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July 14, 1967

Pres. J. F. Kennedy

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Statement on POW's in Viet-Nam

Last week, you indicated that a public statement regarding war prisoners in Viet-Nam -- and our efforts to secure their release -- might be desirable.

The statement was drafted with two things in mind:

to make it no more difficult for Hanoi or the VC to respond affirmatively to our past or any future private proposals;

to avoid arousing unwarranted hopes among the approximately 500 families with relatives missing in action or held by the Communists.

A suggested text is attached. It has been approved by State and Defense. The Government of Viet-Nam has also approved.

You might want George Christian to release it, pointing out that it responds to several questions about the prisoner situation.

W. W. Rostow

Att.

Statement approved

Make no statement

See me

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STATEMENT ON PRISONERS

The United States Government has been greatly concerned at the plight of Americans held prisoner by the National Liberation Front and North Viet-Nam. More than 20 American soldiers and several American civilians are believed held by the National Liberation Front. We know that more than 160 American military personnel are confined in North Viet-Nam. Several hundred more are considered missing because the National Liberation Front and North Viet-Nam withhold the names of prisoners and generally prohibit most prisoners from sending letters. We are gravely concerned that some of these prisoners may not be treated humanely. The claims of the National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese that they are treated humanely cannot be verified because neutral observers or organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross have not been allowed to visit the prisoners, and inspect their places of detention.

Viet Cong and North Vietnamese prisoners held by the Government of Viet-Nam are confined in camps inspected regularly by the ICRC. These prisoners include many captured by U.S. Forces and turned over to the Government of Viet-Nam for safekeeping under the provisions of the Geneva Convention. Their treatment and the conditions of their confinement have been humane and in accord with the Convention as verified by these neutral observers.

On several occasions prisoners including seriously sick and wounded have been released by the Government of Viet-Nam within South Viet-Nam and to North Viet-Nam. Additional seriously sick and wounded prisoners who may be captured in the future and who wish to be repatriated will be given the same opportunity, as required by the Geneva Convention.

The United States calls on the National Liberation Front and North Viet-Nam to permit impartial inspection of all prisoners, and urges them to repatriate those sick and wounded prisoners who qualify for repatriation under the Convention.

The Governments of the United States and Viet-Nam have repeatedly made clear both publicly and privately through many channels their desire to bring about an exchange of prisoners. The Government of the United States reiterates this desire and its willingness to discuss such exchanges at any time and in any appropriate way, using intermediaries or directly, by public means or privately.