

Journey to Freedom Day

Vietnamese Refugees in Canada

By artist Chrystal Phan

April 30 marks Journey to Freedom Day in Canada. This day commemorates the lives lost and suffering endured by the estimated 800,000 to one million people who fled Vietnam after 1975. It also celebrates Canada's humanitarian response to the refugee crisis. And finally, it is a way for Vietnamese Canadians to show their gratitude to Canada.



Veterans of the war in Vietnam set up and rehearse for the morning's Journey to Freedom Day ceremony in Vancouver in 2022. Credit: C. Phan

What does Journey to Freedom Day look like?

Journey to Freedom Day is publicly commemorated in cities with large Vietnamese Canadian populations like Vancouver. Women in traditional Vietnamese dresses (áo dài) sing the South Vietnamese anthem and the Canadian national anthem. Speeches are made in both Vietnamese and English in remembrance of the era.

You'll also see many yellow flags with red stripes. This isn't the official Vietnamese flag, so what does it represent? It represented South Vietnam, and now it's a symbolic and historical flag

commonly known as the Vietnamese Heritage and Freedom Flag. It is often used by people who fled Vietnam after the war and now live in countries like Canada, the United States and Australia.

Why April 30?

April 30 represents the day in 1975 when the war in Vietnam officially ended. The North Vietnamese Communist government declared victory over the US-supported South Vietnamese government. April 30, 1975, marked a time of great fear and change for the people who escaped and started new lives in different countries like Canada.

In Vietnam, April 30 is referred to as "the liberation of Saigon." It is considered the day when the North and South sides of the country were put back together as one (reunification). Consider the two perspectives. Many have immigrated to Canada since the 1970s. How do you think Vietnamese immigrants today view Journey to Freedom Day?