

DÉCLARATION of Disinherited Vietnamese on Human Rights

read out in front of Saigon Cathedral on April 18th 1977

We, with what remains of our failing strength, with what remains of our mutilated spirits, resolve to struggle non-violently for the respect of Human Rights in Viet Nam. Our strength is diminished by hunger and privation. Our spirits are mutilated, for heads bowed and backs bent, we must obey blindly, unconditionally and irrevocably the orders of one Party and a tyrannic government.

We have chosen non-violence, as it is the only way of avoiding the bloodshed and sacrifice of a people martyred relentlessly over the past decades.

Peasants of the world !

Look at your brothers in Viet Nam. The Vietnamese peasant labours in the sweltering heat of the tropics, at the mercy of nature, only to find his harvest confiscated in the name of building a so-called «socialism». The water buffalo, after pulling the plough all day is allowed a few moments rest. The Vietnamese peasant, after toiling all day in the rice fields is forced to spend his rare moments of leisure undergoing indoctrination lessons and senseless discussion.

Workers of the world !

Imagine the working conditions of the Vietnamese labourer. Forced to work all the month long without hope of a different week, all week without hope of a different day, all day without hope of a different hour, to receive in the end nothing but a pittance of a wage, and on top of this be obliged to declare that he is working of his own free will. He has to offer his sweat, blood and tears to the Party leaders and for propaganda's sake must publicly proclaim that his acts are guided by the providence of their Government, of the omniscient, all-clairvoyant Party. The most sacred right of the worker is the right to strike. In Viet Nam, even this basic right has been denied.

Clergymen, scientists, artists and progressive intellectuals of the world !

May all those praying in churches, leave off their prayers !

May all those engrossed in their research come out of their laboratories !

May all those who create, break up their pens and thrown away their brushes !

All ! all ! look at the tragedy of Viet Nam ! A country where churches and pagodas are turned into indoctrination centres - where all principles, even the very laws of nature, are distorted to fit the regime's propaganda - where writers and journalists are forced to put their pens to the service of the Party and Government, to cover up the cruel errors they have committed.

All Vietnamese, whether they be peasants, workers or intellectuals have no other alternatives but to :

- * Resign themselves to the inevitable, and blindly obey the orders of this new race of speculators - communist cadres - in order to receive a miserable wage, the meagre crumbs of a meal, and perish gradually in despair;
- * Die of hunger and exhaustion in one of the many concentration camps that have been set up all over the country.

The entire harvest of the peasants and all goods produced by the workers are taken over by the State and redistributed according to the State's own criteria.

We have seen :

- * Workers and peasants forced to work unpaid during their leisure hours for fear that their family's rice ration be cut and they die of hunger.

- * Old people and women feigning smiles and enthusiasm in meetings and gatherings, for lack of enthusiasm can be punished by the refusal of rice rations and basic necessities for the whole family involved;
- * Prisoners, who even after their release must keep silent, not daring to tell of the horrors they have seen in the prisons. They are haunted by the constant fear that if they are caught speaking out, their wife and children will be deprived of their rice rations, and die of hunger.

One might find the courage to sacrifice one's own life, but who can bear to see his loved ones sacrificed because of his own acts ?

This is the reason behind so many pathetic and unthinkable cases, such as the father who, in order to ensure a proper rice ration for his son, urges his son to denounce him. Otherwise both of them will die. This case is only one of many, unimaginable to those who have not lived in Viet Nam (e. g. a woman denouncing her husband, a man denouncing his own brother).

The present regime uses food as a pressure to govern the people, compelling them to obey, breaking all resistance. Any individual thought, however constructive it may be, although it may never be put into action, is branded reactionary and can entail arbitrary imprisonment for he who dares express it. Those who run the Law Courts, the Police, Deputies in the National Assembly are all in fact political cadres, and follow the directives of the one Party.

Whereas the propaganda machine grinds out principles of tolerance, humanity, freedom and democracy, reality is completely different. More than 20 % of the former regime's officials detained in concentration camps have been murdered or tortured to death. Moreover, the Government has confiscated all private property, even that of the workers, who have been chased out of towns and now have to work on country sites and in the camps.

Intellectuals of the world ! Awake !

Proletarians of the world ! Arise !

To save the human being, this conscience inherent in man, you must all struggle to put an end to the barbaric cruelty and the violation of human and civil rights by the government in Viet Nam today.

There is not a moment to lose, and on the basis of clauses 13 and 63 of the United Nations Charter, you, progressive nations, governments, international organisations and particularly U.N.O. must intervene to end by all means this savage violation of human rights, this calculated extinction of liberties, this policy which reduces man to the state of an animal, resigning himself totally, blindly obeying orders.

Every hour that passes marks the death of thousands of people in concentration camps and the prisons. Every day that passes is one more day of torture and suffering for millions of Vietnamese. They live in waiting for the outcry and action of humanists all over the world.

Saigon, 18th April 1977

This Declaration is signed by :

1. Lawyer TRAN DANH SAN, President of the Anti-militarist Progressive Youth Force in 1965,
2. Prof. PHAM BIEU TAM, Vice-President of the Association of Patriotic Intellectuals,
3. Prof. TON THAT DUONG KY, Vice President of the National Liberation Front South Vietnam, President of the Anti-militarist Progressive Youth Force in 1965, banished to North Vietnam by the Saigon Government on 19th March 1965 for his pacifist activities,
4. Mr. HUYNH THANH VI, President of the Vietnam Press Association,
5. Lawyer NGUYEN HUU GIAO, Vice-President of the Students Union in 1964 (he organised the burning down of the American Information Center, in Huế),
6. Lawyer TRIEU BA THIEP, President of the Students Struggle Committee against the Ngo Dinh Diem dictatorship in 1963,
7. Lawyer NGUYEN HUU DOAN, President of the Saigon Students Union, active opposant of the Ngô Đình Diêm Government in 1963,
8. Prof. NGUYEN VAN THANG, Secretary General of the Saigon Students Union in 1969, President of the Students Association for the Peoples' Right to Life.

These eight people, drafted and signed this Declaration on April 18th 1977. Six of them read it out on the steps of Saigon Cathedral. This courageous act culminated in their arrest. From their prison cells they communicated the content of that Declaration to DOAN VAN TOAI, a fellow prisoner, who learnt it by heart and reported it to QUE ME in France.

Published from the original text in vietnamese, all responsibility and eventual consequences assumed.