

The ultimate humanity

The feelings that are prompting private citizens in Canada and other countries to offer the shelter of their homes to the young victims of war in Vietnam are readily understandable and altogether admirable. In disaster the instinct to save the children is the ultimate badge of humanity.

That there is confusion at official levels in Canada and in Vietnam is also understandable. In a war there always is. The measured process of adoption—which in the case of Vietnamese children adopted earlier has taken up to a year—is no longer possible. But Canadians will prove the true extent of their compassion by their speed. There is no time to spend on soul searching motives.

In Vietnam panic exists, but has not yet wiped out all Saigon's cumbersome and costly red tape; indeed, the deterioration of the military and political situation may have frozen much of it in place. The horrifying crash of a jet bringing 243 orphans to the United States will have vastly enhanced the state of fear in those attempting new rescues. One hope is that Canada has had in existence a service for bringing children out of the country for adoption here, and that this service can be extended.

In Canada there is also confusion, and a snow storm. "Quite honestly, we don't know what's going on," said an information officer for the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services last night. One flight which was to take off for Saigon and return with a group of children was delayed, and there was even doubt about who would provide the aircraft, although both the Ontario Gov-

ernment and private sources had offered to pay for it. There might be two flights, or none.

But in the meantime a Canadian Forces Hercules had left Hong Kong for a three-hour flight to evacuate about 100 Vietnamese orphans, and there may be further flights, with the children coming on to Canada by commercial aircraft. The federal effort did not preclude private or provincial mercy flights: "It is simply our response," said a spokesman. Every possible response is needed.

At best Canada can save only a few of the children of Vietnam and Cambodia who will otherwise die. Surely every effort must be made to do that little.

Individual Canadians have been phoning government and private child agencies to offer help to the children. They, too, have been making and meeting confusion.

Some have offered their money, some have offered their homes. The Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto alone received "about 1,000 phone calls from Torontonians" yesterday. Some of those offers will not prove up, but the emergency has been foreseen in some homes and by some children's aids, and from 60 to 70 Ontario families have already been approved and are awaiting international adoptions.

The weather may keep Vietnamese children out of those homes, the collapsing Saigon government may. But Canadians will be able to live with themselves if they rescue as many children as confusion will allow, and if they mean it when they offer their money and a place in their hearts.

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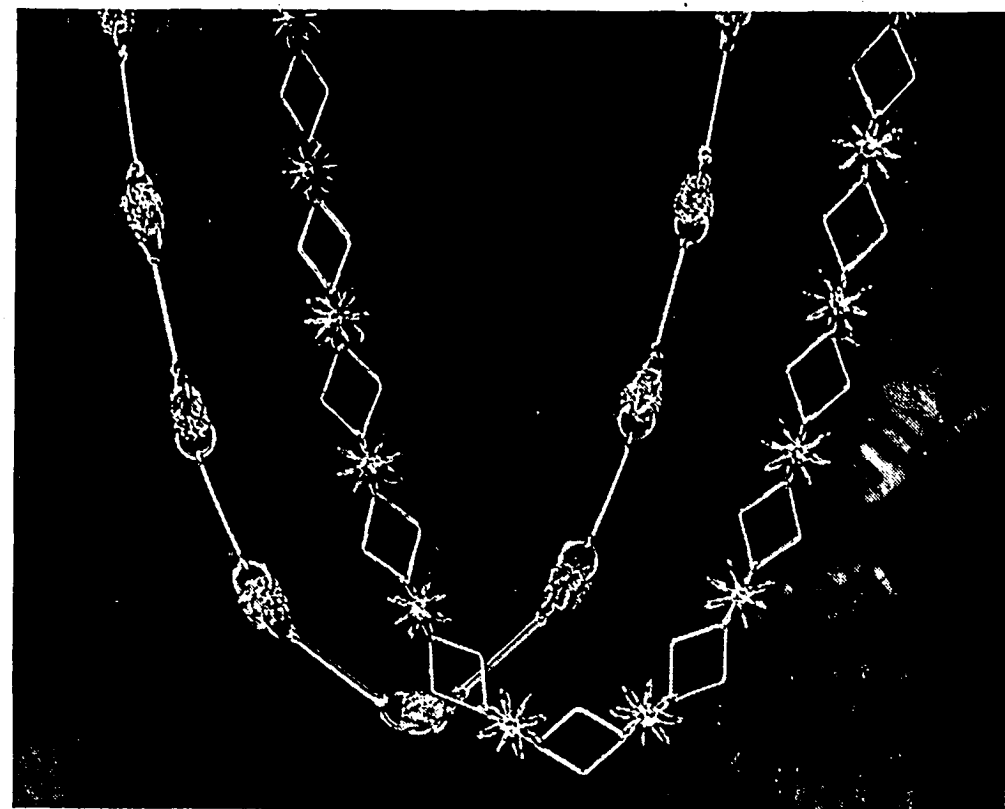
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