

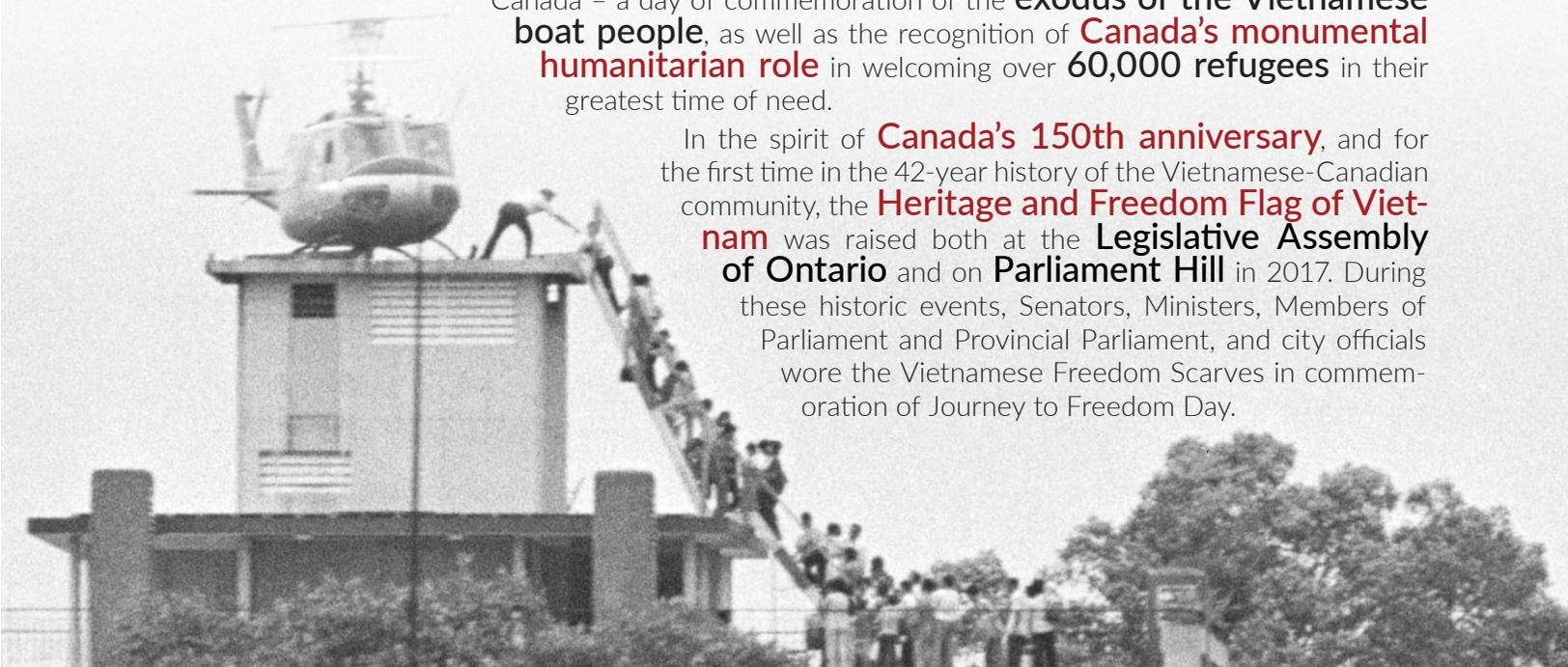


# JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY

APRIL 30

**Bill S-219** was introduced by the **Honourable Senator Thanh Hai Ngo** on April 30, 2014, and was passed as the **Journey to Freedom Day Act** on April 23, 2015, during the year of the 40th anniversary of the fall of Saigon. This Act officially designates April 30 of every year as "Journey to Freedom Day" in Canada – a day of commemoration of the **exodus of the Vietnamese boat people**, as well as the recognition of **Canada's monumental humanitarian role** in welcoming over **60,000 refugees** in their greatest time of need.

In the spirit of **Canada's 150th anniversary**, and for the first time in the 42-year history of the Vietnamese-Canadian community, the **Heritage and Freedom Flag of Vietnam** was raised both at the **Legislative Assembly of Ontario** and on **Parliament Hill** in 2017. During these historic events, Senators, Ministers, Members of Parliament and Provincial Parliament, and city officials wore the Vietnamese Freedom Scarves in commemoration of Journey to Freedom Day.



## QUEEN'S PARK HONOURS JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY

On April 26, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario celebrated the second anniversary in honour of Journey to Freedom Day. On April 29, Queen's Park held the symbolic Vietnamese Heritage and Freedom flag raising ceremony. During these two events in Toronto, participants remembered the modern beginnings of Vietnamese refugees and their compassionate welcoming in Canada. Ministers (including the Honourable Ahmed Hussen), Members of Parliament and Provincial Parliament, and other government officials made special statements at these events while wearing the yellow and red-striped Freedom Scarves.



The Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship speaking at the flag raising ceremony in Queen's Park



MPP Julia Munro giving a statement in honour of Journey to Freedom Day in the Ontario Legislature along with other Members of Parliament while wearing the Freedom Scarves



The first ever flag raising ceremony at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in Queen's Park



## FLAG RAISING ON PARLIAMENT HILL A HISTORIC MILESTONE



On May 1, over one thousand participants from across Canada and the U.S. attended Journey to Freedom Day on the Hill to witness its first ever raising of both flags. Numerous MPs and Senators joined the ceremony, which featured touching statements from the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, the Honourable Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Official Opposition), Senator Ngo, and MP Anne Minh-Thu Quach.

The community continued their milestone event by marching from Parliament Hill to the Canadian National War Memorial to lay a wreath in honour of the sacrifices of the brave men and women who fought for freedom, democracy and human rights. A moment of silence was held to commemorate a shared past.



Dr. Kien T. Le - President of the Vietnamese-Canadian Federation, and Senator Ngo laying a wreath at the Canadian National War Memorial to honour the brave men and women who fought for freedom, human rights, and democracy



The Honourable Rona Ambrose - Leader of the Official Opposition, the Honourable Senator Thanh Hai Ngo, and the Honourable Peter Kent



The Honourable Judy Sgro giving a statement to commemorate the historic Journey to Freedom Day



MP Anh Minh-Thu Quach and other parliamentarians wearing the Freedom Scarves in Chamber



The Honourable Peter Kent making a statement in remembrance of the exodus of the boat people



Senators wearing the Freedom Scarves in the Senate Chamber to honour a shared heritage

## FREEDOM SCARVES IN THE CHAMBERS

On May 1, MPs in the House of Commons wore the Vietnamese Freedom Scarves to honour Journey to Freedom Day. MPs Peter Kent, Judy Sgro, and Minh Thu Quach made statements to recognize this national day in the House of Commons Chamber. On May 2, Senators also wore the Freedom Scarves in the Senate Chamber, where Senator Ngo made a final statement on Journey to Freedom Day and recalled the beginnings and successes of Vietnamese communities across Canada.



Participants gathering around the Canadian National War Memorial on a rainy day

Both the Canadian flag and the Vietnamese Freedom and Heritage flag being raised on Parliament Hill for the very first time



April 30, 1975 marked the end of the Vietnam War when Saigon, the capital city of South Vietnam, fell to the Communists. For millions of people, this day not only indicated the end of the War, but also marked the beginnings of their pursuit for freedom and democracy. What followed was the exodus of millions of people from the land they called home. The people of Vietnam escaped for many reasons: the suppression of human rights by the authoritarian government, the prosecution of ethnic, religious and political groups, and very poor living conditions caused by food shortages, drought and flooding. Those with land and title were stripped of all their belongings and displaced to remote areas of the country, forced to survive in dreadful conditions.

## THE "BOAT PEOPLE"

In the following years, the refugee label "boat people" became commonplace, as many attempted to escape using small, often unseaworthy vessels to cross the rough open waters to seek temporary refuge in neighbouring countries, many of which refused to allow them to dock. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees reported that at least 250,000 people died at sea. Drowning, starvation, violent attacks by pirates and being sold into prostitution and slavery were among the primary causes of death of the boat people.





The Vietnamese Veterans Association saluting the flag raising ceremony at Queen's Park



## CANADA WELCOMING VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

The situation of the Vietnamese boat people became an international humanitarian crisis, and Canada responded by not only opening its doors to those in their greatest time of need, but by playing a leadership role in encouraging other countries to open their doors as well. By 1980, some 120,000 Vietnamese refugees were warmly welcomed to Canada with the Private Sponsorship Program.

Canada had become a world-wide leader in human rights, humanitarian aid and compassion. Canada's response to the crisis was so monumental, that the U.N. High Commission for Refugees awarded the entire people of Canada with the Nansen medal, a Nobel Prize equivalent in recognition of outstanding contributions to refugees. This was the first time in history that this medal was presented to an entire population of a country.

## VIETNAMESE IMPACT ON CANADIAN CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Over the years, Vietnamese-Canadians have made great contributions to Canadian society, both economically and socially. They have taken the torch and embraced what it truly means to be Canadian, by continuing this country's humanitarian tradition.

As former refugees themselves, the Vietnamese diaspora in Canada has been instrumental in the welcoming and supporting



of newcomers to this country. Their quest for freedom can be compared to the recent and ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and the escape from oppression, and so the Vietnamese community has worked diligently to help those refugees settle in their new home. Canada's critical role in welcoming new cultures is reflected in the diverse, multicultural mosaic that forms the core of Canadian society today. The culture and heritage that each new community contributes to our collective Canadian identity makes Canada stand alone on the world stage as a truly unique and diverse country.



The Honourable Senator Thanh Hai Ngo, Patrick Brown – Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, the Honourable Judy Sgro, and MP Michael Levitt attending the flag raising ceremony in Toronto



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during Question Period on May 1, when all MPs wore their Freedom Scarves in Parliament



For more information, pictures, and videos, please visit [www.senatorngo.ca/media-item](http://www.senatorngo.ca/media-item).

