

# TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION AND THE CONGRESS

## VIETNAM: A Time for Healing and Compassion

After 30 years of war, peace came to Vietnam in 1975. Some Administration leaders had argued that the war must continue because, if the United States gave up, a bloodbath would ensue in which "our" Vietnamese would be slaughtered. In fact, almost all the Vietnamese who worked for the Saigon regime, and who remained, have by now returned to their families and are pursuing normal lives. Peace has come to Vietnam without any bloodbath and without any cruel policy of reprisal. It is time for Americans of good will to recognize and applaud this achievement. It is time for Americans to insist that our government adopt policies that will bring the fruits of genuine peace to the people of Vietnam who continue to suffer from the lingering effects of the war. Such policies will also help bring peace of mind to those many Americans whose anguish cannot end until our government begins to behave with decency and generosity. A new year and a new administration give us fresh hope that initiatives of good will can be quickly undertaken.

In the weeks ahead our government should take the following steps to normalize relations with the sovereign state of Vietnam, to satisfy our nation's duties to the Vietnamese people and to deal justly with the American victims of the war:

1. The President should open direct negotiations between Washington and Hanoi on all outstanding issues;
2. The President should support the admission of Vietnam to the United Nations;
3. The President should lift the embargo on American trade and travel to Vietnam;
4. The President should extend diplomatic recognition to the government of Vietnam and enter into full diplomatic relations at the Ambassadorial level;
5. The Congress can provide substantial economic aid for the reconstruction of Vietnam as promised by agreement and in the spirit of our generous policy after other wars;
6. The Presidential pardon must be extended to military deserters and to recipients of less than honorable discharges during the Vietnam era;
7. The treatment and programs directed at Vietnam era veterans must be reviewed and improved.

*(Write or wire your Representative, Senators and President for the implementation of the above program.)*

A program of this kind, if fully implemented in good will, would put the Vietnam war really behind us. One pretext for not going ahead with this program is the allegation that the Vietnamese government is guilty of human rights abuses. We have examined these charges and find them to be based on distortion and exaggeration.

True, some Saigon collaborationists have been detained in re-education centers, perhaps 40,000 at present. But such a number is surprisingly small considering the several million Vietnamese involved in Saigon's war effort. It is well to recall the savagery with which the Saigon regime pursued its war policy before condemning the new Vietnam leadership for taking steps to punish and re-educate the worst wrong-doers. Many of those detained engaged in crimes against their own people, including rape, murder, torture, bribery and extortion. On balance, consider the terrible difficulties left behind by the war and made worse by America's continued hostility. The present government of Vietnam should be hailed for its moderation and for its extraordinary effort to achieve reconciliation among all of its people.

We share the view that American citizens should be gravely concerned about abuses of human rights, whether they occur in our country or abroad. This concern is especially appropriate where our government supports a foreign regime that is engaged in flagrant abuse of its own people — abuses including systematic torture. But Vietnam presents a very different case. The present suffering of the Vietnamese people is largely a consequence of the war itself for which the United States bears a continuing responsibility.

Aside from the enslavement of Black people and the near-genocide of the American Indian, our role in Vietnam is the darkest page in the history of America. Vietnam today calls for understanding not accusation, for reconciliation not continuation of American enmity.

### We appeal for action now!

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