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To my friends

the Vietnamese nationals in France with love

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WHY has there been such a great delay in writing this article? I am aware that many friends were surprised and pained that back in the country I had not said a word about the "Vietnamese nationals." Perhaps they thought that the daily bustle had made me forget them? As a matter of fact, I deliberately did not speak about them when referring to friends of Viet Nam, because for me they are more than friends, however close they may be, they are fellow-countrymen, brothers and sisters. Many times I set to writing about them but each time I torn up what I had written because I found that I had not been able to tell all my love and affection for those who are today what I was 20 years ago.

For 20 years to a day is between the departure from Paris of a young doctor, full of faith and enthusiasm, with the single purpose of doing what she could to contribute to the implementation of the Geneva Agreements and the triumphal return to France of the representative of the budding Revolutionary Government of the South Viet Nam Republic on the first anniversary of the Paris Agreement. Twenty years, yes, a slice of Viet Nam's history! And a slice of my life too, a long journey with joy and enthusiasm but also with sufferings and tears! Like all of us. Twenty years of implacable fighting, twenty years of sustained combat, twenty years of a ruthless genocide committed by the American but also twenty years of unshakable confidence in the righteousness of our cause, marked by dramatic successes and ending on January 1973 with a dawn of genuine peace and independence.

Let me proclaim at once that I am proud to represent the "Vietnamese nationals in France" in the midst of the revolution, proud to show that more than twenty years in a French school then University had not cut me off from my people and to substantiate the correctness of these words by a Governor General of Indochina: "the road to France is that to anti-France", because France was ever so much of a colonialist power. I recollect that during my meeting with the Morsang-sur-Seine Vietnamese residents, one of them asked me "Why did you go into the maquis?". Surely enough, everyone's life is the resultant of a series of events. There was

nothing unusual about my choice, for the choice I made, all the Vietnamese nationals, in my place, would have made it also. In my turn, I shall be entitled to ask back: "Why do you take part in the revolution when you have everything you need? When you can afford a life of luxury, of ease, free from all care, when you have a job you like, when you are in a position to work and improve yourselves continuously let alone enjoy the happiness of a united family?" And your answer will certainly be similar to mine: "Because we are Vietnamese, because we love our fatherland."

The June 6 1974 commemoration of the founding anniversary of the Provisional Revolutionary Government at the Palais de la Mutualité will be ever engraved on my mind. Twenty years earlier, when I was one of the enthusiastic crowd who demanded and chanted "Peace in Viet Nam", I was far from thinking that one day I should be there on the rostrum, as a guest of honour and a spokesman of my country. A indescribably jubilant, ebullient and friendly atmosphere was prevailing in the Hall that evening. In the context of a social life highly active, full of trepidation and frenzy, it was a real feat to get a full house during a week-end. Yet the feat was accomplished thanks to the support of all our fellow-countrymen, and chiefly to the dedication of the executive committee of the Vietnamese residents in France and the sympathy of our French and foreign friends. Nothing was more moving than being able to gauge the strong solidarity between our French, English, Dutch, Italian, Belgian or Swiss friends and us, and the spontaneous feeling of fraternity of all the Vietnamese, of the Vietnamese nationals living in France and elsewhere for the third political segment, represented by us, partisans! It is in such moments that one feels like a wrench in one's heart the invincible strength of an entire people rallied around the same ideal of peace and happiness and backed by men of good will the world over.

Everything has been enshrined in my memory: the meal in Belgium, in a narrow room full of smoke but so rich in meaning, the students coming purposely from Germany to see our delegation, the collection made with a modest napkin whose proceeds were to buy medical books for the jungle,

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the magnificent bouquet of red roses offered to me in Geneva, the random chat in Lausanne just before our train for Zurich left with a group of youths most of whom did not know anything about the PRG. In France, I felt really in my element, as my husband and I are all "returnees from France." I won't dwell on the flowers, hugs, kisses and welcome words. What moved me much more was the tears furtively wiped, the tremulous smiles, the prolonged hand-shakes, for no word could express faithfully what one feels in one's heart of hearts, the emotion pent up in the effusions and the restraint in the depth of explosions of joy. Nothing was more stirring for me than the poignant visit to Marseille cemetery. Like in Edith Piaf's song, "the sky was blue, the sea was green," a glowing blue and an iridescent green, but we were all sad, sad because we were parting, sad because we were after all in a strange land, sad at the thought that those who were buried there would never see again the familiar silhouettes of bamboos swinging in the wind or of lotus quivering in the breeze!

I brought back with me all the gifts received which have an inestimable sentimental value in this world of iron and bombs and bullets the US and their henchmen continue to keep my people in: the bronze Ho Chi Minh medal given by old uncle Ty, the cat with its whistle by Cuong, the books of poems by Jane, the cassettes by Phi, the mother-of-pearl heart by Tien and so many other souvenirs fragrant with love and friendship. Every one wanted to show me their love for the land. How can I forget Thai, the hands white with flour, singing with feeling tunes from the South? Everyone, each in his or

her way, within his or her means, was desirous to please me. For they saw in me her who had suffered in jail, who had lived in the jungle with all its hardships and sacrifices they had not experienced, for they lavished on me all their admiration and gratitude toward those who remained there to fight. In all meetings, they crowded around me, and the same question was repeated like a leitmotiv: "What can I do for the country?", "What should I do as my share in the common effort?" and I clearly sensed that they were concerned about not being able to do something as concrete as the soldier fighting on the battlefield. They had only one fear: return home too late, grow old day after day and be no longer able to effectively contribute to the rebuilding of the country. They were haunted by the idea of a quiet life in a peaceful country, of a comfortable existence while their people were still in the throes of a war. And yet I told them again and again that in due time, we should call to them, that for the time being, they had better remain where they were because they were the scientific and technical assets for our future construction. I understood very well their impatience and frustration when we told them to wait until conditions were ripe for them to come back. Honestly we did not think they would not be able to stand the trials and privations we had experienced, we did not think they would be scared by bombs and bullets. We did think they were too valuable assets of science and progress to be wasted. There are at present enough soldiers, peasants, workers and militants to bring our task to fruition. There may be bitter people who resent the overseas Vietnamese their comforts which contrast with our people's suf-

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Bananas growing lush in liberated zone

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ferings. But if any, they are only an insignificant minority. The essential is that the majority is aware that each does its bit in the common effort in due time. It is certain that it would be ideal to master the most advanced science and to be abreast with the South Viet Nam reality at the same time. But it is safe to say that in turns the Vietnamese nationals will come back to get a first hand knowledge of the situation at home then return to Europe to keep up with the progress of science and technique which they will try to apply to the specific conditions of their native land. There is their duty, there are their responsibilities. And better than anyone, I can see the size of their sacrifice, which is their not participating directly in the reconstruction but their contribution to it from afar, more often than not unknown to the public. But are the most beautiful deeds the unsung ones?

I also share the concern of my friends about their children: they fear the latter would become aliens to, and forget, their fatherland. But quite honestly, I think such a fear is unfounded. From my own experience, I dare say with your parents' help, you will find it easy to come back to your people. And all Vietnamese residents abroad who have children take care to cultivate in them the love for their native country. The language presents no problem. Not that because the Vietnamese nationals' children speak French better than Vietnamese that they become French. I myself shall round my friends living abroad in the ear that even at this hour, after 20 years' stay in Viet Nam, I speak French better than my mother tongue, which does not prevent me from being one with my people. I personally hold that the Vietnamese nationals have the duty to keep their children on the road to progress for they can afford sending them to school and giving them all facilities to study effectively and seriously. They must turn them into technicians of tomorrow's Viet Nam. They should not have any sense of guilt because they are fortunate enough to be living in a peaceful country. Christmas is soon there. I do think that on that night, Thanh Hai, Phi Huong, Cuong or Yen's three lovable little girls will be eagerly expecting the toys kept ready for them by their parents. Here in Viet Nam, no child will be looking forward to Christmas because for a long time, the festival of love and peace has fled from South Viet Nam. There would not be any toys for them

for the simple reason that they are a luxury out of place in a country at war. On Christmas eve, when the church bells ring, our little children's eyes will not be shining in front of an illuminated fir tree, but scanning the sky not to spot a Santa Claus but a possible messenger of destruction and death. This is not meant to spoil the pleasure of my little Vietnamese friends abroad but only to make them realize the full scope of their luck to be able to live in peace with loving parents from whom nothing separates them, neither that night nor all the other nights of all years, to make them think of their little friends at home, born in the fighting, growing up in the war and continuing to live in the war, because of the US and Saigon. May they reserve a soft corner of their hearts for their brothers and sisters in South Viet Nam, while singing and laughing. So that one day when they are reunited there will not be either incomprehension or envy or rancour and that they will join hands and dance together a happy round.

In conclusion, allow me to say again to you, dear Vietnamese nationals: don't be impatient. In the search of independence, peace and happiness, you have your part. I say "have" and not "will have" because I consider that you have already done your bits and you are doing your bits in the common effort. As a former resident abroad, I know that whatever your material comfort may be, there are moments when solitude grips you at your throat, when, despite of everything you may do, you feel like an exile, a stranger among strangers. This is the most appreciable sacrifice you make for our fatherland. As a former Vietnamese national, I can affirm to you all that one day you will come home and then you will have to do your utmost. In the meantime, for the Vietnamese people, there is no difference between Vietnamese nationals and Vietnamese partisans or anybody else. There are only patriots who at the threshold of the New Year have only one dream: achieve the liberation of South Viet Nam, snatch peace from the US-Saigon paws, return home with a spirit of national concord and work for national reunification. And that dream, believe me, will not take long to come true.

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