

TESTAMENT of Patriotic Prisoners in Viet Nam

We, workers, peasants, proletarians, clergymen, artists, writers and patriotic intellectuals, presently detained in various prisons in Viet Nam, wish first of all to express our earnest thanks to :

- progressive movements all over the world,
- all struggling movements of workers and intellectuals,
- and all those who, over the past decade, have supported movements fighting for human rights in Viet Nam, and for the freedom and democracy of exploited and oppressed Vietnamese.

In the name of our belief in a just cause, we want to alert you, our justice - and freedom - loving friends, as well as international opinion, to a policy of imprisonment never before applied in the history of mankind, and the cruelty of which no one can measure; a planned cruelty imposed on prisoners in all prisons throughout Viet Nam. In fact, apart from 400,000 soldiers, officers and civil servants of the former Government now serving life sentences in concentration camps, the present Communist Government has detained close to 400,000 people from other walks of life : laborers, peasants, workers, patriotic intellectuals, whose past is in no way connected with the former puppet Government in Saigon, and who, on the contrary, have achieved a certain notoriety among the people for their past struggle for peace.

In fact, shaken in the face of massive opposition from all social levels, the Security Forces of the current Government have indiscriminately imprisoned old people, women and invalids. It has also detained without the least hesitation the mad, children and even the newly born ! Among thousands of cases we can cite the arrest of : the journalist DOAN KE TUONG, his wife and 15-day-old baby; the journalist DANG GIAO, Secretary-General of the daily journal «Sông», his wife and 7-day-old baby; Mr PHAN VO KY, 82-year-old Secretary-General of the High Council of Religions in Viet Nam; The Venerable THICH QUANG DO, Secretary-General of the Unified Buddhist Church in Viet Nam (An Quang Pagoda); Father NGUYEN VAN BO, Director of the Fatima Diocese, Saigon; etc...

On the other hand, despite the already impressive number of prisons left by the Thiêu Government, the existence of which at one time was severely condemned by international opinion, the Communist Government can no longer find enough room to incarcerate their numerous prisoners. Apart from the accelerated construction of new prisons, the Secret Police has hastily had to transform schools, hotels, office buildings and even orphanages into prisons. Such has been the case with Hotel Dai Nam, Dai Loi Building (in central Saigon), Long Thanh Orphanage.

The prison system of the former Government (the object of vigorous condemnation and severe protest by international opinion) has been replaced by another system in which cruelty and atrocities are more subtly conceived and planned. All communication between the prisoner and his family is absolutely forbidden, even by letter. Thus, the family of the prisoner, totally ignorant of the prisoner's fate, is plunged into unbearable anguish, and in the face of these humiliating discriminatory measures, is forced to keep silent for fear that the prisoner, used as a kind of hostage, could be murdered at any moment without their knowledge. This entire policy, highly efficacious, has created unprecedented tragedies : numerous infants have forever lost their fathers and innumerable abandoned Vietnamese women will never see their husbands again.

Regarding the feeding of prisoners, in principle and following the criteria established and defined by the Government, each prisoner should receive [the equivalent of] 9,2 piastres

per month (about \$US 3.50 at the official exchange rate, or \$ 0.50 at the black market rate). In reality, corruption among the cadres and inflation are such that prisoners receive at most 70 per cent of the expected ration.

It must be stressed that living conditions in prisons are utterly unthinkable. For example, at Chi Hoa Prison, the official prison of Saigon, nearly 8,000 persons were detained under the former Government, and that situation was severely condemned. Today, this same prison is stuffed with nearly 40,000 persons. Often prisoners die of hunger, of lack of air, under torture, or by suicide. Among these deaths can be cited : Father HOANG QUYNH, 80 years old, President of the High Council of Religions in Viet Nam; the writer DUYEN ANH; etc...

Even today we are ignorant of the fate of Father TRAN HUU THANH, President of the Anti-Corruption Movement under the Thiêu Government; The Venerable THONG BUU, official representative of An Quang Pagoda, and Gia Dinh District; the Lawyer TRAN DANG SAN, President of the Movement for Human Rights in Viet Nam; the cartoonist NGUYEN HAI CHI (alias CHOË). All gravely ill and deprived of medication. Without counting 20 per cent among those [all prisoners] already having died in re-education camps.

There are two types of prisons in Viet Nam : official prisons, and concentration camps. These latter are deep in the jungle where the prisoner is condemned in perpetuity to forced labor, without trial and without any lawyer to defend him.

The prisoners have been struggling against this inhuman system. Thousands of people have already sacrificed their lives, such as the industrialist DO DUC VUONG, the lawyer LUU DINH VIEP, the Cao-Daist Dignitary TRAN QUANG VINH. . . Their heroic sacrifice has not been known by the outside world, because Viet Nam is surrounded by an iron curtain. No foreign journalist can be admitted here, the population is forbidden to speak to foreigners, even if they are Russians or Hungarians. . . Moreover, the wily Government has presented attractive programs, flowery assurances to lull the cadres and delude international opinion, with the aim of establishing forever an inhuman dictatorship.

In the vast prison which the whole of Viet Nam has become, and for the prisons properly speaking, a policy has been articulated and measures taken so that while international opinion remains uninformed and at the same time satisfied with what is presented, popular opinion, however constructive it might be, is stifled before it can develop.

In contemporary human history, the existence of such a system is a cancer on humanity, and a shame for the conscience of mankind. It is moreover an insulting challenge to international opinion, to progressive movements, to international organizations, and to all people of goodwill.

All of you ! Look at the hell of Viet Nam !

In this moment of agony, we, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese prisoners, appeal to you to intervene in Viet Nam through all means to terminate immediately this situation - and this medieval cruelty of the present Government.

The holocaust of the Jews in 1945 dying in the crematoria was an enormous wound for humanity. But in Viet Nam, hundreds of thousands of people are tortured, oppressed and living in perpetual anguish, dragging out their lives in suffering and madness.

If it is true that humanity today retreats in fear before the growth of Communism, and above all the so-called 'invincibility' of Vietnamese Communists who have defeated the all-powerful American imperialism, then we, prisoners in Viet Nam, request the International Red Cross, world humanitarian organizations, men of goodwill, to send each of us urgently a dose of cyanide so that we may end our suffering and our humiliation. We want to die at once! Help us to do this : help us to die at once. We shall be eternally grateful to you.

Viet Nam, August 1975 to October 1977

This Testament was drafted by Mr DINH HUY BINH, imprisoned under the Government of Nguyễn Văn Thiêu, and under the present Communist Government. Text reviewed, corrected and approved by : [49 names follow].