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TRAN VAN HUONG SPEECH AT PRESIDENTIAL CHANGEOVER CEREMONY

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[Address to the compatriots by outgoing President Tran Van Huong at a ceremony at Independence Palace for turning over presidential power to Gen Duong Van Minh--live]

[Text] Mr President of the Senate, Mr Speaker of the House, senators and deputies, gentlemen:

I have been looking forward to this day for a long time. My long cherished aspiration has finally come.

When my predecessor turned over the presidential duties to me, I was fully aware that my old age and exhausted strength, whether I wanted it or not, would inevitably effect my ability to carry out a great mission successfully at a time when the country is undergoing unthinkable, extremely difficult times. For this reason, I have always cherished the hope that there would be someone who would assume the responsibility to take charge of national affairs and to partially salvage the interests and honor of our RVN.

In exchanging views with Gen Duong Van Minh, I was concerned about the legality of my turnover of power to him. Legally, I thought such a turnover would not be logical at all. I have discussed this issue with him, and I raised it before the two chambers of the National Assembly. After 2 days of discussions, the National Assembly found a solution which, I believe, is consistent with everyone's expectations.

Gentlemen: My concern about the legality of my turnover of power to Gen Duong Van Minh has been eased. Today, we are no longer concerned about it. In any case, a present major task is not related to the legality of this turnover but, rather, to the ways and means to insure that the RVN, no matter how difficult the situation may be, can preserve part, if not all, of our ancestors' honor.

General: Whether we want it or not, another page of history has been turned. You will write the next pages. If I ask you at this early date what you will write, I believe you cannot give a firm answer. However, I know that with your inherent good will, it is unlikely that your future deeds will betray the confidence of all of the compatriots, notables, and intellectuals, especially the confidence that the National Assembly has completely vested in you.

The path has changed because the times have changed. We no longer think that it is always necessary to shed blood. We no longer think that we will fight to the last combatant and the last bullet at a time when a certain measure or a certain solution can bring about peace without excessively undermining our country's honor. For this reason, the line to be pursued is probably embodied in that preset framework.

General, your mission is very heavy. When you assume this mission, I believe that you obviously must have not only good will but also certain courage that permits you to assume it.

I hope that you will achieve success in putting aside the fighting solution and adopting a compromise, moderate solution. This means that you will forget all forms of hatred and achieve, first of all, reconciliation, concord and peace so that we can live together peacefully and strive to rebuild the country. This is the path that must be taken.

General, in eliminating hatred, we must not only eliminate hatred toward the outsiders, but, permit me to say, we should also eliminate all hatred among ourselves that has been caused by differences in our views. It goes without saying that all truly patriotic Vietnamese must inevitably concern themselves with national affairs and must love the country. Regrettably, sometimes people sleep in the same bed but have different dreams. For this reason, their different thoughts and deeds inevitably cause friction and even mutual hatred. I therefore earnestly call upon you to kindly try to eliminate all that may be called hatred within our internal ranks.

Under any regime, there are people serving it. If an ensuing regime persists in thinking about the past, settling old accounts and causing more hatred, no one will dare to wholeheartedly serve any regime. He cannot serve if he is concerned about the possibility that an ensuing regime would take reprisals against him. That is my hope. I ask you most earnestly to think about the future and survival of the country and about human lives and to see to it that reconciliation starts right in this country first, before it expands outside.

There is another point, which is probably the last, that as a matter of course you should do your best to achieve. I believe that no matter how much good will we may have, our strength is limited. You are also a human being. You are not a certain providence possessing the magic power to shape things at will. You must inevitably exert efforts. I believe that whether or not your strenuous efforts are successful does not depend in large measure on yourself. However, if you wholeheartedly serve the country, concern yourself with national affairs, and strive to restore peace and insure that the people can live peacefully and that the bloodshed stops, the meritorious service you render will be remembered forever by younger generations, and I believe that this country will not in any case forget it.

Thank you, gentlemen. [applause]