

The following information comes from this web-site:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_refugees_in_Israel

Vietnamese refugees in Israel

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A Vietnamese youngster with a Magen David Adom "tembel" hat at Ben Gurion Airport, June 26, 1977. Credit: Israeli Government Press Office.

From 1977 to 1979 the [State of Israel](#) permitted approximately 360 [Vietnamese boat people](#) fleeing the [1975 Communist takeover of Vietnam](#) to enter the country.^{[1][2][3]} The most well-known rescue operation took place on June 10, 1977 in which an Israeli freighter ship called the *Yuvali*, en route to Taiwan, sighted the passengers.^{[4][5]}

Prime Minister [Menachem Begin](#) was quoted as having compared them to Holocaust refugees.^[6]

"We never have forgotten the boat with 900 Jews, the *St. Louis*, having left Germany in the last weeks before the Second World War... traveling from harbor to harbor, from country to country, crying out for refuge. They were refused... Therefore it was natural... to give those people a haven in the Land of Israel."^[7]

An [Associated Press](#) broadcast from October 26, 1979 covered one of the arrival flights in which a refugee stated he would like to thank the government of Israel and Prime Minister Menachem Begin "to give us a homeland while the other countries were still reluctant to take us when we left our country to flee from the barbaric regime of communism."^[8]



Vietnamese refugees happily waving to the welcoming crowd at [Ben Gurion Airport](#), June 26, 1977. Credit: Israeli Government Press Office.

The *Times of Israel*, in a special report in 2015 quoted the Vietnamese Embassy in Israel that approximately 150 to 200 former Vietnamese refugees and descendants were still in Israel while about half have left Israel mainly for the USA and France.^[9]

Prominent Vietnamese Israelis include: [Vaan Nguyen](#), and poet and actress and subject of an award-winning documentary *The Journey of Vaan Nguyen*,^[10] Dr. [Sabine Huynh](#), a translator, sociologist and author who fled Vietnam for France in 1976 and has lived in Israel since 2001,^[11] and Dao Rochvarger-Wong, who headed [Bank Hapoalim](#) in [Singapore](#).^{[12][13]}



A Vietnamese boy in at [WIZO](#) kindergarten in [Afula](#), February 4, 1979. Credit: Israeli Government Press Office.

See also[[edit](#)]

- [History of the Jews in Vietnam](#)
- [Israel–Vietnam relations](#)
- [Vietnamese Boat People](#)
- Refugees from Vietnam
- [Article on Hebrew Wikipedia](#) קליטת פליטי וייטנאם בישראל

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12. [^](#) *"'Faces of Israel' campaign aims to highlight nation's different colors". [The Jerusalem Post](#) | JPost.com. Retrieved 2018-02-19.*
13. [^](#) *Deane, Andrew. "Major Israeli Institution Opens For Private Banking Business in Singapore". <http://wealthbriefing.com>. Dao Rochvarger-Wong has been appointed head of private banking. WealthBriefing has learnt that Mrs Rochvarger-Wong and her family were amongst the Vietnamese boat people who were rescued by Israel in 1979 when no-one else in the region would help many thousands like her. Brought up in Israel, Mrs Rochvarger-Wong, adopted the Jewish faith and served with distinction in the military. She embarked on a career in private banking with Bank Leumi before joining Hapoalim. External link in |website= ([help](#))*

The following information comes from this web-site:

<https://972mag.com/i-remember-when-israel-rescued-non-jewish-refugees/55387/>

By [Lisa Goldman](#)

| Published September 6, 2012

I remember when Israel rescued non-Jewish refugees

The following is an expanded version of my contribution to a [group blog post](#) by +972 writers, in response to Israel's refusal to take in a group of Eritrean refugees who were left to bake in the desert sun for a week without food or medical help, while the army prevented activists from bringing food or a physician to examine them.

In 1977, Prime Minister Begin [authorized citizenship](#) for 66 Vietnamese refugees. The captain of an Israeli freighter in the South China Sea found them huddled on a leaky boat, low on food supplies, and took them in, bringing them to Israel after they were denied refuge in Taiwan. Begin granted the refugees citizenship in his first act as newly-elected prime minister. He was leader of the Likud party, which won Israel's national elections after 29 years of uninterrupted rule by the rival Labor party.

At my Jewish day school in Canada, we were told by our teachers, who tended to represent the [National Religious](#) point of view, that Begin had done a mitzvah. The narrative we were taught was that the Jews, who had lost six million in the Holocaust because none of the countries that convened at the [Evian Conference](#) agreed to take them in, would behave differently now that they had their own state.



[Prime Minister Begin greeting Vietnamese refugees in Israel in 1977](#) (photo: Government Press Office)

This is how Begin reportedly explained to President Carter his decision to take in the boat people:

“We never have forgotten the boat with 900 Jews [the *St. Louis*], having left Germany in the last weeks before the Second World War... traveling from harbor to harbor, from country to country, crying out for refuge. They were refused... Therefore it was natural... to give those people a haven in the land of Israel.”

Over the next two years, Israel took in approximately 300 Vietnamese refugees and gave them citizenship. [Vaan Nguyen](#), the daughter of one of those refugees, was born, raised and educated in Israel. Today she is a published poet, journalist and actress who lives in Tel Aviv. A few years ago, she [appeared in a documentary film](#) about her family in Israel and her journey to visit her father’s village in Vietnam.

Today, websites that [celebrate Jewish life](#) and religion [boast](#) about Israel’s generosity to the Vietnamese refugees, which is compared to the many stories we were raised with – about Jewish refugees who committed suicide within site of the Swiss border after they were denied entry, for example. I grew up hearing and reading those stories about Jews who died because no-one would take them in. That photo, above, of Menachem Begin greeting the Vietnamese refugees in Israel? I found it on the Government Press Office’s [official Flickr account](#).

Almost exactly 35 years after an Israeli ship rescued those Vietnamese boat people, Prime Minister Netanyahu, now leader of the same party once headed by the late Menachem Begin, allowed the world to watch as 21 Eritrean asylum seekers sat in the desert within Israeli territory, pressed against a fence that was built to keep them out. They were denied food or shelter beyond a couple of tarpaulins. They were denied medical care, even though one of the women in the group reportedly miscarried while sitting out there in the hot sun.

“It is important that everyone understand that Israel is not another destination for infiltrators.” [\[Netanyahu said\]](#). “We are determined to stop the influx of infiltrations that has ensued.”

Today, the government [announced](#) that it was allowing three of the refugees – two women and a child – to enter Israel. The other 18 men were turned over to the Egyptians, who may repatriate them to Eritrea. According to Human Rights Watch’s [reports](#), those men face indefinite forced army service, torture or jail in their native country. Or perhaps torture and death at the hand of Sinai smugglers who murder refugees in order to reportedly [harvest and traffic](#) their organs. In order to save those two women and a child, they basically sacrificed their lives.

According to an [Associated Press report](#) about Israel’s rescue of the Vietnamese boat people, Menachem Begin agreed to take them in and grant them citizenship after Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong had refused to accept them. He called their refusal “shameful.” Former prime minister Golda Meir added, “Would one not rescue a stray dog or a wounded bird?”

As far as I know, none of the major Jewish organizations have called the Israeli government to task for its deeply shameful and cruel treatment of a little band of Eritrean refugees.

The following information comes from this web-site:

http://www.aish.com/jw/id/Vietnamese_Boat_People_in_the_Promised_Land.html

Vietnamese Boat People in the Promised Land

Nov 19, 2011 | by [Menucha Chana Levin](#)



Memories of Holocaust refugees, but with a different ending.

Since 1948, Israel has provided a home for millions of Jewish refugees from around the world – Morocco, Iraq, the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia.

What is not so well-known, however, is that Israel has also taken in and sheltered persecuted *non-Jews* seeking asylum from war-torn countries in the Balkans and most recently, Southern Sudan. A fascinating but little-known story is that of the “Vietnamese Boat People.”

In the late 1970s, after decades of civil war, the North Vietnamese totalitarian communists defeated the South Vietnam regime. In the aftermath of this Vietnam War and the fall of Saigon, hundreds of thousands became refugees. An estimated one million people were imprisoned without formal charges or trials. The new communist government sent masses to “re-education camps” which – rife with abuse, torture and executions – is where 165,000 people died.

Meanwhile, 145,000 South Vietnamese were brought to the United States. For the rest – hoping to escape Communist persecution and torture – there was no choice but to perilously attempt escape by sea.

The sea raged with ferocious waves and Thai pirates.

The risks were huge. The refugees had creaky, wooden boats, overloaded with human cargo. There was the constant surveillance of Communist patrol boats. The sea raged with ferocious waves and crawled with savage Thai pirates.

Despite the risks, hundreds of thousands fled. Many had no experience on the rough seas and were blown off course. Many suffered at the hands of pirates who robbed, raped and killed the passengers. Others tragically drowned in storms, by dehydration and disease, or other ocean mishaps.

One refugee, Kiem Vu, described his experience:

The people know there is no going back. Either they will make it, or die somewhere in the immense and unforgiving sea... There is no sight of land, nothing except the rumbling sky, the quivering winds, and the trembling heartbeats; the people are crying for help. Soon, they run out of food, raw fish have become their main source of nourishment, but even that is rare... Even their clothes are wet, and they have had to sleep through the coldest nights. Their spirits and strength are greatly diminished. Why is freedom so hard to find? If not in the vast ocean, then where is it?

For one fragile fishing boat crammed with 66 refugees, a miracle was about to occur. Adrift in the South China Sea for nearly a week, they were lost. Their little boat was leaking and waterlogged. They were without food and water, and their clothes had been shredded by the high winds. A ship after ship – from East Germany, Norway, Japan and Panama – passed them by, ignoring their desperate SOS signals, in violation of the most basic code of the sea.

Miracle Rescue

Then on June 10, 1977, an Israeli freighter ship called the *Yuvali*, en route to Taiwan, sighted the nearly naked passengers. Captain Meir Tadmor telegraphed Haifa for permission to take them aboard, even though his ship carried only enough life rafts and jackets for his 30-member crew. Still, he had no choice but to pick up the refugees, he said, because "they are poor in body and morale."

Captain Tadmor plucked the refugees from their rickety boat 400 kilometers south of Saigon. The refugees – doctors, professors, bankers, nurses, fishermen, and 16 children under age ten – hadn't had anything to eat or drink for days.

Yet the *Yuvali* found no port willing to accept its surplus "cargo." Captain Tadmor made an unscheduled stop in Hong Kong to get the refugees desperately-needed medical attention; authorities in the British crown colony refused to allow them ashore on the grounds that the *Yuvali* was not scheduled to call at Hong Kong. Equally inhospitable were authorities in Taiwan: they put a police cordon around the ship to prevent anyone from getting off. The refugees received a similarly cold reception at Yokohama, Japan.



Menachem Begin welcomes Vietnamese boat children to their new "home," Israel. (June 1977)

The rebuff awakened some poignant memories in Israel. Ships carrying Jewish refugees from the Nazi Holocaust sought in vain to enter ports in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Caribbean. They wandered the seven seas looking for a haven and were summarily turned away. Some, like the *SS Struma*, were abandoned without food, water and fuel – then torpedoed and sunk by a Soviet submarine, killing 768 men, women and children.

And so, Menachem Begin's first act as Israel's new prime minister was to offer asylum and resettlement to the 66 Vietnamese. Only then did Taiwan allow the group to disembark, where they were whisked to Sung Shan Airport for a flight to Israel.

As Begin explained to then-U.S. President Carter:

"We never have forgotten the boat with 900 Jews [the *St. Louis*], having left Germany in the last weeks before the Second World War... traveling from harbor to harbor, from country to country, crying out for refuge. They were refused... Therefore it was natural... to give those people a haven in the land of Israel."

The government of Israel offered a ceremonious welcome, with Minister of Absorption David Levy uttering some words of rebuke to the rest of the world: "Let them do as we have. May they lend a hand to save women and children who are in the heart of the sea without a homeland, and lead them to safe shores."

Where are they today?

Those rescued on the *Yuvali* became the first of three groups of Vietnamese refugees to be resettled in Israel. From 1977-79, Israel welcomed over 300 Vietnamese refugees.

Many of the Vietnamese refugees eventually left Israel, seeking life in more familiar surroundings. They left not out of disappointment and frustration, but as grateful emigrants.

Others have remained, forming the core today of a thriving Vietnamese community in Israel. Kien Wong lives in Haifa, has a growing multi-generational family, and owns Yan Yan, a popular Chinese restaurant. (see film clip below)

Kien Wong owns a popular Chinese restaurant in Haifa.

Another of the refugees, Hanmoi Nguyen, who has raised five Hebrew-speaking daughters in Israel, is featured in the documentary film, [The Journey of Vaan Nguyen](#). Nguyen had been the son of a wealthy landowner in Vietnam and returned to his native village to reclaim his ancestral property and settle scores with the Communist functionary who kicked him out at gunpoint. In an eerie parallel to the Holocaust survivors who returned to their homelands to reclaim their old homes, Nguyen is met with suspicion and hostility at his old village.

This summer marks the 25th anniversary of this unique rescue story. The Talmud says that saving one life is like saving a whole world. In this case, in those stormy seas south of Saigon, 66 precious souls were given a new lease on life.