Je l'ai trouvée excellente, et je vous en remercie.

Monsieur Le, je crois savoir que nous avons encore admis quelques dizaines de réfugiés venant du Vietnam ce week-end.

**M. Le :** Oui, il y en avait 28.

**Le sénateur Tannas :** Vous avez dit 28. Cela signifie que l'histoire n'est pas finie. À votre avis, que penseraient du projet de loi ces 28 réfugiés qui viennent d'arriver chez nous? L'appuieraient-ils?

**M. Le :** Merci beaucoup de votre question, sénateur. Permettez-moi d'ajouter quelques éléments d'information. Les 28 réfugiés qui sont arrivés au Canada la semaine dernière venaient de Thaïlande, où ils avaient été coincés pendant plus de 20 ans. La Vietnamese Canadian Federation a travaillé de concert avec l'organisation VOICE des États-Unis de 2002 à 2007 jusqu'à ce que la ministre Diane Finley annonce le programme humanitaire en faveur des réfugiés, mais il s'agissait de réfugiés des Philippines, qui avaient été coincés là pendant 20 ans.

After five years of working with the government, finally the refugees were accepted to Canada and they started to come in 2008 and 2009. This was thanks to the efforts of a lot of people in Canada, including Senator Thanh Hai Ngo, and various organizations in the Vietnamese community, as well as organizations in the U.S. and Australia.

I just want to give you a piece of information: For 275 people from the Philippines whom we brought into Canada, we spent around \$650,000, an average of \$2,500 per person. We raised that money entirely on our own. We took care of everything for them, from medical examinations, the application fee overseas, airfares and resettlement. When they came here, within a couple of weeks, sometimes days, they started to work right away. We never had any problems.

I think that, because of that experience, the government — this time it was Minister Jason Kenney — became aware of what we did with the refugees from the Philippines, so he was willing to let us sponsor some more refugees. We were able to compile a list of around 110 refugees who were stranded in Thailand for over 20 years. We started to collect funds from the Vietnamese community in Canada, in the U.S., Australia and other countries, and the first group of these refugees came just last week, 28 of them.

After they arrived in Vancouver, a large group went to Calgary and Toronto, and I think one group of seven stayed in Vancouver. One person came to Ottawa just last Saturday, and I had the honour to go to the airport to welcome him. I'm sure that, within the next couple of days, he will start working right away. So thank you very much for the opportunity to elaborate more on the situation of these refugees.

**Senator Cowan:** Thank you for your presentation this morning. It's a remarkable story.

I understand that Senator Ngo has indicated that he intends to propose an amendment that would change the title of the bill from "Black April Day" to "Journey to Freedom Day." Do you support that amendment? Does that make it more or less acceptable?

**Mr. Le:** I think "Journey to Freedom" might be clearer and more understandable for Canadians. It has a more positive tone to it, so we fully support it. Besides Journey to Freedom, there is another suggestion. I don't know whether you would be willing to consider it. This is my own suggestion: "Gift of Freedom Day" because that is essentially what the Canadian people offer to refugees not only from Vietnam but around the world, the gift of freedom. That, by the way, is also the title of this book, which is the story of Project 4000 in Ottawa.

Après cinq ans d'efforts auprès du gouvernement, les réfugiés ont finalement été acceptés au Canada et ont commencé à arriver en 2008 et 2009. Cette réalisation est attribuable à de nombreuses personnes, dont le sénateur Thanh Ngo, différentes organisations de la communauté vietnamienne et d'autres organisations des États-Unis et d'Australie.

Je voudrais ajouter un autre enseignement : nous avons dépensé près de 650 000 \$ pour faire venir 275 personnes des Philippines, ce qui représente en moyenne 2 500 \$ par personne. Nous avons nous-mêmes recueilli la totalité de ce montant. Nous nous sommes occupés de tout : examens médicaux, frais pour la présentation des demandes à l'étranger, billets d'avion et frais d'établissement. Lorsque ces gens sont arrivés au Canada, ils ont commencé à travailler dans les deux semaines suivantes, sinon dans les quelques jours qui ont suivi. Nous n'avons jamais eu de difficultés.

Par suite de cette expérience, le gouvernement — dans ce cas-ci, il s'agissait du ministre Jason Kenney — a appris ce que nous avons fait pour les réfugiés des Philippines. Le ministre nous a donc informés qu'il était disposé à nous laisser parrainer un certain nombre d'autres réfugiés. Nous avons pu compiler une liste de quelque 110 personnes qui étaient coincées en Thaïlande depuis plus de 20 ans. Nous avons commencé à recueillir des fonds au sein des communautés vietnamiennes du Canada, des États-Unis, d'Australie et d'autres pays. C'est ainsi que le premier groupe de 28 de ces réfugiés est arrivé la semaine dernière.

Après leur atterrissage à Vancouver, beaucoup d'entre eux sont allés à Calgary et à Toronto. Je crois que sept sont restés à Vancouver. Un autre est arrivé au Canada dimanche dernier. J'ai eu le plaisir d'aller l'accueillir à l'aéroport. Je suis sûr qu'il aura trouvé du travail dans les prochains jours. Je vous remercie donc de me donner l'occasion de vous en dire davantage sur la situation de ces réfugiés.

**Le sénateur Cowan :** Je vous remercie de votre exposé de ce matin. C'est une histoire remarquable.

J'ai cru comprendre que le sénateur Ngo a l'intention de proposer un amendement visant à remplacer le titre de « Jour de l'Avril noir » par « Jour du Parcours vers la liberté ». Êtes-vous en faveur de cet amendement? Rend-il le texte plus ou moins acceptable?

**M. Le :** Je crois que le titre « Jour du Parcours vers la liberté » est plus clair et plus facile à comprendre pour les Canadiens. De plus, il a des connotations plus positives, de sorte que nous l'appuyons sans réserve. À part « Jour du Parcours vers la liberté », un autre titre a été suggéré. Je ne sais pas si vous êtes disposés à l'envisager. Je propose en effet « Jour du don de la liberté » car c'est essentiellement ce que les Canadiens offrent aux réfugiés non seulement du Vietnam, mais du monde entier : le don de la liberté. Soit dit en passant, c'est aussi le titre du livre qui raconte l'histoire du Projet 4000 d'Ottawa.

**Senator Cowan:** My second question is, perhaps, to you, Madam Chair. Senator Nancy Ruth referred to the letter that we all received, addressed to the chair from the ambassador, and he requested the opportunity to appear before the committee. Can you tell me why his request was not accepted?

**The Deputy Chair:** We asked for a written submission, which he provided, and we thought that was sufficient.

**Senator Cowan:** I haven't seen the other materials, but he says that he requested an opportunity to appear. I haven't been here a long time, but I would have thought it would be courteous, at least, to have afforded an ambassador the opportunity to appear. But the committee decided?

**The Deputy Chair:** To have a written submission, yes.

**Senator Cowan:** Thank you.

**Senator Ngo:** I have two questions. I'm going to ask the first question of Mr. Molloy. The Vietnamese Communist embassy, in the article, stated the concern that, if we pass Bill S-219, we will open old wounds. Do you think that's a valid concern? If it is, why or why not?

**Mr. Molloy:** Obviously, they think it's a valid concern. We have to ask ourselves: What's the Canadian experience with these sorts of things, where people are damaged by the actions of a government, and what's the proper remedy?

What we have learned in this country, with the dark moments in our own history with the Chinese, with the Japanese in the Second World War, with the residential schools, is that we don't heal those by covering them over. We heal those by offering an opportunity for the government to acknowledge, and for the people who have been harmed to hear from the government, that those kinds of actions are regrettable and, if possible, will never happen again. That's the way we do it in this country. I think we have to be true to our own traditions in dealing with our own mistakes of the past.

If Senator Jaffer were here today, she would support the notion that it is possible to have reconciliation between a community of refugees in Canada and the source government. There have been a whole series of events, over the last couple of years, where the Ugandan refugees have celebrated their arrival in Canada, and the Ugandan ambassador is always present at those. But it's a president from the new regime and the government of Uganda, rather than complaining about what's being done, has reached out to the Asians who came from Uganda, has helped restore their property and has done various things to create reconciliation. The strongest supporters of Uganda probably in the world now are our Canadian Ugandan community.

**Le sénateur Cowan :** Ma seconde question s'adresse peut-être à vous, madame la présidente. La sénatrice Nancy Ruth a mentionné la lettre de l'ambassadeur que nous avons tous reçue et dans laquelle il demande à comparaître devant le comité. Pouvez-vous me dire pourquoi cette demande n'a pas été acceptée?

**La vice-présidente :** Nous avons demandé un mémoire écrit, qu'il nous a transmis. Nous avons pensé que c'était suffisant.

**Le sénateur Cowan :** Je n'ai pas vu les autres documents, mais il dit qu'il a demandé à comparaître. Je ne suis pas ici depuis longtemps, mais je pense qu'il aurait fallu, ne serait-ce que par courtoisie, donner à l'ambassadeur la possibilité de présenter son point de vue. Mais je suppose que le comité a décidé.

**La vice-présidente :** Oui, il a décidé de se limiter au mémoire écrit.

**Le sénateur Cowan :** Je vous remercie.

**Le sénateur Ngo :** J'ai deux questions à poser. La première s'adresse à M. Molloy. Dans l'article, l'ambassade du Vietnam communiste dit craindre que l'adoption du projet de loi S-219 ne rouvre de vieilles blessures. Trouvez-vous cette crainte justifiée? Pourquoi?

**M. Molloy :** Il est évident que, pour l'ambassade, cette préoccupation est réelle. Nous devons nous demander quelle est l'expérience canadienne dans les situations de ce genre, quand des gens sont lésés par les actes d'un gouvernement. Quelle est la bonne solution?

Ce que nous avons appris au Canada, après avoir vécu quelques tristes épisodes de notre propre histoire — dans le cas des Chinois, dans le cas des Japonais durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, dans le cas des pensionnats indiens —, c'est qu'il est impossible de faire disparaître les cicatrices en les masquant. Nous pouvons assurer la guérison en donnant au gouvernement l'occasion de reconnaître les faits et aux personnes lésées l'occasion d'entendre le gouvernement dire qu'il regrette ce qui s'est produit et qu'il fera tous les efforts possibles pour que cela ne se reproduise jamais. C'est ainsi que nous agissons dans ce pays. Je crois que nous voulons être fidèles à nos traditions lorsque nous parlons des erreurs commises dans le passé.

Si la sénatrice Jaffer avait été ici aujourd'hui, elle aurait appuyé la notion qu'il est possible pour une communauté de réfugiés du Canada de se réconcilier avec le gouvernement qui lui a porté préjudice. Il y a eu toute une série d'événements, ces deux dernières années. Les réfugiés ougandais ont commémoré leur arrivée au Canada en présence de l'ambassadeur de l'Ouganda. Bien sûr, le pays a un nouveau régime et un nouveau président qui, plutôt que de se plaindre de ce qui a été fait, a tendu la main aux Asiatiques venus de l'Ouganda, les a aidés à retrouver leurs biens et a fait différentes choses pour favoriser la réconciliation. Aujourd'hui, les meilleurs partisans de l'Ouganda dans le monde se recrutent dans la communauté ougandaise du Canada.

You can't make the hurt of this go away by suppressing it. You have to deal with it. It's going to be very hard for a regime like the regime in Vietnam to do that, but, I would submit, that that's their problem not ours. Our responsibility is to our people and our people include 300,000 Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians who fled because of dreadful mistreatment. If we choose to acknowledge their suffering, the contribution they make to us and the way our people reacted to that, I think that's our business.

**Senator Ngo:** Thank you, Mr. Molloy. We also received a letter from the chair of the committee on External Affairs of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Mr. Tran Van Hang. He stated, in his letter: "This bill, S-219, is a document that fabricates the history."

Could you tell me what historical facts have been fabricated in this bill?

**Mr. Le:** May I add some comments to Senator Ngo's question? I don't think that there are wounds and division between the ordinary Vietnamese inside and outside Vietnam. Even the late Prime Minister of Vietnam Vo Van Kiet disclosed, in an interview with the BBC, that the reunification of North and South after 1975 had caused pain to millions.

Bill S-219 exposes the division between the government of Vietnam and the people of Vietnam.

Regarding the opening of old wounds, this is just a lame excuse, most likely because the government that was responsible for those horrors is still in power today and it's the very government that is expressing these concerns. If we follow their logic, we shouldn't commemorate Remembrance Day every year. This had to do with a tragic war, too, but Canadians proudly commemorate Remembrance Day. Lest we forget.

The analogy is inaccurate; this won't open an old wound. The injury trauma has not healed. The bleeding continues to this day, both figuratively speaking and literally. We must not sweep the past under the rug. It is shameful and an insult to those who have suffered and died and, frankly, would be embarrassing for all Canadians.

I would like to draw to your attention an analogy with what we're doing here. The Tribute to Liberty project is off the ground, as you have heard. It will build a monument in Ottawa in commemoration of the victims of communism. Will that open old wounds? I don't think so. Will that create difficulties in diplomatic and trade relationships with former and current Communist countries? I don't think so.

**Senator Ngo:** I have another question. As you know, it's been since 1975 and it's now 2015, so it's been 40 years. We call it the fortieth anniversary of the Vietnamese community who settled in

On ne peut pas supprimer le préjudice en le masquant. Il faut l'affronter. Il sera très difficile pour un régime comme celui du Vietnam de le faire, mais j'estime que c'est davantage son problème que le nôtre. Nous sommes responsables envers nos gens, qui comprennent 300 000 Vietnamiens, Cambodgiens et Laotiens qui ont fui leur pays pour échapper à d'horribles persécutions. Nous pouvons reconnaître leurs souffrances, leur contribution à notre pays et la façon dont les Canadiens les ont accueillis. Cela relève bien de nous.

**Le sénateur Ngo :** Merci, monsieur Molloy. Nous avons également reçu une lettre du président du Comité des affaires extérieures de l'Assemblée nationale de la République socialiste du Vietnam, M. Tran Van Hang. Il dit dans cette lettre : « Ce projet de loi, le S-219, est un document qui falsifie l'histoire. »

Pouvez-vous me dire quels faits historiques ont été falsifiés dans le projet de loi?

**M. Le :** Puis-je formuler quelques observations sur la question du sénateur Ngo? Je ne crois pas qu'il y ait des blessures et des scissions parmi les vietnamiens ordinaires qui vivent au Vietnam et ailleurs. Même le premier ministre du Vietnam, Vo Van Kiet, a révélé dans une interview accordée à la BBC, que la réunification du Nord et du Sud après 1975 avait causé des souffrances à des millions de personnes.

Le projet de loi S-219 met en lumière les divisions qui existent entre le gouvernement et le peuple du Vietnam.

Quant à rouvrir de vieilles blessures, ce n'est qu'un faux prétexte, très probablement parce que le gouvernement responsable des horreurs commises est encore au pouvoir aujourd'hui. Et c'est ce même gouvernement qui exprime des préoccupations. Si nous acceptons son raisonnement, nous devrions éviter de célébrer chaque année le jour du Souvenir, qui évoque une guerre tragique, mais que les Canadiens commémorent avec fierté. Nous nous souviendrons.

L'analogie ne tient pas. Le projet de loi ne rouvrira pas de vieilles blessures. Le traumatisme est encore là. Nous saignons encore dans nos cœurs et dans nos corps. Nous ne devons pas tirer le rideau sur le passé. Ce serait honteux et insultant pour ceux qui ont souffert et ceux qui sont morts. En toute franchise, ce serait embarrassant pour tous les Canadiens.

Je voudrais attirer votre attention sur une chose analogue à ce que nous faisons ici. Le projet Tribute to Liberty est lancé, comme vous l'avez sans doute appris. Il s'agit de construire un monument à Ottawa pour commémorer les victimes du communisme. Cela rouvrira-t-il de vieilles blessures? Je ne le crois pas. Cela occasionnera-t-il des difficultés diplomatiques et commerciales avec les anciens et les actuels pays communistes? Je ne le crois pas davantage.

**Le sénateur Ngo :** J'ai une autre question. Comme vous le savez, nous parlons d'événements qui remontent à 1975. Nous sommes presque en 2015 : 40 ans sont passés. Nous disons que

Canada. What does this remembrance mean to the Vietnamese-Canadian community? Do you think that other Vietnamese diaspora abroad will be highlighting this milestone event?

**Mr. Le:** I believe so. It will be very befitting if the approval of this bill is announced on that occasion, April 30, 2015, the fortieth anniversary of the fall of South Vietnam.

As I said before, this bill has overwhelming support within the Vietnamese community in Canada, and it has support with the Vietnamese community overseas in other countries. We look forward to its final approval.

**Senator Ngo:** Can I ask another question?

**Mr. Molloy:** could you elaborate the role of the Canadian people who welcomed the boat people refugees and why these contributions should be marked our Canadian history? What has happened to the Canadians who helped resettle the Vietnamese refugees?

**Mr. Molloy:** I must say, for those of us at the time, the speed with which Canadians reacted was quite amazing. But what was also really significant is that there were no religious groups in Canada that didn't participate. What was quite remarkable was that the leadership was taken by two communities with strong memories of war and repression.

The Mennonite Central Committee was the first off the mark, and there were members on the committee at that time who had been refugees from Russia in their own lifetime. As well, the Christian Reformed Church of Canada, the Dutch Christian Reformed Church, is made up of people who endured the occupation of the Nazis during the war. The third strong participants were the Canadian Jewish community with their own strong memories of the horrors of persecution, war and repression.

As we have researched the book, what we find time and again are newspaper clippings where Hungarian refugees were sponsoring Vietnamese refugees. Ugandan refugees, who had arrived five years before, formed sponsoring groups.

We're looking back 40 years ago. We were on our way to being a multicultural country, but we were nowhere near where we are now. For many "white-bread" Canadians, this was the first time they were ever in a position to bring people from other parts of the world, other than Europe, into their churches and homes. I think for all of us it was a humanizing event and that's why I'm so enthusiastic about this bill.

We're celebrating the antithesis of what happened to those people. In Vietnam, doors were closed on people. The Chinese were expelled. In Canada, there were all sorts of people all over the place and the amazing thing is that there was not a village in

c'est le 40<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la communauté vietnamienne qui s'est établie au Canada. Qu'est-ce que cette commémoration signifie pour la communauté? Croyez-vous que les communautés vietnamiennes établies dans d'autres pays célébreront aussi cet anniversaire?

**M. Le :** Je le crois. Il serait particulièrement opportun que l'approbation du projet de loi soit annoncée le 30 avril 2015, date du 40<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la chute du Sud-Vietnam.

Comme je l'ai déjà dit, le projet de loi bénéficie d'un très fort appui au sein de la communauté vietnamienne du Canada. Il est également appuyé par les communautés vietnamiennes d'autres pays. Nous attendons avec impatience son adoption.

**Le sénateur Ngo :** Puis-je poser une autre question?

Monsieur Molloy, pouvez-vous nous en dire davantage sur le rôle de la population canadienne dans l'accueil des *boat-people*? À votre avis, pourquoi ce rôle devrait-il s'inscrire dans l'histoire du Canada? Qu'est-il arrivé aux Canadiens qui ont aidé les réfugiés vietnamiens à s'établir dans le pays?

**M. Molloy :** Je dois dire que ceux d'entre nous qui ont vécu cette période ont été stupéfiés par la vitesse à laquelle les Canadiens ont réagi. Il y a également lieu de mentionner que pas un seul groupe religieux du Canada n'a refusé de participer. Autre fait à noter : deux communautés fortement marquées par le souvenir de la guerre et de la répression ont pris la direction du mouvement.

Le Comité central mennonite a été le premier à embarquer. Certains de ses membres de l'époque avaient eux-mêmes fui la Russie comme réfugiés. De même, l'Église chrétienne réformée du Canada, ou Église réformée néerlandaise, se compose de gens qui ont connu l'occupation nazie pendant la guerre. Le troisième important groupe de participants, qui se recrutait dans la communauté juive du Canada, se souvenait lui aussi des horreurs de la persécution, de la guerre et de la répression.

Pendant que nous faisons nos recherches pour le livre, nous sommes très souvent tombés sur des articles de journaux parlant de réfugiés hongrois qui ont parrainé des réfugiés vietnamiens. Des réfugiés ougandais, arrivés au Canada cinq ans plus tôt, avaient également formé des groupes de parrainage.

Tout cela s'est passé il y a 40 ans. Nous étions alors en bonne voie de devenir un pays multiculturel, mais nous étions quand même très loin de ce que nous avons réalisé aujourd'hui. Pour beaucoup de Canadiens traditionnels, c'était la première fois qu'ils avaient l'occasion de parrainer des gens de régions du monde autres que l'Europe et de les recevoir dans leurs églises et leurs maisons. Je crois que, pour nous tous, ce fut une expérience humanisante. C'est pour cette raison que je m'intéresse tant à ce projet de loi.

Nous célébrons l'antithèse de ce qui est arrivé à ces gens. Au Vietnam, les portes se sont fermées devant les gens. Les Chinois ont été expulsés. Au Canada, nous avons partout toutes sortes de gens : c'était extraordinaire car il n'y a pas une seule localité du

this country that didn't get people from that part, all the way up to Tuktoyaktuk. They didn't stay very long when winter came, surprisingly, but there are Vietnamese who are running businesses in Yellowknife today.

It's quite amazing, even in the places where they didn't stay.

If you talk to people in Prince Edward Island, where 10 or 15 families came and then drifted away, they regard it as a positive experience because it opened their eyes to a common humanity. I think it had an awful lot to do with the breaking down of racism in this country. We still have racism of course. But I think people in little towns across the country who had never seen people from Asia, except maybe the owner of the local Chinese restaurant, suddenly had to deal with the fact that these people had old people with them, babies, they needed jobs and places to live, what they would do at Christmas — all those sorts of things.

It had a humanizing effect on all of us and is an important moment in our history. People often ask if we could do it again. It might have been a unique moment, but it has had a powerful impact on our attitude as to what it is to be Canadian.

**Mr. Le:** May I add a comment to Mr. Molloy's observation? He mentioned the presence of Vietnamese refugees in Yellowknife. I met them in 1979. I met a family who was sponsored by a church group in Yellowknife. They started a business of office cleaning and they are still there. They have not drifted away. Their business is booming.

I would also like to mention, regarding the remote towns and places in Canada where refugees were sponsored by church groups, the family of Carol Huynh, who won a gold medal in the Beijing Olympics a few years ago, was sponsored by a church group in a small town in British Columbia and they are still there.

**The Deputy Chair:** Seeing no other questions, I thank Mr. Molloy and Mr. Le.

pays — pas même Tuktoyaktuk, dans le Grand Nord — qui n'ait pas accueilli des réfugiés de cette région. Ils ne sont peut-être pas restés après l'arrivée de l'hiver, mais il y a encore des Vietnamiens qui exploitent des entreprises à Yellowknife.

C'est incroyable, même aux endroits où ils ne sont pas restés.

Si vous parlez aux gens de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, où 10 ou 15 familles sont arrivées, mais sont parties plus tard, ils vous diront qu'ils ont trouvé l'expérience positive parce qu'elle leur a ouvert les yeux sur d'autres êtres humains. Je crois que cette arrivée en masse des Vietnamiens a joué un grand rôle dans l'affaiblissement du racisme dans le pays. Bien sûr, nous avons encore des racistes, mais je pense que, dans les petites villes du Canada où on n'avait jamais vu des Asiatiques, à part peut-être le propriétaire du restaurant chinois local, la population a soudain été mise en présence de gens qui comptaient parmi eux des personnes âgées et des bébés et qui avaient besoin d'un emploi et d'un logement. Elle a dû s'interroger sur ce qu'il convenait de faire à Noël, et tout le reste.

Comme je l'ai déjà dit, ces événements ont eu un effet humanisant sur nous tous et ont marqué un important moment de notre histoire. Les gens se demandent souvent comment ils se comporteraient si c'était à refaire. Peut-être ce moment a-t-il été unique, mais il a eu de profondes répercussions sur notre attitude comme Canadiens.

**M. Le :** Puis-je ajouter quelque chose aux observations de M. Molloy? Il a mentionné la présence de réfugiés vietnamiens à Yellowknife. Je les avais rencontrés en 1979. C'était une famille parrainée par un groupe religieux de Yellowknife. Elle a monté une petite entreprise de nettoyage de bureaux, qui est encore active. Les membres de la famille sont encore là, et leur affaire est florissante.

Je voudrais aussi mentionner, au sujet des collectivités isolées du Canada où des groupes religieux ont parrainé des réfugiés, que la famille de Carol Huynh, qui a remporté une médaille d'or aux Jeux olympiques de Beijing, il y a quelques années, avait été parrainée par un groupe religieux d'une petite ville de la Colombie-Britannique. Les membres de la famille y vivent encore.

**La vice-présidente :** Comme il n'y a pas d'autres questions, je voudrais remercier M. Molloy et M. Le.



# Debates of the Senate

Bill S-219 Third Reading

OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

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Part 1: VOLUME 149 • NUMBER 101 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIMENT

**Tuesday, December 2, 2014**

Speaker: The Honourable Pierre Claude Nolin

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Part 2: VOLUME 149 • NUMBER 103 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIMENT

**Thursday, December 4, 2014**

Speaker: The Honourable Pierre Claude Nolin

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Part 3: VOLUME 149 • NUMBER 104 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIMENT

**Monday, December 8, 2014**

Speaker: The Honourable Pierre Claude Nolin

## THE SENATE

Tuesday, December 2, 2014

### BLACK APRIL DAY BILL

#### THIRD READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo moved third reading of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, as amended.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to third reading of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, as amended.

I envision journey to freedom day as a day of remembrance of suffering that followed the fall of Saigon, as a day to pay tribute to Canada's humanitarian role in welcoming refugees during and after the Vietnam War, and as a commemoration of the achievements of the Vietnamese Canadians concurrently to highlight a new chapter in Canada.

I am thankful for and touched by the level of support that will ensure that journey to freedom day reflects Canada's humanitarian role in welcoming thousands of Vietnamese refugees as part of the boat people exodus following the fall of Saigon. What took place in the years after the fall of Saigon from 1975 to 1996 was the largest known mass migration in modern history, with more than 1.5 million people leaving their war-torn country in search of freedom. As honourable senators know, many Vietnamese people had to set sail in rickety, broken boats for the South China Sea, where they faced constant unimaginable peril. Not only did they have to navigate through deadly storms, but also they had to face disease, starvation and even pirate threats.

[Translation]

It became very clear to the world and to Canada that the Vietnamese refugee problem had become an international humanitarian crisis, and that the only compassionate way to fix it was to take decisive and immediate action.

[English]

The Honourable Ron Atkey, Immigration Minister at the time, approached former Prime Minister Joe Clark's cabinet to raise this mass migration issue and ask his fellow colleagues: How do we want to be remembered? Then, the citizens of Canada did something that was truly amazing. In July 1979, the Canadian government made its historic announcement that a target of 50,000 Vietnamese refugees would be admitted to Canada by the end of 1980. In February 1980, the government announced that the number of refugees admitted would be increased from 50,000 to 60,000.

[Translation]

Out of the 60,000 Vietnamese refugees that were admitted to Canada between 1979 and 1980, nearly 26,000 were sponsored by the government, while 34,000 others were sponsored by private citizens and by members of their families. In the decade that

followed, from 1982 to 1991, roughly 80,000 more Vietnamese were admitted to Canada.

[English]

Canada became known for its private sponsorship program, whereby it sought the assistance of voluntary organizations, churches and groups of at least five adult citizens who could sponsor and provide for a refugee family for a year. For each person thus sponsored, the government accepted another refugee under its own care. Individuals, families, volunteer agencies, communities, religious organizations and Canadians from all walks of life came forward to sponsor thousands of refugees, helping close to 120,000 to resettle in Canada.

[Translation]

This extraordinary feat was accomplished thanks to the exceptional leadership shown at every level of government, from mayors and municipal councillors to federal and provincial cabinet ministers, not to mention extraordinary officials. Welcoming that many refugees in such a short time is not easy. Canadians accomplished something quite unique.

[English]

Mike Molloy, President of the Canadian Immigration Historical Society, who was on site as an immigration agent for Canada, testified at the Senate Human Rights Committee last week that the sponsorship of so many boat people was something amazing, an unusual moment in our history and that it remains by far the largest resettlement operation Canada has ever undertaken.

The success of the boat people resettlement to Canada rested on the acclaimed private refugee sponsorship program. However, the real heroes of the Vietnamese resettlement and integration into the Canadian fabric were literally the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who sponsored refugees through their churches, synagogues, service clubs, unions and the ad hoc groups of friends and neighbours who got together to sponsor families privately and even to provide them with housing.

In 1986, the Right Honourable Jeanne Sauv , then Governor General, accepted on behalf of the people of Canada the Nansen Medal, the refugee equivalent to the Nobel prize and a prestigious international humanitarian award given in recognition of major and sustained efforts made on behalf of refugees. This was the first time since the medal's inception in 1954 that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees presented it to an entire population.

Since coming to Canada, members of the Vietnamese community have consistently shown that they are hardworking Canadians capable of becoming an integral part of Canadian society. There was not a village in this country that didn't hear about or take in refugees from the boat people exodus. Some Vietnamese refugees even landed all the way up in Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories. Now mind you, we don't know how long they stayed there after winter surprised them, but we know for

sure that there are Vietnamese Canadians running successful businesses in Yellowknife today.

. (1500)

The boat people establishment was, for so many Canadians, the first time they were ever in a position to bring people from other parts of the world other than Europe into their churches and homes.

Last week in committee, Mr. Molloy said it best. Canadians regard the settlement of Vietnamese refugees, “. . . as a positive experience because it opened their eyes to a common humanity.”

Canada is now home to more than 300,000 Vietnamese Canadians, with three proud generations who celebrate an important heritage in a great nation.

Were it not for Canada's generosity and humanity, neither I nor thousands of Vietnamese refugees could ever have achieved what we have today. We are now allowed to live in a beautiful country where we enjoy freedom and democracy as proud Canadians.

Honourable senators, this was a humanizing event, and Canada did something spectacular. We must ensure that this truly remarkable period in Canadian history is recorded, preserved and remembered.

April 30 is a day to commemorate those Canadians from all walks of life who, with open arms, welcomed 120,000 Vietnamese refugees who lived through a devastating war, suffered in refugee camps and endured long boat trips to escape a place they could no longer call home.

Every year on April 30, for the past 39 years, Vietnamese Canadians have gathered to remember a new beginning and to thank Canada. In 2015, the Vietnamese-Canadian community will celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the boat people resettlement to Canada.

I envision Bill S-219 as establishing a day to honour Canada's humanitarian tradition of accepting refugees during and after the Vietnam War as a way to mark this milestone.

I also envision April 30 as “Journey to Freedom Day” to thank Canada for saving our lives and to commemorate the Vietnamese refugees' new-found freedom because freedom isn't free, and the boat people paid for their freedom with their perilous journey.

(On motion of Senator Fraser, for Senator Jaffer, debate adjourned.)

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## JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY BILL

### THIRD READING—VOTE DEFERRED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Ngo, seconded by the Honourable Senator Enverga, for the third reading of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, as amended.

**Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer:** Honourable senators, I rise to speak on Bill S-219, which is An Act respecting a national day of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and to declare a Black April Day, which has now been amended in committee to “Journey to Freedom Day.”

Honourable senators, today I rise to speak about Bill S-219, and I would like to thank Senator Ngo for raising the issue.

• (1530)

Honourable senators, for Vietnamese communities around the world, April 30 is one of the most significant days of their collective history. It recognizes the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the takeover of South Vietnam by the North and the beginning of the mass exodus of millions of Vietnamese people from their homeland.

As you are aware, honourable senators, at committee stage, we had a number of witnesses, and there was one witness who wanted to appear in front of our committee whom we were not able to accommodate. I did promise him that I would read his letter to all of you, honourable senators. He is the Ambassador of Vietnam to Canada. His letter reads as follows:

Dear Senators of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you the present state of Vietnam-Canada relations and a different view on S-219.

Last year, Canada and Vietnam celebrated 40 years of diplomatic relations. Canada recognized the then Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1973 (before the end of the war in 1975) and has continually recognized and supported Vietnam since reunification of our country. Vietnam is grateful to Canada for its kind understanding and support over the past 40 years now.

The ambassador goes on at length to describe all the bilateral relationships that Canada and Vietnam have had and, because of time limits, I will not read those.

The ambassador then continues:

Meanwhile, Bill S-219 introduced by Senator Ngo reaches back into the past and paints a dark and narrow view of Vietnam, its international relations and history. Moreover, this Bill proposes to enshrine this view with the recognition of the thirtieth day of April as “Black April Day”.

The Government of Vietnam disagrees with this negative and selective portrayal and has expressed its concerns privately and publicly.

I submit that, if this Bill receives parliamentary approval, it will send the wrong message to the public of Vietnam and the international community about Canada’s goodwill towards our country.

Senator Ngo, in his presentation to the Committee stated that this Bill is not political and would not have any impact on bilateral relations between Canada and Vietnam. This is incorrect.

In fact, the Government of Vietnam has made many representations to the most senior levels of the Government of Canada and leaders of Parliament expressing our serious concerns about the language and intent of this Bill.

If passed, this Bill will have an adverse impact on the growing bilateral relations between our two countries. Despite claims of being non-political, this Bill clearly incites national hatred and division, not unity.

As Ambassador, I have travelled across Canada and I believe strongly that this Bill does not represent the views of the majority of Vietnamese-Canadians. It is regrettable that there has been no opportunity for the Committee to hear other witnesses from different parts of Canada.

Honourable senators, on the issue of refugees, one that is being highlighted in S-219, the Government of Vietnam is grateful for the role Canada played in welcoming the thousands of Vietnamese refugees to its shores at a very difficult time in our country’s history many years ago.

This was a time of war, poverty, disunity and suffering of all involved. Millions of innocent Vietnamese were victims.

The black days of war and suffering are the enemies of humanity, development and hope.

Vietnam and its people all over the world are focused on the future and the bright days of a better future with the help and friendship of countries like Canada.

Since that difficult time, the relations of friendship and cooperation between our two countries have increasingly grown on all fields.

As previously mentioned, our two countries have just celebrated 40 years of diplomatic relations. We should build on this milestone by highlighting the positive, the present and the future — not the negative of the past.

Honourable senators, Vietnamese Canadians living all over in British Columbia, the Prairies, Ontario or Quebec, the Atlantic provinces, Newfoundland and Labrador, even Canada's North, are hard-working people and important part of the Canadian cultural mosaic. These citizens also represent the bridge between our countries. This is what we should celebrate together.

In conclusion, let us leave the black days of war, suffering and disunity in the past. Vietnam and the Vietnamese people around the world have come a long way in 40 years. Let us focus on building the future as mapped out by Ministers Baird and Pham Binh Minh in September 2014. Let us focus on those things that bring us together, not tear us apart.

Once again, I thank you for your time and consideration.

Honourable senators, as I said earlier, this bill has now been amended at committee stage and the name of the day has changed to "Journey to Freedom."

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that at least 250,000 Vietnamese people lost their lives at sea in their desperate attempt to flee.

As I stated at second reading, honourable senators, to be a refugee is one of the most difficult trials a person can face. There is an overwhelming helplessness that you feel when you are in the hands of the goodwill of the international community.

I, again, want to take the opportunity to thank Canada and the policies of Prime Minister Trudeau, which allowed the Vietnamese to come to Canada and also allowed my family to come to Canada in 1975.

Those of us who have been refugees share an unspoken bond. We are acutely aware of the varying levels of suffering that each refugee undergoes. Some of us, through sheer chance, were put in a position where a country welcomed us with open arms. In particular, it is a recognition of the Canadian families, religious groups, charities and non-governmental organizations that sponsored an estimated 34,000 Vietnamese refugees to Canada. It is also an acknowledgment of the suffering of the many Vietnamese refugees.

Honourable senators, at this point, I would like to recognize the former mayor of Ottawa, who did a yeoman's job in welcoming Vietnamese people to Ottawa. Marion Dewar, Mayor of Ottawa in 1975, saw that there were many refugees suffering and, as we remember, they were called the "boat people." She went to her community and asked for support for the Vietnamese refugees, and then she contacted the federal government and challenged the government, which had set a quota of 8,000 people, to say that Ottawa would accept 4,000 of those refugees. The project was known as "Project 4000," in which 4,000 refugees were going to be accepted by Ottawa.

As a result of her challenge, Ottawa increased the number it would accept to 60,000. Marion Dewar led this initiative, and she encouraged many mayors across the country to also be part of this initiative. As a result, many communities came together and supported Marion Dewar's work and recognized that what she was doing was very important.

[ Senator Jaffer ]

Today, I spoke to Marion Dewar's son, Paul Dewar, who is the MP for Ottawa Centre. He said: "If you praise my mother for the work she did, if she were here, she would say: It was not me. It was Canadians. It was my community."

Honourable senators, as a refugee myself, I would be very remiss if I didn't thank Marion Dewar and all the Canadians who helped refugees to make Canada our home.

**Some Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear.

**Senator Jaffer:** I know most of you have heard my story of being a refugee from Uganda ad nauseam, but I can never speak enough about it. As you know, I am an Indian and, as a result of being an Indian, I was thrown out of Uganda. We all proudly call Canada our home. Let me share with you what my home looks like.

My grandchildren speak Gujarati, an Indian language with some of us at home. My grandson is in French immersion and is starting to play the bagpipes. My son is a professional bagpiper with the Irish Regiment, which Senator Campbell knows very well. My daughter is an expert Indian Bharatnatyam dancer and reached a very high standard in dancing. She reached this standard because of her Quebecois teacher, Benoît Villeneuve, a renowned Indian dancer. He is such a renowned Indian dancer that when Mr. Chrétien, as Prime Minister, went to India, the Indian Government invited Mr. Villeneuve to dance with the other professional Indian dancers.

That is why we love Canada. We love and cherish Canada because we can strengthen our Indian culture and become part of other cultures.

• (1540)

Sadly, some things in my household never change. Honourable senators, my two children are continuously trying to correct my English and the words I use. When they sometimes hear the debates they say to me, "Mom, you butchered the words. Why don't you learn the words properly?" Now it continues.

My grandson shudders when I speak French with him. He is forever correcting my pronunciation.

[Translation]

My grandson often says to me, "Grand-maman!" He tells me that I should improve my French. Easy for him to say. Not for me.

[English]

My grandson speaks French as if he were from Quebec. My children speak English because they are from British Columbia. Both of those languages are often a challenge for me.

But, honourable senators, I share my family's story because what we love is that we can love who we are: our Indian origin; we love to be Canadians with pride; and we love that we are Muslims and can pray with pride. My grandson has been the youngest person to say the prayers in the mosque recently. We are proud to be Canadians, because in Canada we are part of the community. That's what it means to be a refugee here.

When you arrive in a country and when you are included in the community, when you are not excluded because of your faith, your colour, your skin, and you become part of building that community, then you have the same dreams and aspirations as all Canadians. That is why I am a proud Canadian.

**Hon. Grant Mitchell:** Honourable senators, I would like to say a few words about this because Vietnam has a particular place in my heart and in my life.

I want to begin by congratulating Senator Ngo on his efforts to recognize this era in Vietnamese and Canadian history. I was very aware of that time, the time of the boat people. In fact, my wife and I were part of a group that sponsored several Vietnamese refugees, but unfortunately over the years we've lost touch with them. They were a pair of brothers, 16 and 17 years old, so now they must be 55. I've tried to track them down but, despite my efforts on the Internet, I haven't been able to.

In any event, it was a wonderful period of time in Canada. There was a great sense of purpose amongst so many Canadians and, for whatever reason, a real affinity for the plight of the Vietnamese people. I guess you can imagine, with the history of the Vietnamese War so clear in our minds, as close as we were to the U.S., that that might have heightened our awareness, empathy and our sense of the Vietnamese people and our desire to help. It was a wonderful time.

I also would like to mention something that's probably not known to many Canadians, and perhaps not to very many people, very many senators, but Canada played a peacekeeping role in Vietnam. When Vietnam was divided into North and South in 1956 after the French were driven out, for whatever reason the international community — not the United Nations, and I don't know why that was — put together an observatory force. The force was contributed to by three nations: India, which was seen to be neutral; Canada, which represented the then Cold War West; and Poland, which represented the then Cold War East.

This was called the International Control Commission. It set up outposts all over Vietnam, North and South, where one representative of each of those three countries would be stationed for a month at a time on a rotational basis and then moved along. There were always three, one from each country, in each of these outposts, and they were there to observe and report on any arms buildup by what became the Viet Kong and the North and South Vietnamese armies.

Clearly, it didn't work as well as it might have, unfortunately, but I just wanted to acknowledge the fact that Canadians did contribute in that way. These were Canadian soldiers. They weren't combatants, but they were often at great personal risk. Canadians participated in that International Control Commission from 1956 right up until about 1972.

The reason I know about this is because my father was there for a year, between 1963 and 1964. As a young boy of 12 years, that left a vivid impression in my mind, my father leaving for a year. In those days, there were no holidays where you met halfway and there were no long-distance calls. A year was a year. That was a long time for me, my sister, my brother and undoubtedly, as you

can imagine, my mother as well. That experience has never left me, and his respect and admiration for the Vietnamese people has never left me either.

It was a very formative time in my life, and it has made me — although everybody would in any event — highly respectful of the Vietnamese people: their resilience, courage, strength, and of course their tremendous contribution to Canada's development over the many years that they have been immigrants and now fully-fledged citizens of this country.

**Hon. Joan Fraser (Deputy Leader of the Opposition):** Just a couple of words, colleagues. I hadn't planned to speak at all, but listening to the remarks today there was something I thought I would add.

I have only been to Vietnam once in my life, and that was maybe eight or nine years ago. I went to Hanoi, representing the Inter-Parliamentary Union. There are several things I remember. One is being advised, almost before I left the airport, by a Vietnamese that if I was walking around, I should not look at drivers approaching me at red lights, because if they made eye contact with me they wouldn't stop. I followed that advice and I survived, although I did learn that at that time red lights were considered more in the way of advisory signals than compulsory rules.

**Senator Munson:** Just like Quebec; it's just a suggestion.

**Senator Fraser:** At that time, already there was a growing amount of Western investment in Hanoi which is, by the way, a beautiful city. Old Hanoi is really beautiful. I spent more than a day just walking around, and it was very impressive. One of the things you see is a 1,000-year-old university, predating Oxford, Cambridge and the Sorbonne, and even the Italian universities by two or three centuries.

What I remember most is a Vietnamese parliamentarian saying to me, his face shining, "Did you see the banner in the airport?" It had been a very long flight from Montreal and I had not noticed the banner in the airport. He gave me the precise wording, which I don't remember, but it was something like, "Welcome home Vietnamese from overseas." I said, "That's very nice." He said, "No, no, you don't understand. This was a big deal for us. For years and years the people who left —" like Senator Ngo and thousands of others, so many of whom came here — "we didn't want to know about them. We thought they were illegitimate. We thought they were enemies. Suddenly it dawned on us that they're not enemies; they're our brothers. For years we would refuse when they would try to send money home to their families. We would say it's illegal to accept that money," he said.

• (1550)

"Suddenly it dawned on us," he said, and his face just shone, "that they are sending that money out of love, and we should not reject gifts that are based on love." And I thought: Something is happening here. That poor country had such a terrible, terrible time. After the end of the war, I think that terrible exodus of refugees is more proof than there could otherwise be of how bad it got under the new regime. But what I saw was an indication that

things can change, that time can heal, can bring at least some measure of wisdom, and I would hope that our country would be intent on building on that.

I cannot tell you, Senator Ngo, how much I respect your experience and the experience of all of those thousands, but that is although an important part, just one part of the long, long history of what was then your country.

**Hon. James S. Cowan (Leader of the Opposition):** I move the adjournment of the debate.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Senators:** No.

**Some Hon. Senators:** Yes.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** All those in favour please say “yea.”

**Some Hon. Senators:** Yea.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** All those opposed please say “nay.”

**Some Hon. Senators:** Nay.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Clearly the “nays” have it.

I see one senator rising.

**Senator Cowan:** Honourable senators, I assume debate is going to continue.

Mr. Speaker, colleagues, I was surprised and I was disappointed when I learned this morning that the government would deny what is a normal courtesy, and that is my request for adjournment so that I could speak following the speech by Senator Jaffer. No reason was offered by the government other than the government wanted the bill today.

Colleagues, this is a private member’s bill. It was introduced by Senator Ngo on April 10, 2014. Senator Ngo spoke to it on April 30, and our colleague Senator Jaffer, as critic, spoke three sitting days later, on May 7. Senator Martin took the adjournment, and there the bill sat. The Deputy Leader of the Government, Senator Martin, reset the clock on June 19 and again there was no further activity until suddenly, on October 29, the leadership on the other side called the question. No further speeches, just the question, and the bill was referred to our Human Rights Committee.

Then, after the bill had been left to languish in the chamber for months, suddenly everything had to move fast. A mere 18 hours passed between the bill receiving second reading and the first hearing taking place before the Human Rights Committee. At that time, Senator Ngo appeared as the sponsor of the bill. A second hearing was held three weeks later, when two witnesses were heard, and then the committee moved immediately to clause-by-clause consideration.

Colleagues, only witnesses supportive of the bill were permitted to testify. As we’ve heard from Senator Jaffer, the committee received an unusual letter from the Vietnamese ambassador, dated October 30, portions of which she has read into the record this afternoon, in which he requested an opportunity to appear before the committee. He disagreed with Senator Ngo’s characterization of the bill as not having any negative effect on bilateral relations between Canada and Vietnam. He wrote, and this was quoted by Senator Jaffer a few moments ago:

If passed, this bill will have an adverse impact on the growing bilateral relations between our two countries.

The ambassador’s request to appear was denied by the government. The committee chose instead to ask the ambassador to provide a written submission.

Colleagues, I don’t know who is correct, Senator Ngo or the Vietnamese ambassador, but I am troubled that we’re being asked to pronounce on this bill today without our committee having had the opportunity to hear all sides of the issue.

The Vietnamese ambassador was not alone in opposing this bill. We now know that there were others. There were letters which were referred to in the chamber last week by Senator Munson that had been sent to the committee by individuals and organizations wishing to express their opposition to the bill. None of these Canadians were given an opportunity to be heard by our committee.

The primary role of the Senate and senators, as we heard from the Supreme Court of Canada and as was spoken to this morning by our Speaker in an address to the media, is to review legislation. This was not done in a balanced and fulsome way by our committee on Bill S-219.

We were allowed to hear only one side of the story. The committee only heard from people who supported the bill. They may well be right, but there is another side to this story: that of the committee members and, since the committee reports to us, we don’t have the benefit of the other side of the story so that we can weigh the alternatives.

The Vietnamese ambassador’s unusual request to appear before our committee was denied. Vietnamese Canadians, as I’ve said and as Senator Munson pointed out last week, wrote letters opposing the bill. Those views were never presented to the committee.

Colleagues, our job as senators has at times been compared to that of a judge. What judge would ever pass judgment on a case without providing an opportunity for both sides to be heard? Would anyone in this chamber support that kind of justice system? Why then would we accept it for our legislative process?

I’m not saying that Bill S-219 does not deserve our support — perhaps it does. Our colleague Senator Ngo and the other witnesses who appeared before the committee did an admirable job in making their case in support of the bill. The problem is that his was the only side of the story we were allowed to hear. We simply do not know if the bill deserves our support because our

committee was not permitted to do a serious and balanced study of its provisions and impact. We were not permitted to do the kind of study that Canadians expect from us.

I wanted to take the adjournment today so that I would have an opportunity — denied by the government to the committee — to discuss the bill with the Vietnamese ambassador. That is something I've arranged to do next Tuesday morning, which was the first occasion when he was available to meet with me, and he's also meeting with Senator Jaffer and Senator Munson. That was the first opportunity that he was available to meet with me and I asked for what I thought was a reasonable thing to do, which was to ask for the adjournment so that I could listen to him and then I could form an informed opinion on this bill.

And let's be clear about one other thing: There is no apparent urgency to this bill. No reason has been put forward by the other side as to why this bill must be passed today. Colleagues, the bill would declare April 30 to be "Journey to Freedom Day." We're now at December 4 — more than four months before April 30. Why couldn't we delay our vote for a few days, until we have an opportunity to benefit from the views of the other side?

In these circumstances — and I'm speaking simply for myself here — I will be left with no choice. I will abstain from voting on the bill at third reading. I simply do not consider that I have enough information to form a position to vote "yea" or "nay."

I'm afraid that our only hope now is that the other house takes upon itself the responsibility to do the work that we were not permitted to do here. I will urge my colleagues in the other place from all parties to hear those witnesses with different perspectives, to allow the ambassador to appear and present the views of his government and to hear from others as to why they oppose the bill. Honourable senators, it will fall upon the other place to become the chamber of sober second thought. We have not done our job on this bill. This is not how legislation should be passed in our country. This is not the right path for any "journey to freedom." People have the right to be heard before this Senate and before its committees.

• (1600)

#### MOTION IN AMENDMENT NEGATIVED

**Hon. James S. Cowan (Leader of the Opposition):** Therefore, colleagues, for these reasons, I move:

That Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, as amended, be not now read a third time but that it be referred back to the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights for further study and report.

**Some Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**Some Hon. Senators:** No.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Those in favour of the motion please say "yea."

**Some Hon. Senators:** Yea.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Those opposed to the motion please say "nay."

**Some Hon. Senators:** Nay.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** I think the "nays" have it.

**Senator Fraser:** On division.

**An Hon. Senator:** Question!

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Are honourable senators ready for the question?

**Some Hon. Senators:** Question.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** It was moved by the Honourable Senator Ngo, seconded by the Honourable Senator Enverga, that this bill be read a third time. Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

**Some Hon. Senators:** No.

**Some Hon. Senators:** Yes.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion please say "yea."

**Some Hon. Senators:** Yea.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Those opposed to the motion please say "nay."

**Some Hon. Senators:** Nay.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** I think the yeas have it.

*And two honourable senators having risen:*

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** I see two senators rising. Is there agreement by the whips on the time?

**Senator Munson:** Your Honour, I wish to defer the vote to the next sitting of the Senate.

[English]

Housakos  
Johnson  
Lang  
LeBreton  
MacDonald  
Maltais

Tannas  
Unger  
Verner  
Wallace  
White — 45

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### BUSINESS OF THE SENATE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, we are now at the start of the Orders of the Day. Pursuant to the order of Thursday, December 4, the bells will ring for 15 minutes to call in the senators for the taking of a deferred vote on third reading of Bill S-219, as amended.

Call in the senators.

(1830)

### JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY BILL

#### THIRD READING

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, it was moved by the Honourable Senator Ngo, seconded by the Honourable Senator Enverga:

That Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, as amended, be read the third time.

Motion agreed to and bill, as amended, read third time and passed, on the following division:

### YEAS THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Andreychuk  
Ataullahjan  
Batters  
Bellemare  
Beyak  
Black  
Boisvenu  
Carignan  
Dagenais  
Day  
Demers  
Doyle  
Eaton  
Enverga  
Fortin-Duplessis  
Frum  
Greene

Manning  
Marshall  
Martin  
McInnis  
McIntyre  
Meredith  
Mockler  
Nancy Ruth  
Ngo  
Patterson  
Plett  
Raine  
Rivard  
Runciman  
Seidman  
Seth  
Stewart Olsen

### NAYS THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Eggleton  
Furey

Hervieux-Payette  
Joyal — 4

### ABSTENTIONS THE HONOURABLE SENATORS

Cools  
Cordy  
Cowan  
Downe  
Fraser  
Hubley  
Jaffer

Lovelace Nicholas  
Massicotte  
Mitchell  
Moore  
Munson  
Ringuette  
Tardif — 14

(1840)

The Hon. the Speaker: I understand, Senator Cowan, you want to address the house.

Hon. James S. Cowan (Leader of the Opposition): I wanted to take a moment, colleagues, to explain my abstention. I did speak at third reading on the bill last week. I expressed no opinion on the bill, either in favour or against it, but I indicated at that time that I would abstain as a protest against the way in which this bill has been handled. I want to take a moment this evening just to remind colleagues of that.

Colleagues, this is a private member's bill. It is not a government bill. It was introduced by our colleague Senator Ngo in April, and then it sat on our Order Paper for months. Suddenly, at the end of October, the government decided that it had to move immediately on the bill. They called a vote. It was sent to committee.

The government permitted only witnesses who spoke in favour of the bill to testify before the committee. Individuals, including the Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, requested the opportunity to appear, and the government denied them that opportunity.

The government has provided no explanation, no justification for what I consider to be an extraordinary course of events. As a result, our committee was unable to do the job that they are here

[ Senator Carignan ]

to do, that is, to consider the evidence, consider the bill, consider all aspects of the legislation, and then to provide advice to us, as senators.

They were not able to do that and, therefore, colleagues, I would suggest that we were not able to form a balanced judgment on the merits of this bill.

So, the end result is the bill has passed, and we leave it to our colleagues in the House of Commons to act as the house of sober second thought. I hope we will reflect on that. This is not the way we should do business in this country. Our job is to carefully consider legislation and to hear those who wish to express opinions, whether they are in favour or against or simply asking questions about legislation.

The government refused to allow us and our committee the opportunity to do the job, and that's the reason why I abstained from the vote.

Hon. Jim Munson: Just a few words on the same subject and echoing the statement given by my leader on why I abstained. Why I abstained is because this bill is about the "road to democracy." There should be the road to free speech. What the 300,000 Vietnamese refugees came to this country for was free speech, and free speech was denied in the Human Rights Committee. It seems to me that when we debate issues, particularly here in the House of Commons and the Senate, Parliament Hill, we must have an opportunity in which every voice should be heard on each issue. I have a soft spot and a great deal of empathy for the Vietnamese people. As a young reporter, I covered refugees who languished in camps in Hong Kong for years, and I did news stories on them and listened to them and understood them. Of course, we all understand why this country opened its arms to the Vietnamese boat people, and they have become part of Canada's mosaic. But, on this particular occasion, this is the first time since I was appointed to the Senate 11 years ago December 10 that I have ever abstained. I did not abstain because of the intent of what the good senator was trying to put on the paper. My concern was simply this: Let this be a lesson that every time we have a conversation in a free, democratic country like Canada, both sides of the issue should be heard, at least, and then we can vote the way we want to vote. Part of the road to democracy is the road to free speech.

#### VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of a delegation, led by Mr. Phat Nguyen, of leaders from various Canadian-Vietnamese communities across Ontario. They are guests of the Honourable Senator Ngo.

On behalf of all honourable senators, I welcome you to the Senate of Canada.

Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

**S-219**

Second Session, Forty-first Parliament,  
62-63 Elizabeth II, 2013-2014

**SENATE OF CANADA**

## **BILL S-219**

An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War

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**AS PASSED**

BY THE SENATE  
DECEMBER 8, 2014

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**S-219**

Deuxième session, quarante et unième législature,  
62-63 Elizabeth II, 2013-2014

**SÉNAT DU CANADA**

## **PROJET DE LOI S-219**

Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam

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**ADOPTÉ**

PAR LE SÉNAT  
LE 8 DÉCEMBRE 2014

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## SUMMARY

This enactment designates the thirtieth day of April in each and every year as “Journey to Freedom Day”.

## SOMMAIRE

Le texte désigne le 30 avril comme « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté ».

SENATE OF CANADA

SÉNAT DU CANADA

## BILL S-219

## PROJET DE LOI S-219

An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War

Loi instituant une journée nationale de commémoration de l'exode des réfugiés vietnamiens et de leur accueil au Canada après la chute de Saïgon et la fin de la guerre du Vietnam

Preamble

Whereas the Canadian Forces were involved in the Vietnam War with supervisory operations to support the aim of establishing peace and ending the Vietnam War by assisting in the enforcement of the Paris Peace Accords of 1973;

Whereas on April 30, 1975, despite the Paris Peace Accords, the military forces of the People's Army of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front invaded South Vietnam, which led to the fall of Saigon, the end of the Vietnam War and the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government;

Whereas the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that these events and the conditions faced by individuals in Vietnam, including deteriorating living conditions and human rights abuses, contributed to the exodus of approximately 840,000 Vietnamese people, who were referred to at the time as "Vietnamese boat people", to neighbouring countries in the ensuing years;

Whereas the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that at least 250,000 Vietnamese people lost their lives at sea during the exodus of the Vietnamese people for reasons that included drowning, illness, starvation and violence from kidnapping or piracy;

Préambule

Attendu :

que les Forces canadiennes ont pris part à la guerre du Vietnam dans le cadre d'opérations de surveillance menées pour appuyer l'objectif de rétablir la paix et de mettre fin à la guerre du Vietnam, en aidant à assurer le respect des Accords de paix de Paris de 1973;

que le 30 avril 1975, malgré les Accords de paix de Paris, les forces militaires de l'Armée populaire vietnamienne et du Front national de libération ont envahi le Vietnam du Sud, ce qui a entraîné la chute de Saïgon, la fin de la guerre du Vietnam et l'établissement du gouvernement de la République socialiste du Vietnam;

que, selon le Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés, ces événements ainsi que la situation vécue par les gens du Vietnam, notamment la détérioration des conditions de vie et les violations des droits de la personne, ont contribué à l'exode de quelque 840 000 d'entre eux — appelés à l'époque les « réfugiés de la mer vietnamiens » — vers les pays voisins au cours des années qui ont suivi;

que, d'après un rapport du Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés, au moins 250 000 Vietnamiens sont décédés en mer au cours de cet exode en raison

Whereas the sponsorship refugee program in Canada, assisted by the efforts of Canadian families, Canadian charities, religious groups and non-governmental organizations, contributed to Canada accepting more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees, among whom it has been estimated that 34,000 were privately sponsored and 26,000 were assisted by the Canadian government;

Whereas the major and sustained contribution by the people of Canada to the cause of refugees was recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees when it awarded the Nansen Refugee Award to the “People of Canada” in 1986;

And whereas April 30 is referred to by many members of the community of displaced Vietnamese people and their families in Canada as “Black April Day”, or alternatively as “Journey to Freedom Day”, and is, therefore, an appropriate day to designate as a day to remember and commemorate the lives lost and the suffering experienced during the exodus of Vietnamese people, the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees in Canada, the gratitude of Vietnamese people to the Canadian people and the Government of Canada for accepting them, and the contributions of Vietnamese-Canadian people — whose population is now approximately 300,000 — to Canadian society;

Now, therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

#### SHORT TITLE

Short title

1. This Act may be cited as the *Journey to Freedom Day Act*.

#### JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY

Journey to Freedom Day

2. Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the thirtieth day of April shall be known as “Journey to Freedom Day”.

notamment des noyades, de la maladie, de la famine et des violences liées aux enlèvements ou aux actes de piraterie;

que, grâce aux efforts des familles canadiennes et à ceux des groupes religieux, des organismes de bienfaisance et des organismes non gouvernementaux du Canada, le programme canadien de parrainage des réfugiés a permis d’accueillir au pays plus de 60 000 réfugiés vietnamiens, parmi lesquels, selon les estimations, 34 000 ont été parrainés par des organismes du secteur privé et 26 000 ont reçu l’aide du gouvernement canadien;

que le Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés a reconnu la contribution importante et soutenue de la population canadienne à la cause des réfugiés lorsqu’il a décerné la distinction Nansen pour les réfugiés au « peuple canadien » en 1986;

qu’il convient de désigner le 30 avril — que de nombreux membres de la communauté des Vietnamiens déplacés et leurs familles au Canada reconnaissent déjà comme « jour de l’Avril noir » ou encore comme « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté » — en tant que journée pour commémorer les vies perdues et la souffrance vécue lors de l’exode du peuple vietnamien, souligner l’accueil des réfugiés vietnamiens par la population et le gouvernement du Canada et la gratitude du peuple vietnamien à l’égard cet accueil, et reconnaître les contributions apportées par les Vietnamo-Canadiens — aujourd’hui au nombre d’environ 300 000 — à la société canadienne, Sa Majesté, sur l’avis et avec le consentement du Sénat et de la Chambre des communes du Canada, édicte :

#### TITRE ABRÉGÉ

Titre abrégé

1. *Loi sur la Journée du Parcours vers la liberté*.

#### JOURNÉE DU PARCOURS VERS LA LIBERTÉ

2. Le 30 avril est, dans tout le Canada, désigné comme « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté ».

Journée du Parcours vers la liberté

Not a legal holiday

**3.** For greater certainty, Journey to Freedom Day is not a legal holiday or a non-judicial day.

**3.** Il est entendu que la Journée du Parcours vers la liberté n'est pas une fête légale ni un jour non juridique.

Statut

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Available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:  
Disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :  
**<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRES DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

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# PROCEEDINGS



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

Bill S-219 Second Reading

OFFICIAL REPORTS  
(HANSARD)

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Part 1: VOLUME 147 • NUMBER 170 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

**Thursday, February 5, 2015**

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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Part 2: VOLUME 147 • NUMBER 187 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

**Monday, March 23, 2015**

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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Vote: VOLUME 147 • NUMBER 189 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

**Wednesday, March 25, 2015**

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

### JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC)** moved that Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, on April 30, 1975, the Vietnam War ended. The capital city of South Vietnam, Saigon, fell to the Communist invaders from the north, but that is not where the story ends. April 30, 1975, began a new chapter in the lives of the people of South Vietnam.

It was the start of the exodus of millions of people fleeing that country, the land they had called home for generations. They were fleeing the harsh treatment and suppression of human rights by an authoritarian government; ethnic, religious, and political persecutions; political executions of former South Vietnamese officials and their families; forced resettlement in remote areas; and deteriorating living conditions brought on by food shortages, flooding, and drought. By 1979, some 600,000 South Vietnamese had fled.

Over the next three years, the refugee label "boat people" became familiar as Vietnamese began trying to escape from their homeland aboard small watercraft, seeking temporary refuge in neighbouring countries.

*Private Members' Business*

Many countries refused to allow them to land. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees reported that while attempting to escape, at least 250,000 Vietnamese people lost their lives at sea due to drowning, illness, starvation, and sexual assault or violence from kidnapping or piracy.

In response to this humanitarian crisis, Canada responded by opening our doors. Between 1975 and 1976, Canada accepted some 6,500 political refugees who had left Vietnam after the fall of Saigon. In October 1976, Canada accepted 180 boat people. In August 1977, there was a further commitment for 450 people. In 1978, the government agreed to accept 50 boat families per month. By 1980, some 120,000 Vietnamese refugees were welcomed with open arms to Canada. Also, by demonstrating an ongoing concern, Canada aimed to encourage countries of first asylum to open their doors as well.

By 1986, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees was so impressed by Canada's role in accepting so many refugees from South Vietnam that the people of Canada were awarded the Nansen Medal for their "major and sustained contribution to the cause of refugees".

This medal is the refugee equivalent to the Nobel Prize, and marks the only time in history that an entire country has been recognized in this fashion. That is why I am so proud to co-sponsor, along with Senator Thanh Hai Ngo, Bill S-219, or the journey to freedom day act, which will serve three purposes.

First, it would establish April 30 as a day to commemorate the exodus of refugees from South Vietnam.

Second, it would recognize the extraordinary humanitarian role played by the Canadian government as well as Canadian families, voluntary agencies, communities, synagogues and churches, and religious groups in welcoming so many Vietnamese so warmly into the Canadian family.

Third, it should also be noted that this period in Canadian history is one that is not well known among younger Canadians today. For that reason, April 30 should serve as a day of reflection and education. All Canadians should know the story of Vietnamese refugees who were forced to flee their native land, of the vast humanitarian effort that was undertaken by Canadians to welcome them, and of the triumph over adversity that the vibrant Vietnamese community in Canada represents.

Canada was among the first countries to welcome Vietnamese refugees with open arms. When the people of Vietnam were in need, Canadians from all walks of life answered the call without hesitation and opened their homes and hearts to over 60,000 Indochinese refugees who desperately needed a place to rebuild their lives.

This is the highest number of refugees per capita taken by any country in the world during this period. Canada's role in opening its doors to so many Vietnamese refugees is an example of the best of Canada. It is a true demonstration of Canadian values.

Here is a little bit of how it worked.

The federal government developed a private sponsorship program whereby institutions such as churches and groups of at least five adult citizens would take a refugee family into their care for a year.

● (1720)

For each person sponsored privately, the government accepted another refugee under its own care. It was Canada that pioneered the private sponsorship refugee program, enabling our country to accept a much larger number of refugees while also reducing the cost to the government coffers and providing an example to the rest of the world.

Without the warm and caring efforts of thousands of Canadians, and the leadership, support, and co-operation of the Canadian government, as well as refugee agencies, non-governmental organizations, and religious groups, the movement of such large numbers of people, under such urgent and difficult circumstances, would simply not have been possible.

It is written in scripture that he who saves a single life saves an entire generation. Today there are approximately 300,000 people of Vietnamese origin living in Canada. More than 100,000 of them live in the greater Toronto area.

On April 30, for the past 39 years, Vietnamese Canadians have gathered to remember a new beginning and to thank Canada. In 2015, the Vietnamese Canadian community will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the resettlement of the boat people to Canada.

This bill speaks to Canada's long-standing tradition as a beacon of freedom and democracy, a nation that generously embraced refugees who were forced to flee their homelands through no fault of their own.

One of the more remarkable developments in this story is that many of those who came to Canada as boat people are today sponsoring refugees themselves. They have partnered with the Government of Canada, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, to bring to Canada the last remaining Vietnamese refugees, who have been stranded, without status, in Southeast Asia, in places like Thailand and the Philippines, for nearly 40 years. What a proud legacy, and what an amazing way to mark their journey to freedom: by helping others.

This is an important bill, and today I ask for all members' support in moving it forward. National recognition of this day would serve as a point of pride for people of Vietnamese descent and for all Canadians, highlighting as it does the generous Canadian spirit and national respect for freedom. Our nation is one built by immigrants, and our communities are enriched by the vibrant mosaic of cultural heritage within them.

Never again shall Canada's refugee policy be as disgraceful and despicable as it was before and during the Second World War, a time when "none is too many" was the order of the day. Canada's warm, generous acceptance of immigrants and refugees is one of our nation's most sacred traditions. Our historic and continued commitment to diversity is one that we as a government must strive to recognize and honour whenever we can.

*Private Members' Business*

This bill would also provide an opportunity for all of us to reflect on our own commitment to a diverse and inclusive Canada, a place where we are all united in our values, regardless of race, religion, colour, or creed. It is so important for all Canadians to remember and reflect on our nation's history and how it has contributed to our current culture of pluralism, diversity, and acceptance.

This bill would also provide an excellent chance to reflect on the strengths and diversity the Vietnamese community has brought to our country and to thank them for their contribution to our cultural mosaic. We can all learn something from the refugees who were willing to risk everything to live in freedom, because a life lived without freedom is no life at all.

I am a first-generation Canadian, and this bill invites reflection on my own experience as a child of a Holocaust survivor, whose dad came to Canada with nothing more than the shirt on his back, a number tattooed on his arm, but most importantly, hope in his heart. For so many refugees who came to Canada, like the survivors of the Holocaust, the Vietnamese boat people, the persecuted Christians and Yazidis of northern Iraq and Syria, and so many others, each and every one of them had a right to turn their backs on humanity, yet they did not. They came to Canada in search of hope, hope for themselves, yes, but more importantly, hope for their children so that they would not be forced live under the yoke of oppression or persecution. They came to Canada because Canada is a beacon of light in the world, a country that stands tall and strong, adhering to the values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

• (1725)

The journey to freedom day act would offer an opportunity to reflect on our commitment to the very best of Canadian values. It would give us yet another reason to showcase Canada as the best country in the world to call home.

Today I ask for my colleagues' support to pass Bill S-219 and help us declare April 30 as journey to freedom day in this great country of Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his very compassionate speech.

I want to ask just one question so that we can really talk about reconciliation and the path toward democracy and freedom of expression. I would like to know if the member would argue in favour of his government giving all Vietnamese people the opportunity to express their opinion in committee.

We know that at the Senate committee, only testimony in favour of the bill was heard. I hope that in the spirit of genuine, open and frank dialogue, the parliamentary committee will hear from Vietnamese people from all walks of life so that we can finally talk about reconciliation and moving forward toward respect for human rights.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Adler:** Mr. Speaker, this legislation is not about reconciliation. This legislation is first about remembrance and second about celebrating the great Canadian spirit of remembering, of knowing who we are, and celebrating Canadian values of

freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. We are here in the House today as an example of that. We are debating the bill here in the House today.

I know what the hon. member is referring to. At the Senate committee a representative—I believe it was the Ambassador of Vietnam—submitted a letter on behalf of the communist regime of Vietnam to give its perspective on the journey to freedom day act, to which I understand it is vehemently opposed. He submitted his remarks in writing. Unfortunately they were not in French and could not be translated in time to be put into the record.

This is an important bill, and I really hope that, in the true spirit of our great Canadian values, all members will support it.

• (1730)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is based on the response to the previous question with regard to the Vietnamese ambassador. I think there is support for this legislation to go to committee. Is the member in a position to ensure those who might be listening or interested in presenting at committee on his bill that there will be fair representation at committee stage, so that all who want that input will be provided with the opportunity?

**Mr. Mark Adler:** Mr. Speaker, I looked at the record of the debate in the Senate, and it appears that there were four votes against the bill by the Liberal Party and 14 abstentions. I am a little perplexed that the Liberals would be interested in hearing the communist views of the Vietnamese government, given that they seem to have already made up their minds that they will not be supporting this bill. Maybe I should not be surprised. I think it would surprise even members of the NDP that the Liberals would be interested in hearing that.

I would be shocked if the NDP were against such a bill that would celebrate our great Canadian values of freedom and democracy and yet, on the other hand, remember that those in their time of need were helped by Canadians. Their generosity and the great Canadian spirit of celebrating Canadian values brought so many refugees here to Canada who have made wonderful lives for themselves. We as a country have benefited by their presence.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill S-219, a very important bill, which was tabled in the Senate and which seeks to create a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada.

We sometimes forget what it really means to be here in a democratic society where citizens can elect their members of Parliament, and both citizens and elected officials can safely exercise their right to freedom of expression. Most of the world's population cannot exercise that fundamental right.

If I am able to rise today as a member of Parliament and speak in the House of Commons, it is because my parents had to flee Vietnam and were able to find refuge here in Canada, start a family, live in peace, work and support themselves.

*Private Members' Business*

I myself, Anne Minh-Thu Quach, was born in Canada and grew up in Canada, and it is because of my parents' courage and Canada's acceptance that today I can take part in Canada's democratic life.

I would like to take a few moments to recount how my parents fled Vietnam and arrived in Canada. In 1979, after the Vietnam War, my parents decided to flee their country because of the horrible living conditions imposed by the new political regime and in the hopes of finding a better quality of life elsewhere. They could no longer endure the restrictions, the violence and the injustices that happened after the war.

They jumped at the first opportunity to flee in the middle of the night, in secret, with my two brothers, who were one and three at the time. They made their way to a port and paid the smugglers with the last of their belongings, that is, whatever they could carry. They got on a boat, with the direction indicated by a compass, in other words, anywhere, wherever the captain would take them, not knowing whether or not he would bring them to a safe harbour.

They lived in a refugee camp in Indonesia for 18 months, before the Red Cross came to get them. They then arrived in Canada. They had no identification; they had no goods or belongings. They had only their own lives and my brothers' lives. Canada gave them papers and welcomed them as refugees with great generosity.

**An hon. member:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:** Yes indeed.

When they arrived in Canada, my parents had to learn everything: how to survive winter, speak French, drive a car, look for work, cook Canadian food. In short, they had to learn how to live in their new country.

It is thanks to people like Captain Pierre Pellerin, Ginette Malenfant, Nicole Leduc and Estelle, who has now passed away, who welcomed my parents, but also other people, including Fred and Bonnie Cappuccino and many Canadians who opened their doors to my family and welcomed thousands of Vietnamese as if they were part of their own family. From that point on, many Vietnamese were able to begin integrating into Canadian life and making a contribution to Canada. Many thanks on behalf of all Vietnamese.

However, like more than 1.5 million people, my parents were boat people. Canada accepted 137,000 Vietnamese refugees at the time. The federal government also established a private sponsorship program that allowed agencies and Canadian citizens to welcome a family of refugees and provide them with support for one year. For each privately sponsored person, the government would sponsor another refugee. An entire movement of solidarity was created.

Here in Ottawa, at the corner of Preston and Somerset, there is a monument paying tribute to the boat people. Marion Dewar, the mayor of Ottawa at the time and the mother of our colleague from Ottawa Centre, worked hard to welcome thousands of Vietnamese refugees, so many in fact that Chinatown here in Ottawa is a primarily Vietnamese neighbourhood, where they serve the famous pho soup that is so warm and comforting, especially on a cold day like today.

The Vietnam War was the result of 50 years of cold war that divided the world in two. For ideological reasons, countries were at

war, families were divided, men and women were murdered. Today, we no longer live in that bipolar world where everyone tried to impose their own truth. It is high time we began a real dialogue.

Earlier, I spoke about openness and dialogue, because this is something we really need. The Vietnamese diaspora, here in Canada and throughout the world, is divided by economic, political and religious differences.

• (1735)

A round table must be set up where everyone has the right to express their own views. This is how we will move ahead and ensure that the world will change.

I think that Bill S-219 provides a perfect opportunity to establish this dialogue, in light of the fact that it adds a positive aspect to the usual commemorations by emphasizing Canada's acceptance of the refugees.

Out of respect for our refugees and in recognition of the Canadians who opened their arms to Vietnamese refugees starting in 1975, I think it would be worthwhile to at least allow a parliamentary committee to properly study the bill. It is up to us—the children of refugees, those in exile and immigrants—as well as all other Canadians who are open and interested in this dialogue, to help initiate discussion and debate about the Vietnamese commemorations.

I had the good fortune to go to Vietnam to see my family and get to know the land of my ancestors. It is a wonderful country where people are welcoming and very special. I still have many family members living there, and I want them and all Vietnamese still living in Vietnam to have the same opportunities as I did, so that they can live in peace and security and enjoy democracy and universal fundamental rights as I do.

Unfortunately, that is not yet the reality for everyone in Vietnam. Vietnam has signed or acceded to seven international conventions on human rights. It is a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Human rights are entrenched in the country's constitution. However, lawyers, journalists, bloggers and ordinary citizens continue to be arrested, tried and imprisoned merely for expressing their opinions.

Today, we must not be afraid to tell the truth. Every human being is entitled to life, liberty and equal opportunity. I therefore reach out to all Vietnamese, and all Canadians, who wish to undertake this dialogue with me and with parliamentarians.

Bill S-219 provides us with that opportunity for exchange, because the wounds have not all been dressed as yet. We must take the opportunity to sit down around the table, as I said, Vietnamese from all walks of life, so that the process of dialogue and healing can begin and we can at last look to the future.

As the member opposite said, the ambassador of Vietnam was not able to be heard. I have received many emails from other Vietnamese living in Canada who want to participate in this debate and were not able to participate in the debate held in the Senate.

*Private Members' Business*

This bill has to take its course in the Parliament of Canada, and I want it to be considered in committee and for all points of view to be taken into consideration when it is examined. Unfortunately, as has been said, the committee did not hear all the witnesses, but I believe that the House to which we have been elected, the House of Commons, can do better and can hear from everyone at the second stage. It not only can, I believe it must.

To demonstrate our values of open-mindedness, democracy, empathy and generosity as has already been done, we should allow the debate to continue. Let there be no doubt on this point: I am asking questions because I believe the process can be improved. I am in fact in agreement, and it is very important that this debate be allowed to continue.

On a somewhat more positive note, as the Asian new year, the lunar new year, will fall on February 18, I wish everyone a happy Têt. That is the Vietnamese word for the new year. To all Vietnamese everywhere in Canada and elsewhere,

*[Member spoke in Vietnamese as follows:]*

*Chúc mừng năm mới!*

• (1740)

*[English]*

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I truly appreciate the comments that the previous speaker has just put on the record.

She did a phenomenal job in expressing what I believe can be found throughout our country, families that have come to Canada through refugee status and do well. I am sure her parents and her community would be exceptionally proud of the speech she just delivered.

With respect to the member of Parliament who introduced this bill, Bill S-219, I must say I am somewhat disappointed by the manner he chose to answer the question.

It would be nice to see Bill S-219 go to committee. I am supporting Bill S-219 going to committee. I did not appreciate the insinuation that the Liberal Party does not support Bill S-219 going to committee. There is a great deal of value to it.

Much like the former speaker, I raised the issue of the importance of the committee hearing because it was something that was raised. I do think it is appropriate and I was somewhat disappointed with the member's implication that I might not be supporting the bill itself.

I do support the bill for a number of reasons, and I would like to point them out. However, before I do that, I would like to comment that just this last summer I travelled to Vietnam. I have had the opportunity to visit countries in Asia, and it was a very enjoyable experience.

I travelled with my daughter. One of the things that she really appreciated was the number of scooters, because she loves motorcycles. If members have the opportunity to travel in high-density areas, they will get a good sense of the mobility of so many people in some very small areas.

I personally enjoyed the marketplaces, the interaction. I had the opportunity to visit both small and medium-sized businesses. I can reflect on a candle store that assisted people with disabilities in being able to produce truly unique, 100% beeswax candles. As well, there were larger manufacturing plants, one in particular for wrappings. It is a beautiful country.

Maybe I can make reference to some key messages that I think we would like to emphasize.

At the end of the day, what the bill is proposing is that this day would recognize the journey, struggle, sacrifice, and survival of the Vietnamese boat people and remember the historical significance of their travel here to Canada.

Such a day would serve as an opportunity to raise awareness and enhance understanding of the plight of refugees around the world and of what it is to endure the status of refugee.

It is important to recognize that not only were the majority of refugees unable to communicate either in English or French, but it was also at a time when there were challenging economic issues. This complicated things for a number of refugees who landed here in Canada.

This day would commend Canadian families, charities, religious groups, and non-governmental organizations that sponsored an estimated 34,000 Vietnamese refugees to come to Canada and assisted them in their resettlement and adjustment between 1979 and 1980.

This day would also serve as an opportunity to recognize the ongoing contributions of Vietnamese-Canadian people in all aspects of Canadian life and society, including medicine, engineering, business, science, law, academia, arts, media, civil and community service, and, as demonstrated, politics.

• (1745)

These services to our community and so much more have been great contributions by the Vietnamese community, which Canadian society as a whole has grown to love and care for, and which has become a part of our multicultural fabric.

When I was first elected, I had the opportunity to serve as the multicultural critic in the province of Manitoba. What an enriching experience that was. One of my privileges was to visit what we call "Saigon centre", located in Winnipeg Centre. It is a housing complex and a Vietnamese individual there, Ba Tran, whom I have become very close to over the years, did a phenomenal job in educating not only individuals like me, but also others about what took place in Vietnam. We are also very proud in Winnipeg knowing that in virtually all major centres now and every region of our country, we see an enriched heritage because of the Vietnamese contributions over the last number of decades.

I can remember going from Saigon centre, which is a beautiful housing complex, down the block to a monument. A member referred to a monument here in Ottawa. There is a monument across the street from the University of Winnipeg that highlights a very important part of Canada's history.

*Private Members' Business*

A statement that my leader often refers to is that Canada's greatest strength is our diversity. It ultimately allows us the greatest potential around the world. We need to take a great deal of pride in who we are as a relatively young nation. I have had the opportunity to talk about Folklorama, in which Winnipeggers and people from around the world participate. Through 35 years we have seen the Vietnamese community get directly involved in different types of pavilions and the sharing of culture and heritage.

I have grown to appreciate this since I was first elected in 1988. For the first 20 years of my elected life, every day I would drive by the Saigon Manor, a beautiful eight-storey apartment complex. It has enriched my life.

There are other things I should quickly make reference to. It is important for us to recognize that journey to freedom day marks a significant day for the collective history of Vietnamese communities around the world. It recognizes the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the takeover of South Vietnam by the north, and the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam government and the beginning of the mass exodus of millions of Vietnamese people from their homeland.

The vast majority of the Vietnamese migrants came to Canada as refugees on January 1, 1975, where 1,500 persons of Vietnamese ancestry were already living, predominantly in Quebec. After the boat people crisis between 1979 and 1982, some 69,000 individuals entered Canada. This group of wonderful people ultimately settled in all regions and has enriched the quality of life of all Canadians. I look forward to the bill ultimately going to committee.

• (1750)

**Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to speak today in favour of Bill S-219. In particular, I want to thank Senator Thanh Hai Ngo, the first Canadian senator of Vietnamese descent appointed as a suggestion of our government to the Senate. He does a very good job in representing the Vietnamese community across Canada.

I would also like to thank my hon. colleague, the member for York Centre, for sponsoring the bill in the House of Commons, and for the very eloquent speech he made a few minutes ago. He is a person who, through his family history, knows of pain, adversity and the struggle to come to Canada. He mentioned his father, who was a survivor of the Holocaust, a victim of Dr. Mengele. Just a little over a week ago, on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz Birkenau concentration camp, he spoke about his father's struggles there and his journey to Canada.

For me, the bill tells the story of the Vietnamese Canadian community and their struggle to come to Canada, but it is a story we have heard over and over again, repeated throughout Canadian history. It is a Canadian story. It is a story that represents all of us. So many Canadians have come to Canada from places torn by war, from great adversity and oppression, and have struggled very hard through very difficult conditions to come to this country. They have found a place of refuge and freedom in Canada.

This is a country that we all love so much. It is incumbent upon all Canadians, regardless of their background, to learn these stories and to understand how these stories have contributed to our great country.

I appreciate the opportunity to voice my support for this important legislation. As I mentioned, it recognizes the lives lost and the suffering experienced by the exodus of Vietnamese people following the end of the Vietnam War on April 30, 1975, the day that Saigon fell to Communist forces. It was a war, as we all know, that raged for well over 10 years. It was bloody and violent, and people's lives were torn apart. So many innocent lives were lost.

That is not a happy anniversary, but it is one that we must remember. We have to remember these events in history and how they affect people around the world, especially those in Canada.

Canada has played a significant role in aiding tens of thousands of refugees after the fall of Saigon when, according to the United Nations commission for refugees, more than 1.5 million Vietnamese were forced to flee their homeland under the threat of deteriorating living conditions and, it should be noted, widespread human rights abuses.

During this humanitarian disaster that followed, Canadians rallied to offer whatever assistance they could. A crucial moment came in July, 1979, when a previous Conservative government, under the leadership of prime minister Joe Clark and his cabinet, at the recommendation of the then immigration minister, the Hon. Ron Atkey, recognized the plight of these Vietnamese people and agreed to accept 50,000 Vietnamese refugees over the following year. That was a very significant number for Canada to have absorbed in one year. The Hon. Ron Atkey is a personal friend of mine who I have known for over 30 years. He is a very fine lawyer in the Toronto area today. He exemplified the finest in Canadian government at the time.

This effort ultimately brought more than 60,000 boat people, as they were then called, to settle and build new lives across our great country. It is estimated that 34,000 were sponsored by Canadian families, Canadian charities, religious groups and non-governmental organizations, and another 26,000 were assisted directly by the Canadian government.

Throughout Canada, church groups and other community organizations sponsored families to come to Canada. I know that happened in significant numbers in my city of Mississauga and the city in which I grew up, Hamilton. I went to high school and university earlier in my life with some of the young people who came with their families. I saw first hand in their faces the pain they had experienced in leaving their homeland and coming to Canada.

The hon. member on the other side mentioned what a shock it must have been for people to come from a tropical place like Vietnam to a very cold place. Let us face it, here we are in early February in Ottawa, and any of us who have been outside today know it is very cold here. What a shock it must have been for these people who had been through so much in their lives already.

*Private Members' Business*

• (1755)

It was an unprecedented example of the compassion of Canadians toward a multitude of people in need. More than a quarter of a million Vietnamese refugees lost their lives at sea during the exodus from Vietnam. Just in travelling, 250,000 souls were lost. Things had to be very desperate in their homeland for them to take the enormous risk to journey to freedom. Some were beset with illness, while others drowned or were victimized by violence from piracy, kidnapping, and other forms of violence.

The arrival of the Vietnamese refugees in Canada and their settling into new lives in what was a foreign land to them stands as a shining example of how Canadians responded to a world catastrophe. Canada's compassionate response included many sectors, communities, and governments. Many Canadian families took the refugees into their homes and helped them find employment and schooling. It is considered an exemplary moment in Canada's history of humanitarian protection and, in fact, was a contributing factor to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarding its Nansen Refugee Award to the people of Canada in 1986. It was the first and only time that this prestigious medal was awarded to an entire nation.

Due to the overwhelming success of the private sponsorship of refugees program during this time, it became enshrined as a fundamental part of Canada's refugee resettlement program.

Contributing to the success story of the Vietnamese refugees who settled in Canada are the Vietnamese people themselves. Vietnamese Canadians are participating actively in public life in Canada, distinguishing themselves in business, politics, the arts, sports, and humanitarian endeavours.

Here are just a few examples. Kim Phuc, an internationally recognized survivor of the Vietnam war, has established a foundation to assist child victims of war here in Canada. Paul Nguyen, a second-generation Vietnamese Canadian whose parents fled to Canada, is a 2010 recipient of the Paul Zyzyk Award for Multiculturalism. Kim Thuy, an internationally renowned author, received a Governor General's award for her book telling her story of her arrival as a refugee. These are just a few of the many stories of great Canadians of Vietnamese heritage who have told their stories and contributed to the development of our country.

Communities of displaced Vietnamese people around the world already refer to April 30th as black April day. Designating that day in Canada to honour our Vietnamese Canadian population would show our support to a community that has flourished in this country, economically, culturally, and socially. Bill S-219 proposes to designate April 30th as the journey to freedom day in Canada, as a day that would acknowledge the sacrifices made by the Vietnamese people during a very dark time in world history.

Last Sunday, February 1, I attended the annual Tet festival celebration in Mississauga at the International Centre near the Toronto airport. The Prime Minister, Senator Ngo, and many dignitaries spoke there. It was a room of 15,000 people. This is about the eighth time annually that I have had an opportunity to join with the Vietnamese people in celebrating Tet.

There were many speeches made there about Bill S-219. It was just astounding to me to see the overwhelming support of the Vietnamese community in Toronto for the bill. They know it tells their story.

I also want to mention the Tribute to Liberty organization, which is constructing the monument to the victims of communism. It is very close to the parliamentary precinct, near the Supreme Court. The government has donated \$1.5 million to that project. I would encourage all Canadians to go to the website, [www.tributetoliberty.ca](http://www.tributetoliberty.ca), and make a contribution. The Vietnamese Canadian people will be a very significant part of those honoured on that monument. They are an example of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who were victims of communism, who have struggled to come to Canada.

For all of these reasons, to honour the more than 300,000 Vietnamese Canadian people in Canada who contribute to Canada's prosperity and growth as hard-working members of our society, I want to encourage all of my colleagues here to support the passing of Bill S-219.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to the bill that is now before us.

First, while I do not want to reiterate what has been said in this debate so far, I nonetheless would like to say how proud I am that we can talk today about the contribution made by Canadians of Vietnamese origin. This bill once again gives us an opportunity to thank them for their contribution to our communities across Canada.

In the constituency of Pierrefonds—Dollard, there is a fine and dynamic Vietnamese-Canadian community, one that we do not necessarily see a lot of, but that is there nonetheless. It is so well integrated into all the fibres of the community that it sometimes goes unnoticed. Still, it is very much present and very well integrated, in the social, economic, community and recreational spheres.

This is all by way of saying that I could not talk about this bill without mentioning them. I thank them for being part of our community and for the invaluable contribution they bring to it.

I will also take this opportunity to say that this day of commemoration is possible because at a certain point in Canada's history, we opened our doors and we decided, as a country and as a society, to welcome people who were seeking refuge following a major crisis. When a war that caused much human tragedy ended, Canada opened its doors and took people in, and they are now an integral part of the social, economic and political fabric of Canada.

The reason I bring it up this way, and I cannot conceal it, is that as citizenship and immigration critic for the NDP, I have to say that things have changed in Canada since that time.

Consider one simple figure. After the war in Vietnam, about 60,000 Vietnamese were admitted to Canada. Sixty thousand people sought refuge and found it here in our country.

*Private Members' Business*

I cannot help but draw a parallel with the current Middle East crisis, particularly in Syria. The United Nations tells us that this crisis is unprecedented. Hundreds of thousands of people have sought refuge either inside or outside the country, and yet the minister tells us that to date, only 1,300 Syrian refugees have been admitted to Canada since the beginning of the crisis, unfortunately.

The commitment to admit 1,300 refugees that the minister put on the table and that he has had every imaginable difficulty meeting on time is rather shameful when we compare it to the openness we showed some 30 years ago, when we took in 60,000 people who were fleeing hardship in their country of origin. I think those figures speak for themselves.

Let us go a little farther and examine the measures implemented in recent years, which have meant so many changes in the way we admit people seeking refuge.

For example, we could mention the changes to the interim federal health program, a federal program that offered basic health care for refugee claimants in Canada. Because of the changes made by the Conservatives, we now deny basic health care to people living here, in Canada, such as pregnant women and children, who do not have the medications they need to live safely within our borders.

I could also mention the changes made in relation to how refugee claimants arrive in Canada. At present, for example, a group of people who arrive by boat after fleeing a crisis in their country and seek asylum in Canada would automatically be incarcerated and might very easily be sent back, simply because they arrived by boat.

• (1805)

It is as if, when fleeing a crisis situation, people can choose exactly how and when to do it. These individuals are usually victims or people who want to give their children a better future or perhaps even save their lives.

Lastly, I want to talk about the list of countries of origin. The simple fact that a refugee claimant in Canada comes from a country on the list of countries of origin, which are for the most part recognized as stable, democratic countries, means that they are much less likely to be accepted. Furthermore, such individuals have no appeal mechanism available to them. This is problematic when we know that in some countries on that list, people are definitely discriminated against for their sexual orientation, for example, or even their cultural and ethnic origin. Consider, for example, the Roma, a population that faces increased deportation since the Conservatives changed the procedures and added their country of origin to the list. Basically, Romas face discrimination and danger in their country of origin. Because these individuals come from certain countries, they do not have the opportunity to be heard and they do not have time to gather all the necessary documentation to file a claim, in the same way as someone from another country might.

I mentioned just two or three measures that the Conservatives changed over the past few years. As a result of these measures, we are not welcoming 60,000 people who are facing a crisis or a war in their country of origin. We are committing to accommodating a hundred or so people, or a thousand, when global needs are so much greater. Canada has proven that welcoming a larger number of people because of an international crisis does not necessarily lead to

a tragedy or an internal crisis in our country. On the contrary, this is a good opportunity to remember that these 60,000 Vietnamese who arrived after the war were welcomed by Canada. They integrated very well and are full-fledged Canadians. They are proof that Canadians are capable of welcoming people and that together, we can build a better country. Without these people from South Asia, Canada would not be the country it is today. We can be proud that we welcomed all those people.

It is important to remember that at the time, the United Nations recognized Canada's impressive role in taking in refugees. Sometimes it would be nice to go back and polish our image and say that we are still the Canadians we once were, that we are still the country that we once were, and that we want to take people in and do our part in times of crisis, and that the international community can turn to Canada knowing, as it did when Canada was a leader, what its role will be.

I would like to end on a positive note by reminding everyone that we are talking about Vietnamese Canadians and their contribution today. Hats off to them, not only for what they have contributed, but also for the challenges they have overcome so brilliantly. Anyone seeking asylum here in Canada faces those challenges. Nobody chooses to be a refugee. I can hardly imagine the challenge that individuals face when they have to leave the people they love, the places they love and the culture, country and climate they love, sometimes in great haste, but I can understand it. Seeing how successful these people are today inspires me to thank Canadians in general for opening their arms, for contributing through social programs, for being so open and for welcoming these people. I think that all of us here in the House should salute all refugees, including the Vietnamese refugees who arrived 30 years ago, and congratulate them on having overcome their obstacles and on becoming part of the big Canadian family.

• (1810)

[English]

**Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise enthusiastically in the few minutes left in debate to support Bill S-219, the journey to freedom day act.

I spent a significant amount of time in Vietnam in my previous life as a journalist in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and even into the 1990s. I had the dubious privilege of being in Saigon on that dark day, April 30, 1975, when I was lifted out of the American compound with the final Americans present, other third country nationals, and more than 7,000 South Vietnamese nationals. I watched with great concern during the dark years of re-education through the late 1970s and afterward, and followed with great concern the plight of those who were forced through circumstance to leave their country and seek a better life elsewhere.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I can reassure my colleagues who expressed concern, the members for Beauharnois—Salaberry and Winnipeg North, that this bill will be going to committee. The committee will hear witnesses across the spectrum, and I look forward to seeing the Vietnamese ambassador during this coming committee study.

I would say to him that this bill is not a condemnation of the present government. We have close and good ties with the current government. This portrays a particularly dark period and the journey to freedom of hundreds of thousands of people. Of these, 60,000 came to Canada. In fact, greater freedoms came to Vietnam not through war but through the pressures of capitalism, free enterprise, and the will of the people for better lives in Vietnam.

Just to conclude, the significance of the commemoration of journey to freedom day is really threefold. It would mark the tragic events following the fall of Saigon and the exodus of the Vietnamese refugees. It would also pay tribute to all of those Canadians who rose to the challenge, welcomed the traumatized refugees, and helped them adjust to a new and better life in a new and unfamiliar land. Finally, it would celebrate the incredible contributions that the Vietnamese refugees have made to the building of our great country.

This was demonstrated just last week at this year's Tet celebration in Toronto, where members will recall that the Prime Minister addressed a crowd of over 10,000 grateful Canadians of Vietnamese origin.

All Canadians should know the story of the Vietnamese refugees who were forced to flee their native land, of the vast humanitarian effort undertaken by Canadians from coast to coast to coast, and of the triumph over adversity that the vibrant Vietnamese community in Canada represents today.

• (1815)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

The hon. member for Thornhill will have six minutes when this matter returns before the House.

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## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 23, 2015

In March, barely 30 days before that fateful day of April 30, the Khmer Rouge forces had effectively surrounded Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital. The American ambassador, Ambassador Dean, had begun preparations for the final pullout of embassy staff and Americans and third-country nationals, which took place on April 12, and which led to the eventual Cambodian genocide, the brutal murder of more than two million Cambodians, and a dark five years in that Southeast Asian country.

Barely three weeks later, the United States ambassador in Saigon, Ambassador Martin, decided it was time to end the American presence in that country. The musical strains of *White Christmas* were heard on April 29, and on armed forces radio in Saigon a voice said it is 110 degrees in Saigon and rising. This was the signal to all Americans, to all third-country nationals, to all Vietnamese who had worked in various ways for the United States over the previous three decades, to assemble at evacuation points and to leave the country.

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### PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

#### JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT

The House resumed from February 5 consideration of the motion that Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Speaker:** There are six minutes left for the hon. member for Thornhill to finish his remarks.

**Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again it is an honour to rise today and speak in strong support of the journey to freedom day act, Bill S-219, which is an important piece of legislation that comes to us from the other place.

As we approach the 40th anniversary of the effective end of the Vietnam War, one might reflect on the broader events that took place across Indochina 40 years ago this month. At that time there was an ominous shadow falling across the entire region, and the U.S. Congress had decided after great agonizing to end funding of the governments of Cambodia and of South Vietnam and to withdraw all further remaining U.S. military support and military advisors

As a journalist who was there and had evacuated from Phnom Penh on April 12 with the American ambassador, and again left Saigon on April 30 from the U.S. embassy in Saigon, my memory is saturated with images of the vast movement of humanity. More than 7,000 people were rescued from Saigon on that final day, in addition to some 50,000 people who had been lifted by fixed-wing aircraft in the weeks ahead of them. However, the greater tragedy lay ahead. It was not the two million-plus deaths of the Cambodian genocide, but the millions of Vietnamese who, when the country was partitioned in 1954 under the Geneva Accord, had fled the northern regime looking for a better life in the south. Many of these people had no option but to leave Vietnam. They did not have an aircraft or helicopter support nor connections with departing Americans, so they fled by all manner of marine watercraft

When Saigon did fall on April 30 and the North Vietnamese tanks burst through the gate to the presidential palace in Saigon, barely a few blocks from the American embassy, the beginning of an exodus of more than 1.5 million people began.

• (1105)

They set sail for the South China Sea in hopes that neighbouring countries would take them in. Many countries unfortunately turned them away, forcing them even further from their homeland to seek refuge in the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and the United States. As we know, and as we celebrate in the journey to freedom act before the House today, 60,000 made their way to Canada.

*Private Members' Business*

I am proud to say that Canadians from all walks of life stepped up to the challenge then, offering whatever help they could to the long-suffering Vietnamese boat people. Approximately 34,000 were sponsored by Canadian families, churches, synagogue groups, and other community organizations, while 26,000 were accepted into the country under a government sponsorship plan.

In 1986, Canada was honoured with the Nansen Medal, which is the refugee equivalent of the Nobel Prize, given by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in recognition of major efforts on behalf of refugees. This was the first and the only time that the Nansen Medal has been presented to the entire population of a country.

I will conclude my remarks now in the hope that colleagues will support Bill S-219 and the journey to freedom act.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a pleasure for me to rise in the House today to speak to Bill S-219.

I will support this bill at second reading so that it can go to committee. However, I would like to start by explaining why I am so proud to rise today. My colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry and I are the only two people of Vietnamese origin to be elected members of the House of Commons, of Parliament. For us, it is very important to remember what our parents, family members and ancestors lived through. Being able to talk about it in the House today is truly a privilege and an honour. It is a testament both to the great value we place on our origins and to Canada's openness and the fact that the Canadian people opened their arms to us by electing us and asking us to represent them.

It is therefore with great pride and gratitude that I rise today.

Bill S-219 is very short but has several aspects to it. I will read it because I want to talk about it. It has three clauses.

The first clause concerns the short title:

1. *This Act may be cited as the Journey to Freedom Day Act.*

The second clause, which is the core of this bill, reads as follows:

2. Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the thirtieth day of April shall be known as "Journey to Freedom Day".

The third and final clause simply says this:

3. For greater certainty, Journey to Freedom Day is not a legal holiday or a non-judicial day.

● (1110)

[*English*]

The bill before us is a very short and simple one. As I said in French and will repeat in English, there are three clauses in the bill. The main one says:

Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the thirtieth day of April shall be known as "Journey to Freedom Day".

Then the bill specifies:

For greater certainty, Journey to Freedom Day is not a legal holiday or a non-judicial day.

[*Translation*]

Why are we talking about April 30? Many people who had to leave their country attach considerable significance to that date.

For instance, my parents were fortunate to be here in Canada on April 30, 1975. They came here, they met here and they settled here, and I was lucky to be born here.

However, many people unfortunately had to leave their country. We all know this, thanks to the films and news reports that have been made about the Vietnam War, which left its mark not only on an entire generation of Vietnamese people, but also on the entire world.

Everyone is familiar with the Vietnam War. Everyone knows how much a war and the devastation it causes can affect the population and future generations. Still today, development in Vietnam lags behind because of the damage and destruction caused by the war.

I think remembering April 30 is extremely important because April 30 represents a day of commemoration. For many people in Canada and indeed around the world, April 30 is a day for people to come together. Ever since I was elected, for instance, I go to Montreal every year, which is an opportunity for me to remember my roots, my culture and the sacrifices made by many Vietnamese people.

I invite Canadians to watch the very moving speech made by my colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry, who shared her personal experience and that of her parents. I think it is quite meaningful to many people.

To some, this day signifies the end of the Vietnam War, the end of a devastating war that had tremendous repercussions for the country. To others, this day also serves as a reminder that people had to leave their country.

What is more, many commemorative events are held around April 30 in recognition of the boat people. I invite those who have yet to watch a documentary on this, to do so.

This shows the direct impact that the war had on the population and the sacrifices that people had to make to leave their country in search of a better future. Today, we feel and see the results. New generations like mine and future generations reap the benefits from the fact that people had to leave their country and learn to live in a new society that was foreign to them. Even though Vietnam was a French colony, many Vietnamese did not speak French or English. Coming to Canada meant they had to adapt and integrate.

As an elected member, I am very proud to say that I am well integrated into Canadian society. The community is very proud of all the Vietnamese people who have achieved success at all levels, such as earning a living by becoming a doctor, for example. I am generalizing a bit. We also have writers, such as Kim Thúy, who is very famous in Quebec and around the world. A great number of people have made very significant contributions.

*Private Members' Business*

I read the bill and it is very simple. Unfortunately, it will not contribute anything new. We could have taken this opportunity to find solutions to current problems. I will come back to that later. I want to mention that there was lack of consultation and debate, and therefore transparency, in the other chamber's process. A great deal of attention was paid to what some people said, but not to what others had to say. I hope that the House of Commons committee will be more open-minded and that we will have a more fulsome debate, because it is important to have this debate.

As I mentioned, I received some 300 emails about this bill. Unfortunately, this bill is divisive at a time when we should be uniting the community. The bill has received criticism from all quarters. Some say that it does not go far enough and that it is not critical enough of the current government. Others, especially those in the business community who are dealing with Vietnam, say that it is not necessarily beneficial to negotiations and that it would be detrimental to discussions with the Government of Vietnam. As this is a Conservative bill from the other place, it is unfortunate that the approach used is not one that brings people together, not just Canadians, but also all Vietnamese Canadians, whether they are the children of boat people or those who were forced to leave their country. Why not unite all these people?

I am proud of the NDP position because we are talking about human rights. It is time to do so. I regret that the bill does not do enough to bring people together.

• (1115)

[*English*]

I look at what the younger generation has done. A friend of mine, Glenn Hoa has created "generation legacy". Last year thousands of dollars were raised in order to invest in the Vietnamese boat people museum in Ottawa. It was a way for the community to get together behind a project that was unifying, that looked at the heritage of Canadians of Vietnamese origin or even that of the Vietnamese people who came here. It was a way for us to get together; it was different generations coming together.

Unfortunately with the bill, we do not feel this. We feel it is divisive. As I said, I have received hundreds of emails, some supporting the bill and some denouncing the bill. There are many things that need to be done in order to help people in Vietnam. I think we could have done a better job.

[*Translation*]

Since it is time to negotiate with Vietnam as part of the trans-Pacific partnership, we need to advocate for human rights. Unfortunately, the government is not going in that direction. Nevertheless, I understand that the important thing is to commemorate what happened to the people who had to leave their country. That is why I am going to support the bill at this stage.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the Liberal critic for Canadian heritage, I would like to explain to the House why I will be supporting Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, or the Journey to Freedom Day Act.

I would also like to explain why I am insisting that the government allow this bill to be extensively and thoroughly reviewed by the appropriate parliamentary committee. Everyone must have an opportunity to freely express their opinions, unlike what happened in the Senate.

Bill S-219 would designate April 30 as the Journey to Freedom Day and would commemorate Vietnamese refugees and their exodus to Canada. This day would not be a legal holiday or a day off. However, it would provide an opportunity to celebrate how lucky Canada is to have such a vibrant Vietnamese community. As the Liberal leader and member for Papineau always says, Canada's diversity is what makes our country strong. Vietnamese Canadians are a good example of that.

A number of my constituents of Vietnamese origin have shared a different perspective. They see this day as an opportunity to thank Canada for welcoming them with open arms and for giving them a chance at a new life. The Vietnamese are known for their generosity and modesty.

If Canada tells them that it wants to celebrate everything they have contributed, they respond that they would rather celebrate everything that Canada has given them. After all, we are looking at two sides of the same coin. Canada owes a lot to its Vietnamese community, which wants to thank Canada. Let us celebrate together.

• (1120)

[*English*]

The proposed new national day would commemorate a major historic event. On January 1, 1975, some 1,500 persons of Vietnamese ancestry were living in Canada, mostly in Quebec. Following the 1979 to 1982 boat people crisis, some 59,000 Vietnamese refugees entered Canada. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, after the United States, Canada is the country that welcomed the largest number of Vietnamese refugees from 1975 to 1996.

In 1986, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded the Nansen Refugee Award to the people of Canada for the "major and sustained contribution of the People of Canada to the cause of refugees". Canadians were the first and the only people to have been honoured collectively with this award.

[*Translation*]

The journey to freedom day will remind us that Canada welcomed tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees and that Canada must continue to be welcoming. There were millions of victims of the Vietnam War, and unimaginable atrocities were committed on all sides. Since we did not participate, our country could have chosen to ignore these victims. If we are being honest, there were some people in Canada who did not want to get involved in the aftermath and consequences of a conflict we had no part in.

*Private Members' Business*

However, Canada remembered that although it was not involved in the war, it played an active role in the peace efforts. Canada remembered that every time it has shown generosity, it has become even stronger. Canada listened to its heart and welcomed refugees not only from Vietnam, but also from Cambodia and Laos, saving many lives and transforming broken dreams into renewed hope.

We must never forget the pain of the exodus, those who lost their lives, the unspeakable horrors experienced by the boat people, or the generosity of the Canadian families, communities and religious groups who took them in, clothed and housed them. Nor must we forget the foresight of the Canadian governments of the day, how hard the newcomers worked to learn, in a matter of months, French, English and new customs or how very much Canada benefited from the contributions of these newcomers, their children and the generations that came after them.

That is what we must never forget. That is what we will all be able to celebrate together in harmony, as we bear in mind both the sacrifices people made and the promises of the future, the opportunities available in a Canada that is stronger because of its Vietnamese community. That is how I, as Liberal critic for Canadian heritage, see this commemoration. That is why I support this bill. There is no other reason. The goal is to bring people together, to leave nobody out. The goal is also to strengthen the bond between Canada and Vietnam, to strengthen the trade, cultural and scientific ties between our two countries. Canada must stand up for human rights and justice in Vietnam as it does all over the world.

• (1125)

[English]

In other words, the Liberal Party sees this bill as an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the great contributions of the Vietnamese Canadian people to Canada's diversity and multiculturalism, and to all the elements of Canadian life and society.

The proposed new national day would also celebrate the Canadian families, charities, religious groups and non-governmental organizations that sponsored tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees and assisted them in their resettlement and adjustment to their new country.

[Translation]

Some Vietnamese Canadians have written to us, their parliamentarians, to tell us that they do not like the date chosen for the commemoration, April 30; others do not like the title; still others are afraid this commemoration will lead to a historical interpretation that makes them uncomfortable. To that I say that it is important for the people of the Vietnamese community to talk to each other. This commemoration must not be a divisive issue. On the contrary, it should be a symbol of unity and the wonderful symbiosis that exists between the Canadian and Vietnamese identities. That is why I think the committee that looks at this bill must take the time needed to listen to all points of view. In the meantime, Vietnamese Canadians must continue talking to each other to reconcile their points of view.

[English]

The Liberal Party of Canada will insist that it is the government's responsibility to invite an inclusive and comprehensive list of witnesses and experts to discuss this bill at committee to ensure a

thorough discussion on the title, date, content and implications of the act.

[Translation]

We, as Canadian parliamentarians, need to clearly understand and send a message that, above all, our intention with this bill is not to dictate an official, unilateral version of the history of another country. We cannot even do that when it comes to Canada. It is not a question of siding with one side or the other after the fact, after a long and bloody war that our country consciously chose not to take part in. No, it is simply a matter of providing an opportunity for us to celebrate the contribution made by Vietnamese Canadians to Canada's rich social fabric, to remember where we come from in order to better understand where we want to go together.

[English]

**Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill S-219, journey to freedom day bill.

I very much believe that this is a very important piece of legislation regarding a period in history that was a great tragedy for the people of Vietnam, however it also serves as a recognition of an event in which all Canadians should be proud.

On April 30, 1975, when Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese Army, it set off a mass exodus of people, many of whom—

[Disturbance in gallery]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Resuming debate. The hon. member for Etobicoke Centre.

• (1130)

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Speaker, on April 30, 1979, when Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese army, it set off a massive exodus of people, many of whom had only one means of escape, on the water. It was the beginning of a journey that would be fraught with peril and tragedy for millions

In the first few years that followed, a few thousand made their escape from the communist regime, but by 1978 to 1979, those Vietnamese refugees were fleeing from their homeland in the tens of thousands. They arrived in a number of neighbouring countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Their plight created a massive humanitarian crisis across southeast Asia, as many refugees left in overcrowded boats that were, in many cases, unfit to withstand the harsh conditions of the stormy seas.

More than a quarter of a million perished. Some died from illness, some were victims of pirates and kidnappers. It was, by all accounts, a nightmare for all involved.

An influx of so many refugees to those countries was more than they could handle. The “boat people”, as they became known at the time, were sometimes turned away. If they were allowed to land, they were not allowed to integrate into those countries, which led to the creation of several squalid refugee camps.

*Private Members' Business*

This vast humanitarian crisis required action on a global scale, and the world responded. With the aid of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, government officials in each country began the process of resettling the refugees in a number of developed countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia, the United States and, of course, Canada.

Canada played a significant role in aiding tens of thousands of refugees after the fall of Saigon. During the humanitarian disaster that followed, Canadians rallied to offer whatever assistance they could. We ultimately brought more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees here to settle and build new lives across our great country. It is estimated that 34,000 were sponsored by Canadian families, Canadian charities, religious groups and non-governmental organizations, while another 26,000 were assisted by the Canadian government.

The arrival and resettlement of the Vietnamese refugees in Canada is a shining example of how Canadians responded to a global calamity. Canada's compassionate response included families, church groups and community organizations that took the refugees into their homes, helped them find a place to live, to find employment and to get their kids into school.

This exemplary moment in Canada's history of humanitarian protection was a contributing factor in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' awarding its Nansen Refugee Award to the people of Canada in 1986. It was the first and only time that this prestigious medal was awarded to an entire nation.

Canada was forever changed and enhanced by the events following the fall of Saigon and the exodus of the Vietnamese refugees, not just demographically and culturally. In addition to the development of strong and vital Vietnamese-Canadian communities thriving in many cities across Canada, the Government of Canada enshrined its private sponsorship of refugees program as a fundamental part of Canada's refugee and humanitarian resettlement program. The community and church groups that sponsor refugees to come to Canada continue their compassionate work today, to the betterment of Canada, refugees and their families from around the world.

This bill would designate April 30 as "journey to freedom day" in Canada, and it would honour our Vietnamese-Canadian population by showing our support to a community that has flourished in our country economically, culturally and socially. The Vietnamese community in Canada has demonstrated its loyalty and love of Canada.

We are building on a tradition of commemoration well established in communities of displaced Vietnamese people from across the globe. It would also be a significant day for all Canadians, many of whom united in the mid to late 1970s in the face of a humanitarian catastrophe to welcome more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees to a new land and a place to call home. It was an inspiring time as the Government of Canada and the people of Canada exhibited their humanitarian spirit to the world.

All Canadians deserve a day to remember, to show their considerable efforts and to show the world that we are a caring and compassionate nation. Journey to freedom day would not be a legal

holiday nor a judicial day, but a day that would solemnly acknowledge the events of that dark time in history with respect to the sorrows of those refugees who were lost to illness, malfeasance or the cruelty of the turbulent sea. It would also be a day with a deep sense of hope for those who became Canadian, and a strong sense of pride for those who helped make that happen. It would also serve as a fitting way to begin Asian heritage month, which would begin the following day, on May 1.

• (1135)

With the passage of Bill S-219, April 30 will be a special day of commemoration for the Vietnamese-Canadian community, followed directly by a full month of reflection and celebration of the contributions of all Canadians of Asian heritage.

Canada values its relationship with the country of Vietnam. Grounded in mutual respect and partnership, we look forward to building on this very key relationship into the future. We owe it to those who have become Vietnamese-Canadians, however, to also acknowledge their true journey to freedom.

Today, there are more than 220,000 Vietnamese-Canadians who have integrated into and enhanced our country, who contribute to our growth and prosperity as vibrant members of Canadian society. The bonds that they have forged here have been deep and enduring, and Canadians are rightfully proud of our role in their journey to freedom, which began almost 40 years ago.

I strongly encourage all members to join me in supporting Bill S-219.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):**

Mr. Speaker, this bill was introduced in the Senate, a place that is already undemocratic, where there are no elected officials and no real accountability. The bill comes from a place where there is no accountability for the work being done and, specifically, a very biased process.

I will start by giving a little background of the bill. The short title of the bill is the journey to freedom day act. It would establish April 30 as journey to freedom day to commemorate the capture of Saigon by North Vietnamese forces on April 30, 1975, which ended the Vietnam War and began the emigration of South Vietnamese refugees to Canada.

I started by speaking of what happened in the Senate. That is because people had requested to appear, to be witnesses and provide testimonials in front of the Senate committee but were refused. The ambassador for Vietnam was refused. Anybody who wished to voice dissent and not support the bill was not allowed to speak at the Senate committee, which is a very biased, unfair and undemocratic process.

The NDP proudly recognizes the important contributions of Canadians of Vietnamese heritage and their community in Canada, which includes the people who came to our country as refugees. Tens of thousands more came as economic migrants.

*Private Members' Business*

As a responsible official opposition, we want to ensure that any legislative attempt to recognize the contributions of Vietnamese Canadians to Canadian cultural heritage will actually unite Canadians of all backgrounds. It would unite Vietnamese Canadians in our country but also ensure that all members of the community would be included. To that extent, we will seek to include as many opinions as possible when the bill gets to committee and ensure that it is an inclusive process. As the deputy spokesperson for the New Democrats on Canadian heritage and as a member of the heritage committee, I look forward to ensuring that all voices and opinions are heard at committee.

I want to mention that when this bill was studied, there was a strong base of support for it and also voices of dissent. We need to ensure that as responsible legislators, we hear all sides of the story. There is a quote by Mr. Can Le, a former secretary general of the Vietnamese Canadian Federation, who stated:

By approving this bill, Parliament will assure newcomers and future generations of their place in this country and will prove that Canada's inclusiveness is the foundation of its strength and prosperity.

It is great that there were positive comments about the bill and there were many more during the Senate hearings, but there were absolutely no voices heard that spoke against this bill. From what I am learning, there are quite a few, because my office has been inundated with emails and phone calls. I have met with members of the Vietnamese community in Toronto who do not support the bill and are very hurt that their voices are not allowed to be heard. They requested to appear before the Senate committee and were refused. They were not allowed to speak before the committee.

I sent a brief to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage that I was given by a member of the community in Toronto in the hope that it would be put before the committee. The brief points out that the bill offends and marginalizes most of the people it purports to honour by assuming that they would join former Saigon military officers in commemorating the fall of Saigon on April 30. The majority of Vietnamese Canadians will never join that commemoration. I read this directly from a brief I was given, which clearly shows there is a divide in the community. As responsible legislators, we need to ensure that all voices are heard, and that did not happen in the Senate. I hope that in the committee phase we will be able to ensure that all voices are heard.

● (1140)

The second main point identified in the brief is that the bill exploits the boat people and the Canadians who helped them by using them to justify having a national day to commemorate the fall of the Saigon military regime, a divisive, partisan, political event that most of them will not participate in. Once again, they outline that there is a divide and that they do not want a bill that commemorates the fall of the regime or commemorates something that only part of the community here wants to be part of. It is important that we hear all voices, and that has not happened at the Senate committee. If I seem a little repetitive, it is because I am purposely repeating the fact that the Senate was extremely biased and did not allow all voices to be heard.

The third main point outlined in the brief is that the bill slights the Canadian Forces by falsely claiming that they were involved in the

Vietnam War. The bill does not give credit to Canadian Forces for carrying nearly all of the refugees from Asian camps to Canada.

I tend to agree with that, because Canada was not involved in the war. Canada did not have a participatory role in the war, yet Canada was a country that was a safe haven. Our forces went in and helped people by removing them from the camps when they fled Vietnam and went to other countries. That is not being recognized in the bill.

What I am hearing from members of my community is that the bill is divisive. Why can we not move forward in a way that gives us something that all Vietnamese Canadians can come together around and make sure that it is inclusive for everyone, rather than just a small group of people from Vietnam who live in Canada now, or even many Canadian-born Canadians who are not naturalized Canadians? We are all Canadians, and they are saying they all want to be included.

Further on, the brief mentions that the problem is that there were waves of migrants who came to Canada from Vietnam. The first wave were people who were working for the Saigon regime at the time and fled after the end of the war, which ended on April 30. That date is tied very closely with the war, and many people were affected by it. Whenever a war happens, many people are affected. I know from personal experience. I was born in a war zone and know the personal, lived experience of being in a war. No matter how the idea is spun, life is impacted severely by a war. I am hearing that people do not want this day of commemoration to be about the war or the end of the war; they want it to be about showing gratitude to Canada. That date is not April 30, 1975. They would like to adopt July 27, 1979, because that was the first date that refugees were brought into Canada by the Canadian Forces. Why can we not consider that option?

I wish I had more time to go further into this. I have had petitions sent to my office, and the one I am holding has more than 222 signatures from people all across the country who say that the process was severely biased and seriously flawed because it was undemocratically put forward and there is no transparency in the bill. People suggest that another date, any time in July, be set aside as the date, because that would help the community come together and not be further divided. The community wants to stand together to commemorate and to show their gratitude for Canada.

The bill says it is about giving gratitude, but it is called the journey to freedom day bill. Which journey to freedom does the bill actually talk about? That is the real question.

● (1145)

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC):**  
Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to take part in this debate on Bill S-219.

Before I read my notes, I would like to comment on some issues that were raised by the previous speaker. I do not think that she has a full understanding of the issues surrounding that journey to freedom.

*Private Members' Business*

I will speak on more of a personal note, because I came to Canada from a Communist country and regime. The many people who came before me were escaping or trying to escape a regime that they did not want to live under.

The same thing happened with those poor boat people. They were escaping because they did not want to live in a Communist regime and face oppression. A quarter of a million people died trying to escape from that Communist regime in unsafe boats. Does that not speak for itself? I do not know who would need an explanation.

The comment that was made was that the ambassador of Vietnam was not invited. The ambassador of Vietnam represents the current Government of Vietnam. It is not a democratic government. Let us make that clear. Therefore, I would not be surprised if the ambassador of Vietnam would not be in support of this bill or of creating a day to commemorate those brave people who were trying to escape to find a safe haven here, as many others have.

After the war, Canada opened its arms to a lot of people who came from Polish territories, people who took a terrible journey. They were sent by the Russians to Siberia. Hundreds of thousands of them died. No one ever knew the real number. They joined the army and fought alongside Canadians. After the war they had no country to go back to, so many of them came to Canada. We are very grateful for this. People of our generation, in the 1980s, were able to leave Communist Poland. They were stranded in refugee camps across Europe and other countries in the world. They found a safe refuge here.

We can repeat these stories with many groups from many places in the world. Canada has always been strong in supporting those who are oppressed and denied basic human and democratic rights. That is what this bill is about. Let us not confuse anyone. This is not a bill to divide communities; we have to fully understand who is a part of the community and who is not.

On April 30, Canada's Vietnamese community commemorates the end of the Vietnam War, a day that this legislation would recognize as "journey to freedom day". It was on this day in 1975 that the fall of Saigon led to the exodus of over 840,000 Vietnamese citizens. They were prepared to take great risks. Many were even prepared to die, rather than suffer at the hands of the Communist regime. Many of those who fled the brutal regime had to resort to extreme measures. They fled on crowded, unseaworthy boats in the hope of escaping to their freedom.

Tragically, many of the Vietnamese boat people did not survive the perilous journey. More than a quarter million of them drowned, starved, or were attacked by pirates. Miraculously, more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees did succeed in making their way to Canada. Canadians welcomed these refugees with open arms and even invited the refugees to stay with them in their homes. More than half of the refugees were privately sponsored by generous individuals and groups of Canadians from all walks of life.

• (1150)

Thanks to the overwhelming generosity and support of Canadians, entire refugee families were able to resettle here and build a new and peaceful life.

Resettlement of such a large number of refugees in such a short amount of time was a tremendous achievement, and Canada's humanitarian efforts and compassion were recognized internationally. In response to these efforts in 1986, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded the Canadian people the Nansen Medal, which is the refugee equivalent of the Nobel Prize. This is the only time an entire country has been recognized with this honour, and for this we should all be proud.

Bill S-219 aims to designate April 30 as the journey to freedom day. Not only would it commemorate the perilous journey 40 years ago of Vietnamese refugees to Canada, but it would also pay tribute to an incredible humanitarian role played by thousands of Canadians in community and church groups, who opened up their hearts and found ways to welcome Vietnamese refugees here in our great country.

As April 30 is already recognized by our Vietnamese community, it is appropriate to designate this day as a national day of remembrance. It would serve to commemorate the lives lost and the suffering experienced by people during the exodus. It would also mark their arrival to freedom and the gratitude of the Vietnamese people to Canadians for their generosity.

It is a Canadian tradition to commemorate tragic lessons in history so that they are never repeated. We believe we must not ignore the past, and this includes the shameful past of our country's history. Indeed, perhaps it is the memory of one of our own darkest moments that contributed to such an outpouring of generosity from Canadians toward the Vietnamese refugees.

It is with great shame that Canadians recall the tragic decision to turn away the MS *St. Louis* in 1939. The outcome of that disturbing decision should not be forgotten. After being turned away by Cuba, the United States, and finally by Canada, the ship was forced to return to Europe, where almost one-third of its passengers ultimately perished in the Holocaust.

To memorize and educate Canadians about the MS *St. Louis* incident, a powerful memorial is now located at Pier 21 in Halifax, where the ship should have landed. On this day we would mark a tragic period in history, but we would also commemorate a very important part of our country's proud humanitarian tradition.

The outpouring of support from Canadian people during this time underscores our country's commitment to providing protection to the world's most vulnerable. A memorial would also serve to remind all Canadians of how fortunate we are to live in one of the most free and democratic countries in the world, and that we are proud to stand up for our values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

It should also be noted that this period in Canadian history is one that is not as well known among younger Canadians today. Unlike the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, and the Cold War, the Canadian connection to the Vietnam War is often overlooked.

*Government Orders*

In conclusion, I would say that the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees is a very important part in our Canadian history. That is why so many Canadians have voiced their support for the bill and are enthusiastic about the national day of commemoration. For this reason I urge all my colleagues to support the bill. It is a great bill, and we all, as Canadians, will be proud of it.

• (1155)

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am humbled to be speaking after my colleague for Mississauga East—Cooksville, who spoke from the heart of his personal experience living under the regime of a communist government and who knows of what he speaks.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the fall of Saigon, when the forces from the north invaded the south, breaking the Paris agreement negotiated in 1973, and took over South Vietnam with the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

We put forward this bill, which originated in the other place, and I am honoured to be the co-sponsor of it in this House.

This bill would serve three purposes. First, the bill would mark April 30 as a day to commemorate the fall of Saigon, when the communist forces of the north invaded the south and took over the country.

Second, it would serve as a celebration of who we are as Canadians. We took in 60,000 boat people, refugees, who under extreme circumstances, made their way to Canada. We made them Canadian citizens, and they are now proud Canadians.

That is the story of Canada. Canada is made up of people from all over the world. We are all immigrants. We are all from some other place. We come here for hope and opportunity. That is what Canada represents to so many people around the world. People come here to escape persecution and hatred. They come here for a better life for themselves, and more importantly, for their children so that they can realize all of their dreams. That is why this bill is so important.

Third, this bill would serve a pedagogical purpose. Canadians, whether they are Vietnamese, Jewish, or Polish does not matter, should all know the history of each other.

April 30 is a significant day for the Vietnamese people. It is also a significant day because it marks a time when freedom ended for a group of people around the world, and our young people need to know that. They need to know that living in Canada bears a certain responsibility. Because we live in such a great country, because we live in the democracy we do, we have responsibilities. We have a responsibility to remember all of the past atrocities that have occurred around the world, from the Holocaust to the Holodomor to the Armenian genocide. These are all important facts of global history, and yes, of Canadian history.

This is why it is so important that all members of this House support Bill S-219. It is because April 30 is a significant day in global history, but more importantly, the symbolic nature of this bill stands tall so that we as Canadians remember and do not forget. That is why when the time comes to show our support in this House, we must all stand in unanimity to support the journey to freedom day act, Bill S-219. I ask all members to join me in supporting this bill.

• (1200)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** In my opinion the yeas have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 25, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

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\* \* \*

[Translation]

**JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT**

The House resumed from March 23 consideration of the motion that Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Speaker:** The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill S-219, under private members' business.

- (1825)

[English]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 365)

**YEAS**

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Angus	Armstrong
Ashton	Aspin
Atamanenko	Aubin
Barlow	Bateman
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Bezan
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Blaney	Block
Boivin	Borg
Boughen	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Braid
Brison	Brosseau
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Butt
Byrne	Calandra
Caron	Carrie
Casey	Charlton
Chisholm	Chisu
Chong	Choquette
Christopherson	Clarke
Cleary	Clement
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crockatt
Crowder	Cullen

*Private Members' Business*

Cuzner	Daniel	Stanton	St-Denis
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Stewart	Storseth
Day	Dechert	Strahl	Sullivan
Devolin	Dewar	Sweet	Tilson
Dion Dionne	Labelle	Toet	Toone
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre	Tremblay	Trost
Dreeshen	Dubé	Trottier	Trudeau
Dubourg	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Truppe	Turmel
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Uppal	Valcourt
Dykstra	Easter	Valerioté	Van Kesteren
Egliniski	Eyking	Van Loan	Vaughan
Falk	Fantino	Vellacott	Wallace
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Warawa	Warkentin
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher	Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea
Foote	Freeland	to	
Freeman	Fry	Sky Country)	
Galipeau	Gallant	Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Garneau	Garrison	Williamson	Wong
Genest	Genest-Jourdain	Woodworth	Yelich
Giguère	Gill	Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Godin	Goguen	Yurdiga	Zimmer— 266
Goldring	Goodale		
Goodyear	Gosal		
Gourde	Gravelle		
Grewal	Groguhé	Nil	NAYS
Harper	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)		
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)		
Hawn	Hayes	Nil	PAIRED
Hiebert	Hoback		
Holder	Hsu		
Hughes	James		
Jones	Julian		
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)		<b>The Speaker:</b> I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill
Kellway	Kennedy (Calgary Southeast)		stands referred to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.
Kent	Kerr		
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)		
Lake	Lamoureux		(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)
Lapointe	Latendresse		
Lauzon	Laverdière		
Lebel	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)		* * *
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leaf		
Leitch	Lemieux		
Leslie	Leung		
Liu	Lizon		
Lobb	Lukiwski		
Lunney	MacAulay		
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie		
Maguire	Mai		
Marston	Martin		
Mathysen	May		
Mayes	McCallum		
McColeman	McLeod		
Menegakis	Michaud		
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port		
Coquitlam)			
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)		
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)		
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mourani		
Murray	Nash		
Nicholls	Nicholson		
Norlock	Nunez-Melo		
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon		
Opitz	O'Toole		
Pacetti	Paradis		
Patry	Payne		
Péclet	Perkins		
Pilon	Plamondon		
Poillievre	Preston		
Quach	Rafferty		
Raitt	Rajotte		
Rankin	Rathgeber		
Ravignat	Raynault		
Reid	Rempel		
Richards	Rickford		
Ritz	Rousseau		
Saganash	Sandhu		
Saxton	Scarpaleggia		
Schellenberger	Scott		
Seeback	Sellah		
Sgro	Shea		
Shipley	Shory		
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)			
Sims (Newton—North Delta)			
Sitsabaiesan	Smith		
Sopuck	Sorenson		



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage**

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CHPC • NUMBER 039 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, April 1, 2015**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Gordon Brown**



## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Wednesday, April 1, 2015

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC)):**

Good afternoon, everyone. We are going to call to order meeting number 39 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. Today the orders of the day have our studying Bill S-219, an act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War.

In this first session we have two different groups with us. We have Senator Ngo, who is the sponsor of this bill in the Senate. Then we have some folks from the Canada–Vietnam Trade Council. Each of the two groups will have up to eight minutes.

We are going to start with Senator Ngo. You have the floor. I think you're going to share that time with Mr. Nguyen. You have up to eight minutes.

**Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo (Senator, CPC, Senate):** Thank you, Chair.

Dear colleagues, I understand votes are expected today. With the committee's agreement, I will keep my opening testimony short and concise. However, I would like my full remarks, which have been distributed in both official languages, to be registered in the record.

[See appendix]

It is with great appreciation that I appear before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to talk about the journey to freedom day act, which seeks to recognize April 30 of every year as the day marking the end of the fall of Saigon; commemorating the Vietnamese refugees' exodus; and recognizing the fundamental role played by the Canadian people, who welcomed thousands and thousands of the Vietnamese refugees with open arms. For Canadians of Vietnamese origin, April 30 depicts a dark day when they lost their country, their home, their families, and their friends; when they began their exodus as refugees and embarked on that perilous journey to freedom.

Quite simply said, the significance of the journey to freedom day act on April 30 is threefold.

First, it marks the tragic event of the exodus of the Vietnamese refugees who fled their homeland after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

Second, it pays tribute to all Canadians and the Government of Canada, who rose to the challenge and welcomed thousands of refugees with open arms.

Third, it celebrates the incredible contributions of the Vietnamese refugees, who have contributed to the building of our great country Canada.

The events that followed the fall of Saigon marked the beginning of the refugees' crisis and the start of the exodus of millions of people fleeing Vietnam. Canada's experience with the Vietnamese refugees' exodus began during the fall of Saigon. In fact, after the fall of Saigon on May 1, 1975, Canada immediately recognized the plight of the Vietnamese people trying to escape, and declared it would sponsor refugees with relatives already in Canada.

[Translation]

Canada became an international leader through its creation of a private refugee sponsorship program. Without the kindness and generosity of thousands of Canadians, and the dedication, support and cooperation of the Canadian government, refugee agencies, non-governmental organizations and religious groups, it would simply have been impossible to welcome so many people in such dire straits.

[English]

For the last 39 years, Vietnamese communities across Canada have gathered on April 30 in a ceremony to commemorate memories of loss and grief, to collectively remember their perilous journey, to share their heritage, and to express their gratitude for Canada's historic role.

It is with this brief comment that I humbly ask for your support as we move Bill S-219 forward and recognize our shared heritage.

• (1535)

[Translation]

Thank you very much for giving me your attention.

[English]

It is my pleasure to answer your questions afterwards.

**The Chair:** We'll continue. In this eight minutes, we'll move over to Mr. Nguyen, from the Vietnamese Association of Toronto.

**Mr. James Lam Nguyen (President, Vietnamese Association Toronto):** Good afternoon, committee members and Chair. *Merci beaucoup.*

I also understand that votes are expected today. With the committee's agreement, I will keep my opening statement very short and concise. I agree, however, with the senator. I would like my remarks, which have been distributed in both official languages, to be registered in the record.

[See appendix]

My name is James Nguyen. I am the current president of the Vietnamese Association Toronto, or VAT, one of the oldest Vietnamese organizations and biggest in Canada. I am honoured to be before you to provide my unwavering support for Bill S-219 and to explain why this act, recognizing April 30 of every year, is meaningful for the Vietnamese Canadian community.

I left Vietnam, like many of my fellow Vietnamese Canadians, in the events that followed the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. My journey to freedom started in the fall of 1980 by boat, with my older sister and three older brothers. We stayed in a Malaysian refugee camp by the name of Pulau Bidong for approximately six months before Canada generously accepted us in March 1981. We stayed briefly in Quebec and eventually resided in Edmonton, Alberta.

Our journey lasted about six days and five nights before we disembarked in Malaysia. On the boat journey—as some of you may know, it is a perilous journey—we encountered Thai pirates. There was a story that was recounted to me by several people who were on the boat. I was only six years old, so I didn't know much. When the Thai pirates come onto your boat, they generally steal things or loot things, and they generally take the women with them. My sister was almost taken.

A man whose wife and daughter were taken onto the Thai pirates' boat tried to commit suicide by jumping overboard. He thought that because his wife and daughter had been taken, his life was hopeless, so he wanted to kill himself. When the Thai pirates saw this, they ordered all the women back to our boat. I guess they have some honour among thieves and were afraid that this man would come back to haunt them. That is one story that I can relate to you from my experience.

My story is not unique, as there are many refugee stories similar to mine. The country I left behind is just a distant memory, almost 35 years old now, and all of my good memories are of Canada. I remember playing street hockey in the cold winter months in Edmonton and pretending I was Wayne Gretzky or Mark Messier and using an empty beer bottle with aluminum foil as the Stanley Cup in the back streets of Edmonton.

As a leader of the biggest Vietnamese community in Canada, I attend many events on a weekly basis. There is overwhelming support for this bill whenever the conversation comes up. This bill is important to me and to those I encounter in the community, because it acknowledges our heritage.

Let me state clearly that I do not believe this bill is anti-Vietnam or anti-Vietnamese government. I genuinely believe that the people of Vietnam are a beautiful people, with so much culture and history. This bill is a testimony of my and the rest of the Vietnamese Canadians' journey as refugees to Canada and of the journey of others after April 30, 1975, to our newly adopted homeland of Canada. I think that remembering April 30 is extremely important, because April 30 represents a day of commemoration for many people in Canada. April 30 is a day for Vietnamese Canadians to come together to express our gratitude to Canadians for welcoming us with open arms.

I'm Catholic by background. I remember a nun who was very helpful in the Vietnamese Canadian community by the name of Sister Angeline. God bless her; she departed from us a few years ago.

In closing, I just want to say thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions.

[Applause]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

In the interests of fairness, we are now going to move over to hearing, from the Canada-Vietnam Trade Council, Julie Nguyen and Elizabeth McIninch.

You have up to eight minutes. Thank you.

• (1540)

**Dr. Dai Trang H. (Julie) Nguyen (Co-Founder and Director, Toronto, Canada-Vietnam Trade Council):** Thank you.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members.

My name is Dai Trang Nguyen, and I'm from the Canada-Vietnam Trade Council. I'm also a representative of the Canada-Vietnam Association. I'm a college professor in international business and international development in Toronto.

I'm here today with two objectives. My first objective is to bring the Vietnamese Canadian community together, and my second is to restore fundamental freedoms for many community members.

The first objective depends on the second one. In this presentation I seek to make three recommendations to amend Bill S-219. The first is to change the date of commemoration to July 27; the second is to change the title of the bill to “appreciation of Canada by Vietnamese refugees”; and the third is to remove war-related content from the bill.

In this presentation I will discuss three main points: first, what's wrong with this bill; second, what the negative impacts of this bill on the community are; and third, what amendments are necessary to bring the community together.

What's wrong with this bill is that it appears to be about three positive things but in reality is about two negative things. The bill creates a good impression that it is about the commemoration of Vietnamese refugees, the community's appreciation of Canada for accepting them, and Canada's recognition of the community's contribution. In reality, what it is about is imposing another version of Vietnamese history and war history that favours the old Saigon regime and, based on that, criticizing the current government of Vietnam.

The three positive things bring the community together and all Canadians together; the two negative things divide the community. There are disagreements not just from those who oppose the bill, thinking that it has gone too far, but also from those who support it, thinking that it doesn't go far enough.

For the last 40 years, there has been only one accepted political voice in the Vietnamese Canadian community, and all other voices are suppressed. The first wave of Vietnamese, who arrived in 1975 and 1976, were a few thousand associated with the old Saigon regime. They have since imposed an anti-communist stance on community members who came later, including 60,000 refugees who arrived in 1979 and 1980, at least 100,000 economic migrants who came after 1972, and those who were born in Canada.

Community members are not supposed to have anything to do with “back home”, including research and education, trade and investment, music, cultural events, and so on. No one has ever come out to declare an alternative stance, mainly because of the necessity of making a living and taking care of family. The official flag of Vietnam has never been shown in community events, and the old Saigon flag is still being used.

Bill S-219 set off a movement in the community that had never happened before. In early February, 22 representatives courageously signed an open letter to oppose this bill, and you have a copy of it in both languages. This prompted hundreds of others to follow suit to sign it, and hundreds more started to speak out. The division between the anti-communist old Saigon regime and their followers and members who seek an alternative stance is now in the open.

I'm here to call for fundamental freedoms for many if not the majority of Vietnamese Canadians, specifically freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression according to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The focus of this bill should be about three positive things that help bring the community together. It should not be about the war or the current situation of Vietnam, because that will cause emotion and disagreement and further divide the community.

We therefore have three recommendations.

The first is to change the date. The date, April 30, is not appropriate, because this is the date that the Vietnam War ended.

• (1545)

This bill is not about the Vietnam War. This bill is about the Vietnamese refugees. Therefore, if you choose July 27, the date when the first flight of Vietnamese refugees landed in Canada, the bill will remind the community from all sides of what Canada has done for us and of the effort we need to make to contribute to Canadian society.

The second recommendation is to change the title. The title now, the “journey to freedom day act”, is not appropriate considering the need to restore fundamental freedoms for many members and the claims by many members that they did not come to Canada to search for freedom. We need a new title that is agreeable to all members, such as, for example, “appreciation of Canada by Vietnamese refugees”.

The third recommendation is to remove war-related content. In order to have consensus among all community members, we need to remove from the bill the content about the war, especially the words “black April”.

At the same time, Mr. Chair, I would like to mention that we need to rebuild the community. Many members lack access to English or

French, young people are still struggling to find good jobs, and domestic violence is still not addressed properly in the community.

In conclusion, although the bill has had some divisive impacts so far in the community, I believe that it can be an opportunity to open a dialogue for all. It can be an opportunity to rebuild our community and to give everyone a voice in an inclusive process if it focuses on the three positive points above.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We have had some testimony that we received in written copy, but we did not hear it from the witnesses, so in order for us to accept that, we do need a motion to that effect.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** I will move that motion.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we're going to move to questions.

For up to seven minutes, we have have Mr. Adler.

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here.

I have one question that I want to preface by saying, Senator Ngo, that it's an honour to co-sponsor this bill with you. As you know, I'm doing so in the House of Commons. Last week I presented a petition in the House that contained 2,619 signatures from people in the Vietnamese community who are supporting Bill S-219.

There's a question I want to address to you, Senator Ngo. Last week, on March 23 specifically, the deputy critic for Canadian Heritage suggested that we should consider adopting July 27 as the new commemoration date for the bill, on the grounds that this was when the first Vietnamese refugees were brought into Canada by the Canadian Forces on Operation Magnet II. Can you let us know what this proposed option means to you and the people of the Vietnamese Canadian community, who clearly commemorate their grief and thank Canada every year on April 30?

**Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo:** Thank you, Mr. Adler.

I wish to respectfully clarify that important point because it has been stated in the chamber, as you say, and was just recently introduced by Ms. Nguyen on the other side.

With regard to changing the date to July 27 as the date to recognize the refugees brought into Canada by the Canadian Forces in the summer 1979, I must strongly advise and warn you against this option. Changing the date of the journey to freedom day to July 27 would disregard the complete genesis of the Canadian resettlement experience with the Vietnamese refugees' exodus which began with the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

I don't know how many of you know what the date of July 27, 1979 means. You should know that July 27, 1979 is the Vietnam Communist regime's remembrance day, a national public holiday in Vietnam honouring the heroism of the soldiers and the war heroes of the same regime for conducting re-education camps, perpetrating atrocity, and forcing refugees to flee their homes. Now, imagine how offensive this new proposed date would be to the Vietnamese Canadians who left everything behind as refugees to escape the same regime that they found intolerable. This proposal is an insult to the intelligence of the Vietnamese Canadians and the Canadian people. To me, this date is irrelevant.

The exodus, April 30, is the day that marked the beginning of the refugee crisis when their homeland ceased to exist. This day makes sure that everyone's experience as a refugee is recognized.

We have support from all Vietnamese communities across Canada. We have the Vietnamese community in Halifax, Moncton, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, Sherbrooke, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary, Vancouver. All Vietnamese community associations support the bill and support that day.

For those who oppose the bill—maybe those who came to Canada before 1975, are students in the Colombo plan, or for their personal interest of doing business with Vietnam—their personal interest compared to millions of Vietnamese who fled Vietnam on April 30, 1975 is unacceptable. To compare that day with the 300,000 Vietnamese refugees who left Vietnam—and Canada accepted them for that day—is not acceptable.

Also, to say July 27 and force Vietnamese Canadian refugees who were accepted by Canada to accept that day, honouring the remembrance day of the Vietnamese communist soldiers who killed them or tortured them or whatever, is insulting. Basically, that date is irrelevant to us and all of the Vietnamese communities across Canada who are supporting us. As the MP said, he tabled a petition of thousands and thousands who support the bill.

Basically the bill is not divisive of the Vietnamese community, but in fact this bill united the Vietnamese community who left Vietnam.

● (1550)

I'm talking about the refugees. I'm not talking about Vietnam. I'm not talking about the Vietnamese Communist regime. I'm not talking about the Vietnamese Communist government. The bill has nothing to do with the Vietnamese Communist regime or the government. This bill is concentrating on and focused on the exodus of the Vietnamese people. More than two million people left Vietnam on that day.

This bill is recognized by 300,000 Vietnamese who came to Canada. Canada accepted them with open arms. This bill also shows the vibrant contribution of the Vietnamese community in Canada.

Basically, that's the bill. The focus of the bill has nothing to do with trade. It has nothing to do with the Vietnamese government. It has nothing to do with the Vietnamese soldiers.

● (1555)

**The Chair:** Senator, we're going to have to move on now.

**Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Sitsabaiesan, you have up to seven minutes.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here.

We heard from Senator Ngo that the date you proposed was April 30. I think Mr. Adler misquoted me from my speech in the House, which is nothing new. We heard Ms. Nguyen mention that April 30 is contentious for some people.

I am a child of war myself, so I understand your passion when you speak, because I lived in a war. I escaped a war zone, fled to Canada, live in Canada as a Canadian citizen, and have the privilege of being here, so I understand the journey and the importance of many of our collective journeys to freedom.

However, my question is with respect to the date. We've heard Senator Ngo's passionate comment about why July 27 is not a good date. We've heard Ms. Nguyen's passionate comments about why April 30 is not a good date. Clearly, there is some sort of friction.

I'm not a Vietnamese Canadian. In hearing from Vietnamese Canadians, I'm hearing passion from them in saying that both dates are not good. Is there a date that can be good? Is there anything that can actually be a unifier?

Senator Ngo, you said that you want this to be a unifying bill. I want that, too, because I'm a mediator by trade. I want people to be making consensus. What can we do to make it so the community is coming together? What date or possible dates are there so you can make a friendly amendment through Mr. Adler and make that change, so that everybody in the Vietnamese community can be 100% behind this to say thank you to Canada? Because that's what it's about, from what I've heard. What is that date?

That's for anybody.

Go ahead, Mr. Nguyen.

**Mr. James Lam Nguyen:** Thank you for the question.

With any legislation, there's going to be disagreement—

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** I'm going to interrupt you for two seconds. I know we only have seven minutes, so no preamble, please. Just go.

**Mr. James Lam Nguyen:** Okay.

For any legislation, there's going to be disagreement, but what I can tell you is what my personal experience is. I attend events on a weekly basis in the biggest Vietnamese community in Canada. We have close to 100,000 people, which is one third of the Canadian community. This date is accepted by 99.9% of the Vietnamese community.

Ms. Julie Nguyen mentioned that this is a divider. I would love to have her come to any of our events and see our passion. For the last three years, I've organized the biggest lunar new year festival. For two of the three, Mr. Harper attended. The yellow heritage flag is part of our heritage, and it was all over the place.

When we talk about this bill, Madam Committee Member, there is overwhelming support. It's not a dispute between 50% and 50% of the community. This is 99.9%. I would happily invite Ms. Julie Nguyen to any of our events. I'll host her—

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** If I may, I'm going to ask Julie Nguyen to comment, because I see her looking like she wants to speak.

Go ahead.

**Mr. James Lam Nguyen:** I'm sorry. Go ahead.

**Dr. Dai Trang H. (Julie) Nguyen:** I just want to mention that when community members go to these events, these lunar new year events, they go there for the fun. They don't go there for the politics. When they go there, it doesn't mean that they agree to the old flag. It doesn't mean that they agree with that view of the old Saigon regime. It would be a huge mistake to think that all of them who go there accept this view.

Thank you.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** I know that there are passion and politics involved, and I really want to make this work for everybody, because I'm thinking that many communities that have gone through a similar process may want this one day.

Is September 24 a good date for everybody? Is there any date that's not the remembrance day and not the end of the war, because war will always leave a raw wound. I left my country when I was a five-year-old child, and still, when I go back to Sri Lanka.... I went back once, 27 years later, and it was raw for me. War is always going to be raw. Can we not have the war date and not have the remembrance day date and have something else?

**Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo:** Thank you.

You want me to answer that one? Thank you very much, but April 30, 1975, is not the war date.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** It is the war.

**Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo:** It was the end of the war, so basically the war was over. We just think, "Okay, that's the day I left the country".

Did you see the bill? We didn't talk about the war. We didn't talk about the atrocities, so basically—

•(1600)

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** I know. I've read the preamble and I've read the short bill very many times.

**Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo:** I agree with you 100%. I agree with you that the passion is there after you come from the war. So basically that's the date when almost two million Vietnamese left the country.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** I'm going to throw in one quick question. I'll change topics, because clearly we're going nowhere with the date business.

What happened in the Senate when you changed the name from "black April" to "journey to freedom"? What was the thinking or the process behind that?

**Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo:** When we talk about "black April day", nobody understands this. A few people would know it, but "journey to freedom day" is more relevant.

Beginning in 1975 Canada started accepting refugees. The orphans arrived in Canada. On April 24 the Canadian embassy accepted refugees. On April 30 they accepted refugees. I came to

Canada in 1975 on May 27. I remember that date. Canada accepted me and I don't know how many others.

Basically, that's the date after the war. We changed the name to "journey to freedom day" to reflect the amazing human rights role Canadians played in welcoming thousands and thousands and thousands. During 1979 and 1980, Canada accepted 60,000 Vietnamese refugee boat people, so we think this name is better than something more negative.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Why are we counting the commemoration starting in 1975, then, instead of 1979 or 1980?

Mr. Nguyen, you said you came in 1980, I think.

**Mr. James Lam Nguyen:** I came in 1981.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** It was 1981, and you said that's when the 60,000, the vast majority of Vietnamese refugees were accepted in Canada. So why are we counting from 1975 instead of 1979 or 1980 or whenever?

**The Chair:** Answer all that within 15 seconds, please.

**Hon. Thanh Hai Ngo:** In May 1975, 3,000 were accepted into Canada. In May 1975, more than 7,000 were told they were accepted, and then 450 were accepted in August. From then on, Canada started to accept 200 families each month, starting on that date, so basically that's the reason why.

Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Dion, you have the floor for seven minutes.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank the four witnesses.

I had hoped that this meeting would reconcile the Vietnamese community. It is a tall order, but let me try.

Ms. Nguyen, Ms. McIninch, I propose the following.

Once this bill comes into effect in Canada, the commemoration will take shape. When we come together for this commemoration in my riding, Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, I can assure you that everyone will be welcome.

As a Canadian member of Parliament, I do not want to provide an official version of the history of another country. I want to do two things: first, commemorate every Vietnamese refugee, the boat people and all the others, and second, commemorate the extraordinary contribution of Canada's Vietnamese community.

With characteristic generosity, the Vietnamese community wants to add a third reason to celebrate: it wants to express its thanks to Canada. Very well, let's stop there. What is there left to discuss?

There are some things in the section of the bill that begins, “Whereas”, that you may not be so happy about, but that will be quickly forgotten. The only thing we'll remember is that we're together and that we will work together. It is not the role of Parliament to deal with disagreements over interpretations of the past. As a parliamentarian, I am not going to provide an official version of the history of another country. That is not my job.

Can we all celebrate together? That is my question.

[English]

**Ms. Elizabeth McIninch (Director, Montreal, Canada-Vietnam Trade Council):** I very much agree that on the points you've made about honouring refugees and the contributions they've made and no doubt the senator is sincere in his efforts to do this. The unfortunate thing is that if you've read the bill from the preamble on, it is a very malevolent attack on the creation of Vietnam and the Government of Vietnam as it stands today. My position...look, I'm of Irish origin, I know all about this stuff. I know everything about flags from the old regime, marching parades, and the whole thing.

In this case look at ASEAN as a trade group; one of the biggest trading organizations in the world. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines are all dropping. Who's rising to the ascendency in ASEAN right now? Everybody knows it's Vietnam.

It looks to me that.... Why go and poke your finger in the eye of a vital and influential trade partner who right now is the ascending power?

• (1605)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** With all due respect, we are not doing that. I would not do that in supporting this bill—

**Ms. Elizabeth McIninch:** You're not doing that, but if you read the bill carefully—

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** No, not at all. I'm giving the opportunity every year to celebrate the contribution of the Vietnamese community to Canada.

**Ms. Elizabeth McIninch:** That's a different thing.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** If some people have their interpretation of the Vietnam War, or any event in the history of Vietnam, they are entitled to do so in a free country. It's not what we will commemorate at this moment. We'll commemorate the saga of the refugees and the contribution of Vietnamese to Canada.

**Ms. Elizabeth McIninch:** With respect, sir, the bill is all about the history of the war. That's what it's based on, winners and losers—

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Yes, I understand you might dislike the whereas, but my experience with that is that the whereas are forgotten almost always. The only thing that will remain is we'll celebrate the April 30 date. You may not like the date, but it will be April 30 anyway and we'll give the significance to this celebration in Saint-Laurent—Cartierville in my riding with my friends. We'll do it in a very consensual way in welcoming everyone.

Madam Nguyen, do you want to react?

**Dr. Dai Trang H. (Julie) Nguyen:** Yes. Honourable Stéphane Dion, I thank you very much for your point. I totally agree that this bill should be about two things: to commemorate the Vietnam refugees and to celebrate their contribution to the Canadian society.

If we focus on these two positive things there should be no disagreement.

The disagreement comes from the fact that the bill is about the war. It's about the ending of a war that was one of the most controversial and bloodiest wars in the 20th century. When it's about war it will always create disagreement and emotion. In order to build consensus about this bill we should focus on the two points that you just mentioned. The bill is about 60,000 refugees who came in 1979 and 1980. This bill is not about those who came in 1975. In this bill we have to refocus and focus on the 60,000 refugees who were accepted to land in Canada. The first day they landed in Canada was July 27, 1979. This date is relevant.

I have no idea what's happening in Vietnam. I have no idea what July 27 means in Vietnam. I'm here, I'm a Canadian citizen, and I care about what it means for my fellow Vietnamese Canadians in the community. When they come here, they are accepted, they contribute, and this is what I celebrate with them.

I want to clarify that not all of the 300,000 Vietnamese Canadians are refugees. This bill is only about the 60,000 refugees who came in 1979 and 1980. I don't belong to that group. I came as an economic immigrant and there are many economic immigrants like myself. We need to have consensus for the whole community.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** I understand your view.

The bill will pass. Even though I'm opposing it, the bill will pass. I cannot accept having a divided society, a divided community, so I will do my best—I know I won't be alone on that, as I think all my colleagues will do their best—to be sure that the way we commemorate will include you and everyone. That's where we are now.

It's very sad, because usually when you have a commemoration for a community it's unanimous, and it's a great moment. I'm very sad that for you it will be a sad moment. I will do everything to be sure that the people who have the same feelings as you—I'm sure they exist, as they came to speak with me in my riding—will be celebrated with as brothers and sisters, as great Canadians, all together.

• (1610)

**Dr. Dai Trang H. (Julie) Nguyen:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** *Merci, monsieur Dion.*

We will now briefly suspend as we bring in our next group of panellists.

• (1610)

(Pause)

• (1610)

**The Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone. I call meeting 39 back to order.

Today we are studying Bill S-219, an act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War.

On our second panel today we have Mr. Trac Do and Mr. Nguyen from the Canada–Vietnam Friendship Association. From the Communauté vietnamienne au Canada we have Mr. Dao, who's the president of the Montreal region.

Both groups will have up to eight minutes.

Mr. Do, you have the floor for up to eight minutes.

•(1615)

**Mr. Trac Bang Do (President, Toronto Section, Canada-Vietnam Friendship Association):** Honourable Gordon Brown, chair of the House committee on heritage, honourable members for the House committee on heritage, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted and excited to be called as a witness regarding Bill S-219.

My name is Do Trac Bang. My Canadian friends call me Chuck, because I have been in Canada for 35 years.

I am the president of the Canada-Vietnam Friendship Association, and the friendship ambassador for the City of Toronto in Vietnam. I tell you this to show that I have a long experience of serving the community. From 1986 to 1992, for three consecutive terms, I was the appointment in council for the Ontario government on multiculturalism.

I am here to be a witness for Bill S-219, because I think the bill expresses our support for the recognition of the Vietnamese community in Canada.

As a Vietnamese refugee who came to Canada in January 1980, I am one of the members of the Vietnamese boat people. I don't want to talk about the bill for long, but every member around the table has a letter written by me in which I express my point of view on behalf of the Vietnamese community.

I would like to make the point to the committee today, with regard to the wording of this bill, that I believe up to 90% of the Vietnamese community would support choosing July 27 to commemorate the Vietnamese boat people's first exodus to Canada. In this spirit and with due respect, I am calling on the honourable Senator Ngo Thanh Hai to adopt July 27 as the commemoration day to be proposed in Bill S-219 as this day is perfectly meaningful and realistically acceptable to our community.

I represent the older generation, those who first arrived in Canada. However, with me is Mr. Van Hoang Nguyen, who is from the younger generation, those who have also come from Vietnam but who were born after the war ended in 1975. He represents the younger generation and can express the will of the community before the members of the parliamentary committee today.

I would like to ask Mr. Van Hoang Nguyen to take the floor, please.

**Mr. Van Hoang Nguyen (Member, Toronto Section, Canada-Vietnam Friendship Association):** Hello, everyone.

My name is Hoang. I represent a younger generation of Vietnamese in Toronto and also a part of Canada.

I'm here today to make only one point, which is the date of this bill.

When I came to the Hill today, I came across an article in *Embassy* news that came out this morning, April 1. I'm going to quote a sentence written in this article about Bill S-219, and the quote comes from the Conservative member, Mark Adler. The quote says, "This is a historical fact that we're talking about here..". He went on to say that "the historical fact is there was an invasion. There were two separate countries in 1975, and there was an invasion."

As I said, I was born after the war, and, of course, I didn't witness the war. For me, the history comes from history books. I was taught by some of the well-known professors here, for example, Professor Gabriel Kolko, from York University in Canada, who has written a book about the Vietnamese war called *Anatomy of a War*. It's about the Vietnamese war, from 1940 to 1975.

I'm going to read one sentence that I learned from this book: "South Vietnam is a geographic expression only for the sake of convenience" because legally Vietnam, south of the 17th parallel, under the Geneva Accords of 1954, was an integral part of one nation, transitionally divided prior to reunification.

The key word here is "reunification", ladies and gentlemen. April 30, 1975 is the day that reunited Vietnam. April 30, 1975 is not the day that commemorates refugees from Vietnam coming to Canada. That is one thing I want to make clear. This is what I learned from university, from textbooks. My point today is very clear: The day to commemorate the Vietnamese refugees in Canada should be July 27, 1979. April 30 is the day that reunited Vietnam, my country.

Thank you very much for your time.

•(1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now move over to Mr. Dao.

[*Translation*]

**Dr. Ba Ngoc Dao (President, Montreal Region, Communauté Vietnamiennne au Canada):** Honourable Members, Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, allow me to introduce myself. I am Dr. Ba Ngoc Dao, and I have been the president of the Vietnamese community in Canada for the greater Montreal area for four years. I was the president of the association of Vietnamese physicians of Canada from 2005 to 2009.

It is a great honour for me to represent the approximately 30,000 members of the Vietnamese community in Canada in the greater Montreal area—there are 42,500 in Quebec—and to speak to Bill S-219.

We will never forget the participation of the Canadian Forces in the International Commission of Control and Supervision of the armistice and the 1973 Paris Peace Accords. Despite the armistice, South Vietnam was invaded by communist troops from the north. The war ended on April 30, 1975, and from that day onward, the increased terror, repression and atrocities carried out by the new regime against the South Vietnamese led to many more refugees.

We will never forget the words broadcast on the BBC or the VOA, sometime around 1980–1983, of a 75- to 80-year-old Vietnamese man: "If these electric rods and sticks could walk they too would flee the country."

I invite you to listen to the story of a prisoner of war who witnessed the situation from 1975 to 1985.

Before April 30, 1975, this man was a medical officer in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. We can all agree that the role of the doctor is to alleviate human suffering, no matter the politics, location, time or the patient's race. It is a noble and fine profession.

With the takeover by the communist regime, he had to report to brainwashing concentration camps like so many other soldiers, officers and government workers. Almost all southerners were found guilty, and many were considered to have blood debts to public. Doctors were especially guilty because they healed and relieved the suffering of members of the People's Army. The doctor in this story made a very big mistake. He saved the lives of members of the People's Army, who were very moved, quit the army and sought political asylum in the south.

In the concentration camps, he performed forced labour: planting food crops, cutting down trees for wood to be sold for frames, writing self-critical texts, and attending lectures steeped with revenge and jealousy. Camp changes were frequent. After two and a half years in the brainwashing camps, he was released, but continued to be closely watched by managers, police and local authorities.

He was forced to work in a hospital for sick children under the control of poorly educated, non-professional administrative staff or go to the new economic zones, which were deserted regions with little or no resources. He had to stay with friends. At the slightest suspicions, the local authorities would often knock down doors at night to take people away to undisclosed locations.

Faced with this dangerous situation, he had no choice. He had to leave the country at any cost. He tried to seek freedom and flee with his wife and his 10-year-old and 11-month-old sons as boat people. He tried 13 times but never succeeded.

•(1625)

Finally, through some dealings involving the black market for gold bullion, his family caught a plane in March 1985, and fulfilled a promise that his brother-in-law, a student in New Brunswick and Montreal, made in February 1975.

He is but one—

[English]

**The Chair:** Dr. Dao, I'm going to have to stop you for one moment.

The bells are ringing now. If a member of the committee was prepared to ask for unanimous consent to continue, we could do that.

Do we have consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Okay, continue.

[Translation]

**Dr. Ba Ngoc Dao:** Thank you.

He is but one of 840,000 individuals called "refugees". It is estimated that during this exodus, more than 250,000 Vietnamese

lost their lives at sea and roughly 100,000 in the forests at the borders, due to drowning, disease, starvation, violence and acts of piracy.

The Vietnamese diaspora designates April 30 as Black April Day or Journey to Freedom Day to commemorate the lives lost and the suffering experienced during the exodus of the Vietnamese people. This day also acknowledges the warm welcome by Canadians and the Government of Canada of the Vietnamese refugees and the gratitude of the Vietnamese people overseas for that welcome.

It was not just Canada but many others who extended this extraordinary gesture to the Vietnamese refugees: so did the United States, Australia, France, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, and others. In 1986, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded the Nansen Medal to Canada, an honour on par with the Nobel Peace Prize.

Yet how many Canadians are aware of this honour? That was the impetus for Bill S-219. We Canadians, whatever our background, are proud to be recognized by other countries, by citizens around the world through this legislation.

Now let's continue the story of the former prisoner. After arriving in Montreal, in March 1985, the family immediately found work. The mother worked in a furniture factory, and then in a factory that made car brakes. The father studied for an equivalency exam.

In November 1985, after passing the exam, he worked at St. Luke's Hospital as an orderly for more than three years. During that time, thanks to the generosity of the department heads, he worked in the mornings as a trainee and in the evenings as an orderly. Between 1991 and 1993, he had his rotating internship and has been a practising family doctor since 1994. He was awarded the Prix des médecins de coeur et d'action.

•(1630)

[English]

**The Chair:** Merci, Dr. Dao.

We're now going to go to questions, and to Mr. Dykstra, for up to seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Dr. Ba Ngoc Dao:** Could I have one more minute?

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Dykstra, you can ask him to continue.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Go ahead, you can finish. It's only going to be a minute.

**The Chair:** You can finish, but you're using up Mr. Dykstra's time now.

[Translation]

**Dr. Ba Ngoc Dao:** I will sum up.

The Vietnamese community in Montreal has significantly contributed to the development of Canadian and Quebec society: every year it organizes a Health Day around September or October for 400 to 500 people from various ethnic backgrounds with presentations and advice on modern medical problems for and by Vietnamese health professionals; it offers English, French and Vietnamese courses, computer courses, martial arts courses, citizenship courses, meals for the homeless, courses to combat domestic violence, courses to protect seniors, fundraisers for victims of the storms and disasters in Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Lac-Mégantic as well.

There are many other activities that the Vietnamese community contributes to with Canadians of Vietnamese origin.

Once enacted, the Journey to Freedom Day is a day for Canada, its people, its elected officials, and its government. This law is for the Canadian people only and their ideals of peace and freedom.

Honourable chair, honourable members of the committee, by voting for this bill, you are enhancing the values of peace, freedom and human dignity which are truly the pillars of Canada. By voting for this bill, you are helping us to finally express the gratitude of Vietnamese Canadians to their host country and recognizing their commitment and contributions to this society of theirs. You are encouraging them to defend our values and exercise our rights, including the right to vote, which, by the way, exists in name only for the Vietnamese who remained in their country.

On April 30, Canadians of Vietnamese origin will attend a grand ceremony for the unveiling of the "Tribute to Liberty" monument to commemorate the 100 million victims of communism around the world. The monument will be erected near Parliament.

Honorable chair, honourable members of the committee, we sincerely thank you for your attention. Please accept the thanks of the entire Vietnamese community in Canada in the greater Montreal area.

Lastly, let's not forget that the Journey to Freedom Day is not a legal holiday or a non-judicial day.

Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Dykstra, you now have about four minutes and fifteen seconds.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Every once in a while it's not bad for a politician to give up his speaking time.

Mr. Nguyen and Mr. Bang Do, one of the pieces in terms of preparing for this is that concerns, at least from my perspective and some of the same arguments that you're presenting today, were also raised during the honouring of the story of the boat people in 1995. At that time the Vietnamese embassy warned the Canadian government that there would be negative effects, similar to what has been expressed this afternoon, on trade and a bilateral relationship between the two countries. When the monument was erected at Somerset and Preston streets right here in Ottawa, it also commemorated the contribution of the Vietnamese community to the city and the Vietnamese community who fled or were expelled from their country in April 1975.

I wondered if any of you could identify any negative repercussions with respect to trade that happened between Vietnam and Canada.

**Mr. Trac Bang Do:** I think in terms of the trade with Canada it took about 40 years to be built. If we're saying bad things about the country, it doesn't just jeopardize the opportunity for the Canadian government and people to deal with the Vietnamese trade opportunity, but it also jeopardizes the friendship very much for a long time to come. We don't know how many years it will take, maybe another 40 to 50 years. That would be a very very long time.

• (1635)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** One of the other pieces in all of this, from my perspective, is how we, as a country, have identified several events that have happened in other countries, including, for example, the Holodomor, the Armenian genocide. These are all significant tragic events in our world history that we, as a country, were prepared to recognize. We did recognize those events in the House of Commons and by the federal government. I don't understand, or I guess I'm a little bit unsure as to why there is anything different about recognizing Canada's role in accepting all of the displaced Vietnamese who came here in 1975 and on. Commemorating that journey to freedom made by thousands of Vietnamese Canadians, based on the fact that it happened, based on the fact that this is consistent with the Canadian model of how we recognize what these incidents and these tragic events mean to the lives of so many, why is it so difficult to accept this as something we should do as a country?

**Mr. Trac Bang Do:** Today, as a witness, I am saying that I'm not opposed to the bill itself. I support the dates that should be changed. I arrived in Canada in January 1980. But April 30, 1975, is not the date a single Vietnamese came to Canada. As my partner here says, that day was the unification day. I hope that the House committee members would recognize July 27 as the day that recognizes the first Vietnamese boat people's arrival in Canada. As the person who serves the Vietnamese community at large, I think July 27 is more of an opportunity for our people to recognize and to have in the bill.

**The Chair:** All right, thank you very much.

We're now going to move to Ms. Sitsabaiesan, for up to seven minutes.

Then we're going to suspend after that.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here.

I'm not sure if all of you were here in the first half when I was asking about clear controversy with the date. As well, you've clearly articulated, Mr. Dao, you support April 30. Mr. Do and Mr. Nguyen, you both have said that you don't support the April 30 date.

Mr. Do, you mentioned something interesting. In your mind April 30 is the reunification date, when North and South Vietnam were put together.

**Mr. Van Hoang Nguyen:** That is correct.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Clearly, there is a divide. I don't know if it's 90% of the population like one date and 10% don't, or 99% or 50% or 70%. I don't know what the percentages are, and I don't know if there's any math to support it.

Is there, in your minds, a date that is not April 30, that is not July 27, that can work?

**Mr. Trac Bang Do:** I think that there is no other date that can classify so high an expectation for us to recognize than July 27 which is the Vietnamese boat people's first arrival in Canada.

**Mr. Van Hoang Nguyen:** Rathika, I would say June 20. Where is June 20 coming from? From my understanding of the Nansen Award that was awarded to the people of Canada from the United Nations. Now it's not to Canada, but to the people of Canada, who have welcomed a lot of refugees to this country, not only Vietnamese, but people from a lot of other nations.

Now to directly answer your question of what date, what comes to my mind right now would be June 20, 1986, where Canada, as a nation—

• (1640)

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** —received the commendation.

**Mr. Van Hoang Nguyen:** —received the commendation, and that recognizes all Canadians for accepting the Vietnamese refugees in particular, and the refugees from all other countries.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Thank you.

Dr. Dao, do you have a comment about that?

[*Translation*]

**Dr. Ba Ngoc Dao:** Thank you very much.

Keep in mind, all the tragedy, lives lost, much of the terror and atrocities occurred as of April 30, 1975. That is the only date to remember. We must preserve that date otherwise it will be forgotten and we won't be able to explain, especially to future generations, why we are here in Canada instead of in Vietnam. It is because of April 30, 1975.

There was unspeakable tragedy and that is why we must try to commemorate that day. It is not about rekindling hatred or vengeance, but about making this an historic fact for humanity. We must absolutely bear that in mind. We are certainly not talking here about hatred or vengeance, but about the pain and misfortune suffered by the Vietnamese people overseas.

Let's not forget that we are talking about the suffering and all that happened at the start or the middle of April. The opposition is going to Vietnam to celebrate the Great Spring Victory, but what is that about? It is absurd because that was a sad day. In our country, we attend ceremonies that celebrate the great victory, but it reminds us that we were chased out of the country. It is sad for us.

Thank you very much.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Thank you.

I understand that the purpose of the bill is really to express your gratitude to Canada and Canadians for welcoming the Vietnamese refugees with open arms.

Could you tell me, which day, to your knowledge, the first Vietnamese refugee arrived in Canada?

**Dr. Ba Ngoc Dao:** Again, all this tragedy, between 1975 and now, began on April 30, after the Fall of Saigon.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Yes, I understand.

**Dr. Ba Ngoc Dao:** We cannot choose any other date because future generations, Canada, and the world needs to know that it was a day never to forget.

[*English*]

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** I'm going to change gears.

This is a question that came from the analysts also. Do you feel that the presentation of the events or the timeline as outlined in the preamble of the bill is a fair or accurate reflection of historical facts? Yes or no? Why or why not? Anybody.

**Mr. Van Hoang Nguyen:** That is a very interesting question.

As I mentioned earlier, the preamble mentioned that on April 30, 1975, North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam. I should mention that this is what I learned from university. This is a historical fact I said here. I don't bring the long story. I don't mention anything. I just take from the book that I learned from at university. This is where the well-known, respected university history professor mentioned that this is a country that was divided before unification. There was no invasion. The country was one before. It was just temporarily separated.

What I would suggest, if I may, is that some of the wording in the preamble should be removed because it wrongly defines the historical fact of invading. As well the Vietnam War didn't start in 1973 and end in 1975. It was a long war starting all the way back in 1940 and 1954. Those are the facts. As Mr. Dao was saying, I was born after the war. All of this I learned from books and historical facts. Those are things that I wish the committees would consider, the historical facts that you can read from any textbook. You should review the preamble—

• (1645)

**The Chair:** I have to cut you off there, because members do have to go and vote.

We will suspend, and when we come back, Monsieur Dion will have seven minutes. Then we will move to clause-by-clause consideration.

Could members come back right after the vote, please.

We will briefly suspend.

• (1645)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Good afternoon once again.

We will call the meeting back to order. We are studying Bill S-219.

*Monsieur Dion, sept minutes.*

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also want to thank the three witnesses.

[*English*]

We'll try again to reconcile everyone. I'm determined to try.

As you may know, the Monday before May 25 every year there is a statutory holiday in Canada. Which one is it? Do you know?

You don't know. Most Quebecers don't know, but they are pleased that on Monday, May 18, of this year, they will not have to work. It will be a free day. It will be a holiday. Many Quebecers will know that it is the day of the Queen, but they don't know which Queen. They may think it's Elizabeth II. In fact it's Victoria. But most of them don't know that.

Other Quebecers will want to commemorate Dollard des Ormeaux, a warrior who protected New France against the Mohawks when they were attacking Ville Marie, which is the ancestor of Montreal. Others will want to commemorate *les Patriotes*, the ones who fought in the 1837 rebellion against the British system of the time. Others will celebrate whatever you want: they are pleased to celebrate.

My point is that Canada is a free country. April 30 will be the date of commemoration for Canadians of Vietnamese background. You will be free to give to this commemoration the definition you want. Just commemorate with us; it will be great. That's my point.

I have a second point I would like you to react to. Canada is a free country. If in addition to that you want to commemorate a day in July, choose your date. Invite me, please. There are not enough days on the calendar to commemorate enough what Canadians of Vietnamese background are giving to Canada.

Those are my two arguments: commemorate what you want, as long as we do it together, and if it's not enough, choose another date and invite me, please.

**Mr. Van Hoang Nguyen:** Honourable Stéphane Dion, I fully agree with you on having a day to commemorate or to celebrate the fact that we are all here in Canada. The young generation like mine also wants to have a day. Take the statue like the one in downtown Ottawa to memorialize the sacrifice of a lot of people who came here to the country. I have absolutely no problem with that. We absolutely agree with that. Me, my family, all my friends, my colleagues, my partner, we all agree with that.

However, when a bill like this one is put forward, one that's based on historical fact, we should choose a day that's based on fact and based on concrete evidence. The bill mentions the day when the Nansen Refugee Award was given to Canada. My understanding of the bill is that it's really to commemorate and to celebrate Vietnamese refugees in Canada. However, it's also a thank you to the people of Canada. If you want to say thank you to someone, though, you don't come on July 1 if their birthday was June 28. You come on June 28. You don't come on July 1, do you?

My point here is that you'd better choose a day that is meaningful. For all the refugees, including the Vietnamese, what better day to thank Canada than June 20? The bill itself states that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded the Nansen Refugee Award to the people of Canada in 1986.

• (1715)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** I have no problem commemorating this day as well.

**Mr. Van Hoang Nguyen:** Perfect, and I'm sure I'm going to invite you to my party. I have no problem with that.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** I'm pleased by that. I hope you will come to Saint-Laurent—Cartierville on April 30 when we will celebrate Canadians of Vietnamese background.

Another example is June 24. It used to be *la fête des Canadiens français*, French Canadians. Now the God of Quebec one day decided it would be the national day of Quebec for all Quebecers: anglophones, francophones, and allophones together. In my experience, we are now celebrating both. We don't choose. We may celebrate Quebec or all French Canadians from coast to coast to coast; who cares? We celebrate together and we have fun. I hope it will be the case.

[Translation]

Doctor, I know that as president, you are a good man and extremely devoted to your community.

What can we all do together in Montreal to ensure that people like Mr. Trac Bang Do and Mr. Nguyen feel included and celebrate with us?

**Dr. Ba Ngoc Dao:** Thank you, Mr. Dion.

I am here to represent the Vietnamese community in Canada, specifically, the 20,000 plus people in the Vietnamese community in the Montreal region. We are here to deliver our community's message.

We want to keep that day for several reasons. First of all, how can we otherwise explain to future generations why they are here? We have to tell them that it is because North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam on April 30, and we have to tell them about all the terror that ensued as a result. You are all familiar with all of that. We cannot live with just theories. That is why we are here. Future generations need to know this.

The current Vietnamese Canadian community makes significant contributions to social development in so many areas, and future generations will do the same. This is important. If we change the date, younger generations will not know why they are here. It is hard to explain. We have to be sure that the date chosen will always commemorate the date of the mass exodus of Vietnamese people who rejected the doctrine. That is the first reason.

Second, for us, it is not a day of hatred, but rather a day of sadness. I'm sure you would agree that although our homeland is very poor—we have nothing to eat—it is still very beautiful, for sure. For us, staying here is not a gift. We stay here and we are very comfortable, but that does not mean we should forget about our homeland. We are here because of April 30, 1975. We must accept that. That is why that date must not change.

• (1720)

[English]

**The Chair:** That is going to have to be the last word.

[Translation]

**Dr. Ba Ngoc Dao:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. We will now move to clause-by-clause consideration.

Pursuant to Standing Order 75(1) both the preamble and the short title will be postponed.

(Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to on division)

**The Chair:** Shall the preamble carry?

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Mr. Chair, debate.

**The Chair:** Did you ask for debate on the preamble?

Ms. Sitsabaiesan, you have the floor.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Do you want to excuse our guests, so they don't have to sit at the table here while we're going through the perfunctory...?

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Dykstra.

To our witnesses, thank you very much. You are excused, if you wish.

**Mr. Van Hoang Nguyen:** Thank you all.

**Mr. Trac Bang Do:** Thank you very much, members of the committee.

**The Chair:** Ms. Sitsabaiesan, you have the floor. You're debating the preamble.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Mr. Chair, I want to enter the debate at some point. I can debate on the short title if you want or whatever, it doesn't really matter.

**The Chair:** You have the floor.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Mr. Chair, I want to make clear that the New Democrats are very disappointed with this process. We're disappointed that the committee wasn't able to hear from more witnesses and consider the bill more thoroughly. The preamble might be a good place for me to talk about this, because there's clearly a lot of division and contention within the community where there's a lot of passion. I think—and I'm certain that my NDP colleagues will support me in this—that it merits more study than this rushed process we've had today, and what we've learned about what happened in the Senate.

We think it's important to recognize the contributions of Canada in addressing the refugee crisis that resulted from the Vietnam War. That's what we heard from so many of our witnesses today, and the many contributions of the Vietnamese Canadians who have made this country their home. We've heard today, and statistics have shown, that more than 300,000 people made Canada their home, and Canada has welcomed them here. It's also a personal thing for me because my people have had to come to Canada and around the world as refugees. Canada has been a country that accepted my people whether they came as refugees or migrants in other forms.

Canada is a beautiful country. It's sad in that the bill was an opportunity for the community to say thank you to Canada, and there's clearly contention and division, and I wish there were more time for us to thoroughly study and hear more from the community, and possibly make meaningful changes for the community.

It's important to note that clearly there are diverse views on the bill within the Vietnamese Canadian community. As I said, we wish we were able to speak more about the bill here at committee. We learned the Senate process showed a lack of consultation also, and there were

witnesses who requested to appear and weren't given permission. Only witnesses who supported the bill were able to testify in the Senate.

It's our role as parliamentarians, Mr. Chair, to make sure that equity and democracy prevail, and to consider the diversity of all views on the issues and then take them into account to make sure we're being responsible in decisions we're making.

We, and when I say "we" I'm talking for the NDP, support the efforts to commemorate Canada's acceptance of tens of thousands of Southeast Asian refugees in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. We heard from witnesses today that it was more than 60,000. We do wish though that this legislative process had been more inclusive, and allowed for thorough study and thorough analysis by the committee members.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1725)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Is there any further debate on the preamble?

Mr. Dion.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** I just want to say that indeed I would have preferred if more time had been allowed to hear the different views, and to try to reconcile a community that should not be divided at a time when we want to commemorate the community. I think it's our duty as parliamentarians to try to do more than what we did. I'm pleased that at least we had one opportunity to do so, but more time would have been preferable.

I want that to be clear, and also to be clear that the support I will give on behalf of my party is about the contribution of the Vietnamese community to Canada, the refugees that we need, to commemorate their history. It's not about giving an official interpretation of the history of another country.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there any further debate on the preamble?

Shall the preamble carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** On division.

**The Chair:** Shall the short title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** On division.

**The Chair:** Shall the title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** On division.

**The Chair:** Shall the bill carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** On division.

**The Chair:** Shall I report the bill to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of the folks who have come to see our process in action today. Thank you for attending. Thank you to all of the committee members.

Mr. Dykstra.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** I don't mean to interrupt, Mr. Chair, but there are a lot of people here who probably have never seen the process that we move through to get a bill through committee and send it back to the House. Perhaps you could explain to the senator and to his guests what just transpired in terms of this vote.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I appreciate the opportunity to explain our process here. To everyone in attendance we have now passed this bill through the

committee, which we will report back to the House of Commons. It will then be debated once again in the House of Commons at third reading. As this bill originated in the Senate, it has already passed the Senate. If the House of Commons passes it at third reading, it will then go to the Governor General to receive royal assent and then it will be law.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** May I invite you, Mr. Chair, to explain what on division means, because otherwise it could be misunderstood.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dion.

On division means that it passed, but in fact members may or may not have supported it. It was not unanimous, but it did pass.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

Bill S-219 Third Reading

OFFICIAL REPORTS  
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**Wednesday, April 22, 2015**

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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#### JOURNEY TO FREEDOM ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, as reported (without amendment) from the committee

- (1820)

#### SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Deputy Speaker:** There are three motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill S-219.

[*Translation*]

Motions Nos. 1 and 2 will not be selected by the Chair, because they could have been presented in committee.

[*English*]

Motion No. 3 will be debated and voted upon.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motion No. 3 to the House.

[*English*]

#### MOTION IN AMENDMENT

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Ind.),** seconded by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, moved:

That Bill S-219 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the bill is slightly controversial but I think everybody is in favour.

*Private Members' Business*

I am pleased to rise today to speak to my proposed amendment. I know I had proposed various amendments and they were all for the same reason.

We are speaking on Bill S-219, the journey to freedom day act. From the outset, I would like to say that I am not opposed to this bill. All of my proposed amendments, deleting lines 7 to 13 of the preamble on page 1, deleting lines 16 to 30 of the preamble on page 2, which you ruled out of order, and that which you have accepted, deleting clause 2, are due to the fact that these clauses all contain April 30 as the date to mark the journey to freedom day. As we heard in committee, there is no consensus within the Vietnamese community that the date is appropriate.

The purpose of these deletions is to allow the bill to pass while providing the government an opportunity to go back and consult with the Vietnamese Canadian community and select a date upon which a broad consensus exists. The reasons that a consensus does not exist are because: April 30 is the anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War, which would make journey to freedom day synonymous with a historical event that Canada did not play a significant role in; it would take away the focus from Canada's role in settling displaced Vietnamese people and place it on the many points of contention surrounding the Vietnam War; and, it risks making journey to freedom day political when it should not be.

It would be unfortunate if Parliament passed this bill only for it to sow division. We instead seek to create a uniquely Canadian day to commemorate the Vietnamese community's acceptance into Canada and its achievements thereafter.

I can propose a few dates, but they are dates that we got from reading the minutes at committee and through speaking to some constituents.

For example, July 27 is a possible alternative because it is the day that the Department of National Defence's Operation Magnet II began making its flights of displaced Vietnamese people, also known as boat people, to Canada.

May 1 is also a possible alternative because it is the day that the Canadian government declared it would sponsor refugees with relatives already in Canada.

June 20 is a possible alternative because every year the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees marks World Refugee Day on June 20, which I think is important. On June 20, 1986, the Nansen Refugee Award was awarded to the people of Canada by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees due in large part to Canada's role in welcoming Vietnamese refugees into Canada.

I do not want to say that I have a preference for any of these dates because that would be contradictory to my first statement, that I would prefer to have the Vietnamese community, along with government, decide on a consensual date where everybody would be happy.

I have always believed that one of the greatest humanitarian contributions we can make in times of international crisis is to open our borders in order to welcome those who are forced to escape perilous circumstances abroad. Journey to freedom day has the potential to celebrate such noble actions quite admirably. It can also

highlight the positive impact that Canada made during a time of crisis by virtue of being a welcoming and compassionate nation while celebrating the numerous achievements by Vietnamese Canadians who have enriched Canada ever since. Making these the exclusive focus of the journey to freedom day act would be the most beneficial. The day could then serve as a reminder to Canadians that our generosity in difficult times can make a lasting impact that betters our country and the world we live in. This is why I believe it is important to choose a date that does not obscure these goals in any way or divide Canadians, especially those of Vietnamese origin, and that we can move on constructively.

On a personal note, I have received correspondence from Vietnamese in my community who are in favour of the bill. However, the controversy is the date. That is one of the reasons that I propose that we go back and try to have my amendments passed in the House as well as have the bill approved at third reading in the next couple of weeks before the House rises.

● (1825)

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to speak to Bill S-219, journey to freedom day act. I am co-sponsoring this bill with Senator Ngo from the other place.

It is important, however, contrary to what we just heard earlier from the other speaker, that April 30 is designated as journey to freedom day. It is important that this is the date the community has agreed upon. This is the date the community wants.

I presented a petition in the House of Commons signed by 2,620 people of Vietnamese Canadian origin just a little while ago. In addition, we had committee hearings at the heritage committee where we heard from various members of the community, including James Nguyen, president of the Vietnamese Association Toronto. He said:

As a leader of the biggest Vietnamese community in Canada, I attend many events on a weekly basis. There is overwhelming support for this bill whenever the conversation comes up. This bill is important to me and to those I encounter in the community, because it acknowledges our heritage. April 30 is a day for Vietnamese Canadians to come together to express our gratitude to Canadians for welcoming us with open arms.

The community wants April 30. This is the day the saga of the Vietnamese boat people began. Let us not forget that April 30, 1975 was the day the communist forces from North Vietnam occupied and conquered the south. They took over Saigon and as a result almost two million people fled South Vietnam. They fled persecution. They fled political imprisonment. They fled, in a lot of instances, death.

Some 250,000 boat people who went on rafts, that were put together with logs and rope, and crossed the seas succumbed to murder by pirates, rape, sexual assault, drowning, thirst, and hunger.

In 1980, some 120,000 were accepted here in Canada. In 1986, Canada was awarded the Nansen medal. There are 300,000 Canadians of Vietnamese origin now living in Canada. It is important to Vietnamese Canadians, who all agree, that April 30, journey to freedom day, is the day that is recognized by the community and by this House of Commons.

*Private Members' Business*

It is important. I have many people in my community of Vietnamese origin who have told me that April 30 is the day. Canada is a country made up of people that have all come from somewhere else. We all come here for pretty much the same reasons: to escape persecution, to escape hatred, and to escape violence. We come here because we want the opportunity and the hope that Canada has to offer us, for ourselves and more importantly, for our kids.

In the late 1970s and 1980s when Canada opened its doors to so many Vietnamese boat people, that boat became a symbol. It is a metaphor for freedom, for a journey to freedom. That is why April 30 is the date the community wants, the date that Saigon fell to communist forces.

Many Canadians do not know the story of Vietnamese boat people. This day, April 30, is the day Saigon fell, the day when the exodus of people from South Vietnam began, the day that Canadians will learn what people will do and to what extent they will go to escape persecution, to embrace freedom for themselves and for their families.

This is so significant. This is an important date. The young people here in Canada must know April 30 as the date. This bill will serve a pedagogical purpose. It will educate young Canadians and Canadians alike of the importance of what we have here in Canada, the great Canadian values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

This is also a celebration. This bill is a celebration of Canada. It is a celebration of Canadian values that we here in Canada, in 1980, opened up our arms to welcome boat people, people who had absolutely nothing. My dad was a survivor of the Holocaust and he came here with only the shirt on his back.

Many people, not just Vietnamese, have come to Canada with the very same, just the shirt on their backs and some change in their pockets to make Canada their home because Canada offers hope and opportunity for people.

• (1830)

I will tell the House that people in my community want April 30 as the day to mark this. Forty years have gone by now and we have an opportunity in the House to do the right thing, to say to the Vietnamese Canadian community that, yes, Saigon fell on April 30. That is the day that the journey to freedom began, which ended up here in Canada, where now some 300,000 Canadians of Vietnamese origin live.

On the weekend, I was at the North York Vietnamese seniors club. There were many people there, both young and old alike, who came on these makeshift boats. Some came as babes in arms. All remember the experience and all are so grateful to Canada. This date is very important for them. We must do the right thing here in Canada.

People say we have not heard from the community, but the community has been heard. The community has spoken. The community has said April 30 is the day. Some say we need to hear from the government of Vietnam or its representatives. It is not the practice of this Parliament or any other democratic parliament around the world to hear from representatives of foreign governments when it comes to passing domestic legislation, and we should

not bend to the pressure from that embassy or any other embassy. When we pass legislation in the House, it is because the will of the people has tasked us to do that. We are responsible to the Canadian people, not to people in another country.

Vietnamese Canadians have spoken. They have sent many of us here, just like other Canadians, to get the job done, and the job in this piece of legislation is to designate April 30 as journey to freedom day.

• (1835)

**Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to speak about Bill S-219. I just listened to what the sponsor of the bill said, and I would like to clarify something. The member said that he speaks on behalf of the community. Being a member of Vietnamese origin, I can say that I have listened to what the community has said. To be honest, I think the member is not listening to what everyone has to say.

It is a divisive bill. I am not saying that April 30 is not the right date. What I am saying is that it is not unanimous. It has created a division. I find it very unfortunate.

One of the ways we could have gone forward and brought the Vietnamese community together was by doing something more concrete. I have listened to a lot of people in my riding from the Vietnamese community who have told me that one of the main issues for them is human rights issues in Vietnam. What we are doing here is not even addressing that issue.

I heard a lot of comments when the senator talked about the bill. There were no specific things brought forward to deal with the issues that affect people in Vietnam. There is a subcommittee for international human rights that is actually looking into the human rights situation in Vietnam. It heard from Viet Tan, for instance, an organization that spoke about some of the issues the Vietnamese have to deal with.

I will read something from my colleague on the other side, the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells, a Conservative member, who yesterday at the committee said, “The Vietnamese government continues to be a violator in a broad area of human rights and is among the worst violators of religious freedom in the world. The international community must exert pressure on the Vietnamese government to cease these abuses against its own citizens”.

Even when we hear alarm bells coming from the Conservatives, the only thing they can come up with is this bill.

There are only three articles. I will read from the bill. The first one is:

This Act may be cited as the Journey to Freedom Day Act.

That is the short title. The second one is:

Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the thirtieth day of April shall be known as “Journey to Freedom Day”.

Article three, the last one, is:

For greater certainty, Journey to Freedom Day is not a legal holiday or a non-judicial day.

*Private Members' Business*

These are the only articles that will stay after the bill is adopted. All the discussion about the preamble, with all the divisiveness that has come up, and the issues we heard from all sides, will not be in the final text of the legislation. Instead of using a bill to bring Vietnamese together, what the Conservatives have done is divide the Vietnamese community.

To be clear, I will be supporting the bill. I voted for it at second reading and I will vote for it at third reading.

There is a big fundraising rally for the Vietnamese boat people museum. This is a way of learning about the history of Vietnam and what happened after April 30. It will actually be the 40th anniversary this year. There are so many stories of Vietnamese boat people leaving Vietnam.

I invite all members to watch the documentary *Bolinao 52*. It is a documentary that follows a group of boat people through their journey. Why 52? It is because 52 out of 110 people survived. The rest of them died.

There are a lot of ways for us as members of Parliament and for the government to bring forward tools for other generations to know what happened.

● (1840)

I saw the documentary with my mother. It was organized as a fundraiser for the Vietnamese museum. I think that is one way of bringing people together. Everyone agrees that we have to remember our roots. In my case, my Vietnamese roots are part of who I am, and it is really important for me to learn about them.

However, we have a bill that actually does not say much and actually does not do much. I agree with the member when he said that April 30 is already a day when people in the community are celebrating. For instances, this weekend I will be in Montreal celebrating April 30. For me, it is different. Everyone sees the day differently. For me, it is a day to remember my roots and to commemorate all the sacrifices my parents made to come to Canada and for me to actually be here today in the House.

I mentioned human rights in Vietnam. Right now what has been done is basically that an issue has been brought up that is divisive but does not bring anything in return. We have seen what happens when the current government deals with trade agreements. I will give the example of Honduras. The reason the NDP opposed it is that when the government actually negotiated the agreement, it never talked about human rights. Honduras is not the best place on earth in terms of protecting human rights. When the government could actually talk about human rights and negotiate human rights, it did not do it. It is the same thing with the Liberals, who actually supported it.

What we get from the other side is basically, "Let's negotiate a trade agreement. Let's help develop it. After that, eventually everything will be cleared up and the human rights issues will be resolved". However, at the end of the day, we have to negotiate now.

The reason I am talking about this, if members would listen, is that right now there are negotiations regarding a trans-Pacific partnership agreement, and we have not heard the government talk about human rights when it talks about negotiations.

What people in Vietnam and people from the community are saying is that we need to help people in Vietnam. What we are talking about is a bill that is divisive and is not bringing things forward. It is not helping people in Vietnam. That is why what we are offering on this side are solutions. Right now, the solution is negotiations and talks.

I invite the member who is heckling over there to listen to what was said at the subcommittee meeting yesterday. There was a subcommittee meeting in Parliament regarding human rights in Vietnam. Before coming here, I actually watched the whole thing and listened to it. For me, it is important. It is a way of bringing things forward and making sure that we do not forget our past. For me this is really important, because it is part of who I am. That is why I mentioned to the member who is heckling on the other side that instead of bringing forward something that is so divisive, why not help the Vietnamese museum of boat people? Why not help people in Vietnam right now? That would have been a way to bring people together. That would have been a way to move forward. That would have been a way to actually improve things, not just here but in other countries.

Again, the bill we have here today is being used sort of as a tool, and it is unfortunate.

It is too easy to generalize by saying that the community is united for it or against it. We understand the differences. As I said, for me it is a way to remember my roots, to remember my origins, to remember where my parents came from, and to remember the people from Vietnam. It is a way for me to see how great it is for us to live in Canada, where they actually open the door and where people of different origins are welcome.

● (1845)

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the previous speaker, said it all. He outlined his concerns about it, as I have. I imagine many have. The government continues to use important communities like this as nothing more than wedges to divide communities, not build them.

We have to understand what our role is as parliamentarians. It is about uniting people. It is about helping communities to get strong and build. It is about helping communities to go forward. It is about celebrating special days within that community. The way to do that is by consultation, and that means thorough and proper consultation.

As my NDP colleague has pointed out, the bill would divide the community immensely. Rather than have it united, as my Conservative colleague, the mover of the bill, would have us think that everyone was in agreement, if everybody were in agreement, then we would all be very happy today to deal with the bill at this point. The problem is that all are not happy.

We never get 100% at any given time on an issue, but there are as many people against this as there appear to be for this. Those of us who represent a large Vietnamese community in particular have been bombarded with all sides of this issue. When I speak to it today, it is of mixed feelings on both sides because it is a community that I represent.

*Private Members' Business*

I happen to work a lot with the Vietnamese community, and I support it immensely. People are flagging all these issues about not voting for Bill S-219 because it is not the right day. The senator changed the title, which the people were satisfied with, but there was very limited consultation. I believe there was one day of debate at the Senate level and when it came here, it was again very limited debate and discussion at committee.

Many of the people who have written to me and talked to me have said that they wanted to get to the committee when it came up, but it was not even listed on the parliamentary agenda. It suddenly appeared on the agenda and they did not have time to get here. When some of them did come very quickly for the meeting, they were denied the opportunity to speak because there was only so much time.

That is the way the government plays the wedge politics of pitting one part of a community against another. It does not give time for full discussion. What is the problem with taking extra time to ensure that as parliamentarians we get it right so we can support a bill that unites a community? The goal may have been right, but more time was needed to ensure that we had it right, which is why it gives many of us such difficulty trying to figure out how to deal with the bill.

I want to recognize my colleague, who is the party's critic on this. Again, we all try to do what is right but what is right for everyone, not just what is right for a handful of people who suit the government's requirements. We want to do something that is right for everyone.

As I said, I have had so many emails, petitions and so on, asking that we recognize it as a day of celebration, but not April 30. There has been a lot of correspondence for everyone in this. As their MP, I have come to know the people in the community very well and I want to honour them as we go forward.

I will be part of a special commemoration this coming Saturday at Nathan Phillips Square. I have attended it for many years. I speak to hundreds of veterans to remember that day, and we remember the over 250,000 Vietnamese who died fleeing that regime. They died of starvation, or in the ocean or wherever. It is a commemoration like Remembrance Day. It is a day of sadness to remember what happened.

● (1850)

The people that I am talking to in the community want to see a day that is a celebration of all the positive things that have happened as a result of the Vietnamese community coming to Canada, the successful families that they have raised, the businesses that are now operated by successful Vietnamese members of the community. They think it is a great honour to have a day to celebrate all of their achievements in this country that they now call home.

April 30, as the senator initially had for the name of the day, is a black day because it is a day of sadness. April 30 is not a day to celebrate all the great things that people in the Vietnamese community have done in Canada. It is a day on which they remember the fall of Saigon and the ultimate exodus of thousands and thousands of refugees from Vietnam. It is a day that we always recognize at Nathan Phillips Square and other places as a day of

sadness and a day of acknowledging the many men and women who live in Canada who were part of the military that fled. They stand in uniform and remember that day as a day of sadness. I believe what the community would like to have is a day to celebrate the Vietnamese community. That is a day that I would love to see happen. That is where the concern is, that the day is seen as being a black day rather than a day of celebration.

That is why I have tremendous concerns about how to deal with this issue. This is a private member's bill, so we are able to represent our constituents as to how they feel and what they want us to do. A lot of the people in my riding are not happy with going forward with the date of April 30, but as my colleagues indicated earlier, that is the only date on the bill. The bill says very little. It has three lines. It would not achieve anything except to possibly allow the government to continue its wedge politics, which is dividing communities in saying that they are with them or they are not with them, even though their concerns are very legitimate as we move forward.

Most people who are concerned are saying that this is a day of sadness. It is like Remembrance Day for us here in Canada. It is not a day to celebrate all of the great things that the Vietnamese community has done and has worked for.

The Vietnamese community in Canada is made up of people who are fiercely and rightly proud of their history. They work hard and in many cases continue to fight for the true freedom and democracy in their homeland. I attended the human rights subcommittee yesterday and heard the head of the Viet Tan organization talk about the atrocities that continue to happen in Vietnam. They talk about human rights violations. They talk about the amount of human trafficking going on in those communities. Those are issues that we need to be pushing forward and moving along, to ensure that we are helping a community that we very much respect in a tribute. However, is April 30 the right day?

I would prefer the bill to have been sent back to committee and have allocated more time to hearing from more witnesses on all sides of the issue, and do what we are supposed to do in Parliament on issues like this, which is to find a way to bring the community together to unite it. I have no doubt we could have done that, but unfortunately because there was insufficient time, that did not happen.

April 30 is widely seen by the Vietnamese Canadian community as a dark day, like November 11, Remembrance Day, is for us. I would like to have a day to celebrate the Vietnamese community and the wonderful work that the people continue to do to build and strengthen our community, and help us continue the positive things we are doing.

We are going forward with the difficulties of legislation that is tearing apart the community on all sides. I would like to have gone back, if that were an option, but the procedures may not allow that to happen at this particular point. As we move forward and see what else we can do to assist here to take away the difficulties between the two sides of this issue, as to how we get them all to agree, that is going to be difficult to do. I am not sure where we would have to go from here to make any corrections. For the bill to go forward in its current form is a disservice to the Vietnamese community and leads us into a difficult position.

*Private Members' Business*

● (1855)

However, this is a private member's bill and we will all have our opportunity to reflect our community's wishes at the time it comes up for disposition.

**Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to rejoin the debate on Bill S-219, the journey to freedom day act, and to speak in support of the proposed legislation.

As members know, the journey to freedom day act would designate April 30 to mark the day that began the flight of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese in a mass exodus from their homeland. April 30 is the right day to be designated to commemorate the beginning of that exodus. I respectfully disagree with my colleague, the member for York West, and before her, the NDP member for Brossard—La Prairie, in the use of the word “divided” to describe the sentiment of the Vietnamese Canadian community.

On Saturday night I attended a very large celebration banquet in Toronto, which was attended by between 600 to 800 Vietnamese Canadians. The evening was titled “Thank You Canada”. This represents the majority faction of Vietnamese Canadians who support this bill and recognize that April 30 was indeed a tragic day. It marks the communist capture of the South Vietnamese capital after decades of civil war in the country. The final capture of Saigon really was the end of the 1954 Geneva peace accord, which divided the country in hopes that there would one day be reconciliation, but instead, we saw the domination and oppression that followed with the North Vietnamese regime.

For me, April 30 is of particular importance. I was among the 7,000 who were airlifted out of Saigon on April 30 by the American military Operation Frequent Wind. The overwhelming majority of those 7,000 were Vietnamese who had reason to fear for their lives and the lives of their families. They were lucky to have joined that final airlift as the American embassy in the centre of Saigon was abandoned. However, even as we left from the embassy, we could see people gathering at the riverside boarding all types of tramp steamers and smaller boats. They began immediately to flee for their lives. They were the first of hundreds of thousands over the next half decade who would leave their homeland in desperation, seeking new lives abroad.

There were 840,000 souls who fled Vietnam in the mid to late 1970s following the fall of Saigon seeking refuge and new homes. In her Governor General's award-winning novel *Ru*, members may recall Kim Thy describing in vivid detail the experience of these Vietnamese refugees escaping by boat to an uncertain future, something she herself had done as a child. I will read briefly from her writing:

Heaven and hell embraced in the belly of our boat. Heaven promised a turning point in our lives, a new future, a new history. Hell, though, displayed our fears: fears of pirates, fear of starvation, fear of poisoning by biscuits soaked in motor oil, fear of running out of water, fear of being unable to stand up, fear of having to urinate in the red pot that was passed from hand to hand, fear that the scabies on the baby's head was contagious, fear of never again setting foot on solid ground, fear of never again seeing the faces of our parents, who were sitting in the darkness surrounded by two hundred people.

● (1900)

Miss Thy continues:

Before our boat had weighed anchor in the middle of the night on the shores of Rach Gia, most of the passengers had just one fear: fear of the Communists, the reason for their flight. But as soon as the vessel was surrounded, encircled by the uniform blue horizon, fear was transformed into a hundred-faced monster who sawed off our legs and kept us from feeling the stiffness in our immobilized muscles.

The reality is that 250,000 people would not survive the difficult sea journey. They fell victim to illness, piracy, and dangerous seas. Those who did survive made their way to refugee camps in neighbouring countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore and Hong Kong, which created a massive humanitarian crisis. This crisis required action on the global scale and the world responded.

With the aid of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, government officials began the process of resettling the refugees in a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia, the United States and, yes, Canada. Of those who survived the perilous sea voyage, more than 60,000 were welcomed by Canada. Approximately 34,000 were privately sponsored, and 26,000 were assisted by the Government of Canada.

These people, these refugees, became known as the boat people. They were welcomed with open arms by communities and religious congregations. Canadians helped these newest arrivals in Canada to find jobs, to make lives for themselves, and to educate their children and grandchildren. In fact, the outpouring of support here in Canada was so strong that the private sponsorship of refugees program became enshrined as a fundamental part of Canada's refugee resettlement program. It is a program whose strength is still recognized around the world.

Today, there are over 220,000 Canadians of Vietnamese origin. They contribute to all aspects of Canadian life: culture, sport, the economy, and academia. We value these contributions. Canada must continue to acknowledge what the Vietnamese refugees of the 1970s experienced to get here.

We must remember that April 30, 1975 was the trigger. The final capture of the South Vietnamese capital by the communist North Vietnamese was the beginning. While there is sadness to be commemorated, and it is commemorated every year on April 30, there is joy and celebration within the South Vietnamese community at the new life that they found here in Canada. I have seen it regularly on the anniversary.

As a result of Canada's efforts in assisting the boat people, members will remember that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees awarded the people of Canada the Nansen medal in 1986. The only time in history that an entire country has received such recognition.

To this day, Canada has one of the fairest and generous immigration and refugee systems in the world. In fact, we welcome more resettled refugees than almost any other industrialized country in the world. On a per capita basis, Canada leads the way.

*Private Members' Business*

In conclusion, the designation of April 30 as journey to freedom day would be a significant day for all Canadians, not just the Vietnamese Canadian community. It would also be a fitting way to mark the eve of Asian Heritage Month, which we celebrate every year in May. With the passage of the bill, April 30 would be a special day of commemoration for the Vietnamese Canadian community. All Canadians deserve a day to remember with pride their considerable efforts to show the world that we are a caring and truly compassionate nation.

• (1905)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to address what I think is a very important issue. There is no doubt that it bridges political parties in the chamber as we reflect on Canada's great diversity. The leader of the Liberal Party has often said that one of Canada's greatest strengths is in fact its diversity. This is something we can all be very proud of. We can look, for example, at the issues surrounding the principle of multiculturalism, something which Pierre Trudeau established a number of years back and has instilled a great sense of pride in all of us. It does not matter which region of the country we live in.

I can talk about a great Canadian I know and had the honour to present a medal to, and that is Ba Van Nguyen, who is someone I have known for many years. In fact, when I was first elected to the Manitoba legislature in 1988, one of the very first events I was invited to back then was at the Saigon Centre, which is a wonderful, beautiful housing complex in the heart of Winnipeg. That was the first time I had the opportunity to meet Ba.

Through the years, the education and information that Ba has provided me with regard to the historical perspective of Vietnam and in particular the Vietnamese heritage here in Canada is of great value. Ba, and I suspect along with many others but I want to single out Ba, has done a tremendous job of sharing his heritage not only with individuals such as myself but with literally hundreds, if not thousands, of people over the years.

The Saigon housing complex will often have special events, where I will see other politicians as well as members of the public in attendance. They recognize the important role the Saigon Centre plays. Throughout the years, it has created such as positive hub of activity. In fact, just down the street, literally steps away from the Saigon Centre, is a park that is dedicated to the boat people.

If one were to talk to Ba, one would find that he would be prepared to share his story. He, too, had the misfortune of having to get on a boat and travel to the Philippines, and ultimately he came here to reside in Canada. I look at Ba as an individual who has contributed so much to our society. In fact, he ran in a provincial election for a different political party than I belonged to. He has demanded a great deal of respect, not because he stands on a pedestal and requires it, but because he demonstrates through leadership. He has a great sense of pride. He is a proud Canadian and has a great deal of pride in his Vietnamese heritage.

I look at the bill before us and what it would really do. What I would suggest to members of the House it would do is it would say that we need to cherish the Vietnamese heritage and a big part of that heritage are the boats that ultimately brought the refugees to Canada. By designating a day, we would be affording individuals the

opportunity, whether they are of Vietnamese heritage or not, to recognize the contributions and reflect on the history of the Vietnamese community and the positive impact it has had on the broader community.

• (1910)

The potential has been realized in many different ways in the province and the city I call home, Winnipeg, in terms of the social and economic well-being of our communities and the manner in which our Canadian Vietnamese constituents and others have really contributed to our economy and to our social fabric.

We can see that in many different ways, including in our health and manufacturing industries and in politics. The community has really built up, as have other communities. I started talking about diversity and our multicultural fabric. There is a very good sense of just how a community has done so exceptionally well in a relatively short period of time.

This last summer I had the privilege of travelling with my daughter to Vietnam. What a wonderful experience that was, just being able to experience first-hand a culture and heritage that many of the constituents I represent inside this House today can really identify with, the country of Vietnam.

When I look at the bill that we have before us today, I reflect on the importance of the issue at hand and on instilling the sense of pride that we should all have in terms of our Vietnamese community and how well it has done and how well it has overcome, over the last number of years, many different barriers.

Through experiences and talking with members from the Vietnamese community, I know they want to be able to see even more, in terms of contributions and preservation of the heritage. There were discussions about looking at how we could have street improvements, and looking at parks to see how they could reflect how Canada's heritage has actually been enriched by our Vietnamese community.

In second reading, I listened to the debate and I had the opportunity to participate. I listened to many speeches in regard to the value of recognizing a day. I appreciate all the individuals who have taken the time to stand in their place and share with the House some reflections on a very important community.

I look forward to the bill ultimately moving forward.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The question is on Motion No. 3. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Deputy Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Deputy Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Deputy Speaker:** In my opinion the nays have it.  
I declare Motion No. 3 defeated.

(Motion No. 3 negatived)

●(1915)

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC)** moved that Bill S-219, an act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Deputy Speaker:** When shall the bill be read a third time?  
By leave, now?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Mark Adler** moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

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Second Session, Forty-first Parliament,  
62-63-64 Elizabeth II, 2013-2014-2015

(Unofficial Vietnamese Translation)

Quốc Hội Thứ 41, Phiên Họp Thứ Hai  
62-63-64 Elizabeth II, 2013-2014-2015

## STATUTES OF CANADA 2015

## ĐẠO LUẬT QUY ĐỊNH CỦA CANADA 2015

### CHAPTER 14

### CHƯƠNG 14

An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War

Một Đạo Luật tôn trọng ngày lễ quốc gia để kỷ niệm cuộc di cư của người tị nạn Việt Nam và được chấp thuận định cư tại Canada sau khi Sài Gòn sụp đổ và chiến tranh Việt Nam kết thúc

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ASSENTED TO

23rd APRIL, 2015

BILL S-219

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PHÊ CHUẨN THÀNH

NGÀY 23 THÁNG TƯ, 2015

ĐẠO LUẬT S-219

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## SUMMARY

This enactment designates the thirtieth day of April in each and every year as "Journey to Freedom Day".

## TÓM LƯỢC

Ban hành đạo luật chỉ định ngày ba mươi tháng tư mỗi năm là "Ngày Hành Trình Tìm Tự Do".

## CHAPTER 14

## CHƯƠNG 14

An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War

Một Đạo Luật tôn trọng ngày lễ quốc gia để kỷ niệm cuộc di cư của người tị nạn Việt Nam và được chấp thuận định cư tại Canada sau khi Sài Gòn sụp đổ và chiến tranh Việt Nam kết thúc

[Assented to 23rd April, 2015]

[Phê chuẩn ngày 23 tháng 4 năm 2015]

Preamble

Whereas the Canadian Forces were involved in the Vietnam War with supervisory operations to support the aim of establishing peace and ending the Vietnam War by assisting in the enforcement of the Paris Peace Accords of 1973;

Whereas on April 30, 1975, despite the Paris Peace Accords, the military forces of the People's Army of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front invaded South Vietnam, which led to the fall of Saigon, the end of the Vietnam War and the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government;

Whereas the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that these events and the conditions faced by individuals in Vietnam, including deteriorating living conditions and human rights abuses, contributed to the exodus of approximately 840,000 Vietnamese people, who were referred to at the time as "Vietnamese boat people", to neighbouring countries in the ensuing years;

Whereas the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has reported that at least 250,000 Vietnamese people lost their lives at sea during the exodus of the Vietnamese people for reasons that included drowning, illness, starvation and violence from kidnapping or piracy;

Lời mở đầu

Xét rằng, Quân Đội Canada đã tham gia vào Chiến Tranh Việt Nam với các hoạt động giám sát để hỗ trợ mục tiêu thiết lập hòa bình và chấm dứt Chiến Tranh Việt Nam qua việc trợ giúp thi hành Hiệp Định Paris 1973;

Xét rằng, vào ngày 30 tháng 4 năm 1975, bất chấp Hiệp Định Hòa Bình Paris, các lực lượng quân sự của Quân Đội Nhân Dân Việt Nam và Mặt Trận Giải Phóng Quốc Gia đã xâm lăng Miền Nam Việt Nam, dẫn đến sự sụp đổ Sài Gòn, kết thúc chiến tranh Việt Nam và thiết lập Chính Phủ Việt Nam Cộng Hòa Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa;

Xét rằng, Cao Ủy Ty Nạn Liên Hiệp Quốc đã báo cáo về những sự kiện này và tình trạng phải đương đầu bởi dân chúng Việt Nam, bao gồm các điều kiện sinh sống bị suy sụp cùng vi phạm nhân quyền, là nguyên nhân gây ra cuộc di cư của khoảng 840,000 người Việt Nam – vào lúc đó những người này được nhắc đến dưới tên gọi "thuyền nhân Việt Nam" - đến các nước láng giềng trong những năm tiếp theo;

Xét rằng, Cao Ủy Ty Nạn Liên Hiệp Quốc đã báo cáo rằng có ít nhất 250,000 người Việt Nam thiệt mạng trên biển cả trong cuộc di cư vì những lý do như chết đuối, bệnh tật, đói khát và bạo lực xảy ra từ các vụ bắt cóc hoặc cướp biển;

Whereas the sponsorship refugee program in Canada, assisted by the efforts of Canadian families, Canadian charities, religious groups and non-governmental organizations, contributed to Canada accepting more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees, among whom it has been estimated that 34,000 were privately sponsored and 26,000 were assisted by the Canadian government;

Whereas the major and sustained contribution by the people of Canada to the cause of refugees was recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees when it awarded the Nansen Refugee Award to the “People of Canada” in 1986;

And whereas April 30 is referred to by many members of the community of displaced Vietnamese people and their families in Canada as “Black April Day”, or alternatively as “Journey to Freedom Day”, and is, therefore, an appropriate day to designate as a day to remember and commemorate the lives lost and the suffering experienced during the exodus of Vietnamese people, the acceptance of Vietnamese refugees in Canada, the gratitude of Vietnamese people to the Canadian people and the Government of Canada for accepting them, and the contributions of Vietnamese-Canadian people — whose population is now approximately 300,000 — to Canadian society;

Now, therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

#### SHORT TITLE

Short title

1. This Act may be cited as the Journey to Freedom Day Act.

#### JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY

Journey to Freedom Day

2. Throughout Canada, in each and every year, the thirtieth day of April shall be known as “Journey to Freedom Day”.

Xét rằng, chương trình bảo trợ tỵ nạn tại Canada, được trợ giúp bởi nỗ lực của các gia đình người Canada, các tổ chức từ thiện Canada, các nhóm tôn giáo và các tổ chức không-thuộc-chính-phủ, đã đóng góp vào việc chấp nhận hơn 60,000 người tỵ nạn Việt Nam vào Canada, trong đó ước tính có 34,000 người được tư nhân bảo trợ và 26,000 người được trợ giúp bởi chính phủ Canada;

Xét rằng, sự đóng góp quan trọng và lâu dài của dân chúng Canada đối với nguyên nhân tỵ nạn đã được công nhận bởi Cao Ủy Tỵ Nạn Liên Hợp Quốc khi trao Giải Thưởng Tỵ Nạn Nansen cho “Dân Chúng Canada” vào năm 1986;

Và xét rằng ngày 30 tháng 4 được nhiều người trong cộng đồng của người Việt Nam di tản và gia đình của họ tại Canada gọi là “Ngày Tháng Tư Đen”, hay gọi cách khác là “Ngày Hành Trình Tìm Tự Do”, và do đó, là một ngày lễ thích hợp để chỉ định như một ngày để nhớ và tưởng niệm cho những người đã mất và những đau khổ đã trải qua trong cuộc di cư của người Việt Nam, cho sự chấp nhận của người tỵ nạn Việt Nam tại Canada, cho lòng tri ân của người Việt Nam đối với dân chúng Canada và chính phủ Canada đã tiếp nhận họ, và cho các đóng góp của người Canada gốc Việt – dân số đến nay là khoảng 300,000 người – vào xã hội Canada;

Do đó, Nữ Hoàng, căn cứ bởi vào cố vấn và đồng thuận của Thượng Nghị Viện và Hạ Nghị Viện Canada, nay ban hành đạo luật sau đây:

#### TỰA ĐỀ NGẮN GỌN

1. Đạo Luật này có thể được trích dẫn là *Đạo Luật Ngày Hành Trình Tìm Tự Do*

Tựa đề ngắn gọn

#### NGÀY HÀNH TRÌNH TÌM TỰ DO

2. Khắp đất nước Canada, hàng năm và mỗi năm, ngày thứ ba mươi của tháng tư được biết đến là “Ngày Hành Trình Tìm Tự Do”.

Ngày hành trình  
Tìm tự do

Not a legal holiday

3. For greater certainty, Journey to Freedom Day is not a legal holiday or a non-judicial day.

3. Để chắc chắn hơn, Ngày Hành Trình Tìm Tự Do không phải là một ngày lễ luật định được nghi hợp pháp.

Không phải là một ngày lễ luật định

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Available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:  
Đạo luật có đăng tại web site của Quốc Hội Canada theo địa chỉ sau đây:  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>



## JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY

April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015

**WHEREAS**, April 30<sup>th</sup> is referred by many members of the Vietnamese people and their families in Canada as “Black April Day” or alternatively as “Journey to Freedom Day;” and

**WHEREAS**, April 30<sup>th</sup> 2015 marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of Saigon in 1975; and

**WHEREAS**, the last day in April is recognized as the day to remember the victims of the Vietnamese War and to promote human rights issues and fundamental freedom; and

**WHEREAS** the Vietnamese-Canadian community of Ottawa, including many survivors and refugees of the war, have made positive and valuable contributions to the cultural diversity in the city of Ottawa and to Canadian society;

**THEREFORE**, I, Jim Watson, Mayor of the City of Ottawa, do hereby proclaim April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Journey to Freedom Day in Ottawa.

## JOURNÉE DU PARCOURS VERS LA LIBERTÉ

Le 30 avril 2015

**ATTENDU QUE** le 30 avril est reconnu comme étant la « Journée avril noir » ou « Journée du Parcours vers la liberté » par bon nombre de personnes vietnamiennes et leur famille au Canada; et

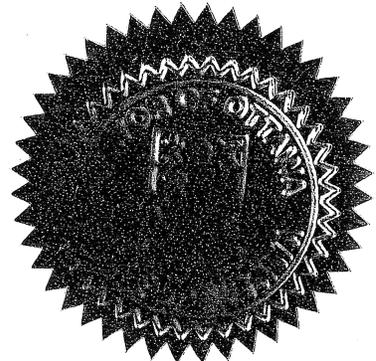
**ATTENDU QU'É** le 30 avril 2015 marque le 40<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la chute de Saigon en 1975; et

**ATTENDU QUE** la dernière journée d'avril est la journée consacrée au souvenir des victimes de la guerre du Vietnam et à la promotion des droits de la personne et des libertés fondamentales; et

**ATTENDU QUE** la communauté vietnamo-canadienne d'Ottawa, dont font partie de nombreux réfugiés et survivants de la guerre, a apporté une contribution précieuse à la diversité culturelle de la ville d'Ottawa et de la société canadienne;

**PAR CONSÉQUENT**, je, Jim Watson, maire de la Ville d'Ottawa, proclame par la présente le 30 avril 2015 Journée du Parcours vers la liberté à Ottawa.

Jim Watson  
Mayor / Maire



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