

S.C.W.P.

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# Council raps refugee policy

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The British Refugee Council today launched a scathing attack on Hongkong's closed camps for Vietnamese refugees in a controversial policy statement titled "Behind barbed wire."

Attacking both the British and Hongkong Governments for their tough policy towards Vietnamese refugees, the council demanded that Hongkong's closed camp policy be urgently reviewed.

An all-party delegation of MPs is also being formed to pressure the British Government into accepting Vietnamese refugees in Hongkong

with close family ties in Britain.

The chairman of the British Refugee Council's Asia Committee, Lord Ennals, said many Vietnamese refugees in closed camps live in "grossly overcrowded conditions."

Lord Ennals and the director of the council, Mr Martin Barber, visited Hongkong last year to study the plight of the 12,600 refugees of whom 6,500 live in closed camps.

"In Hongkong, over 6,500 people are locked up in isolated detention camps, surrounding by chain-mail fencing topped with rolls of barbed wire," Lord Ennals said.

He said Vietnamese refugees were not criminals . . . "They fled towards what they thought was freedom.

"But they found themselves in some place very much less than freedom."

The council urged the British Government to ensure that refugees in Hongkong are accommodated in conditions which will not give rise to concern internationally.

The council's attack was not aimed completely at Hongkong which, it said, deserved sympathy and praise for treating refugees humanely in the past by never turning them away and allowing them to live in open camps and to work.

"The British Refugee Council believes that Britain should now play a much more active role, both in sharing the burden borne by Hongkong and in pursuing policies which may be expected to reduce the numbers seeking to leave Vietnam," the council's policy report said.

Lord Ennals criticised the British Government's reluctance to give a home to refugees from Hongkong and said that unless Britain took the lead to help its own territory, other countries like Australia, Canada and America cannot be blamed for not doing more.

The council listed a string of demands, which included a review of the conditions in the Cape Collinson Camp, that husbands and wives should not be forced to live apart and that the Correctional Services Department should not be responsible for the administration of closed camps.