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VIETNAM EXPELS AMERICAN TEACHER FOR ALLEGED SUBVERSION

By PAUL WEDEL

BANGKOK, Thailand (UPI) -- Vietnam arrested and expelled an American English teacher for allegedly threatening national security and possessing secret documents, Hanoi radio and the teacher's sponsoring organization said Friday.

Diplomats said the expulsion appeared to be part of a widening crackdown on foreigners and internal dissidents meant to prevent Eastern European-style democratization in Vietnam.

Hanoi radio said Miriam Hershberger, a 35-year-old English teacher at the Hanoi Foreign Languages School in Hanoi since July, was expelled from Vietnam Tuesday and arrived in Bangkok the same day.

"During her stay in Vietnam, Miriam Hershberger tried to use foreign papers opposing the socialist regime in Vietnam to teach students," the radio said. "The Vietnamese security agency also searched for living place and confiscated documents containing national secrets of Vietnam.

"Accusations of Miriam have threatened Vietnamese national security," it said, without elaborating.

Hershberger, whose hometown was not immediately known, declined comment. Her sponsoring organization, the Mennonite Central Committee, an American humanitarian group, denied the accusations.

"The Mennonite Central Committee states its full support for Ms. Hershberger and rejects the allegations of Vietnamese security police that she was attempting to destabilize Vietnam," said a statement issued by the Mennonite office in Bangkok.

It said school authorities had asked Hershberger to teach newspaper reading.

"At no time prior to her deportation did anyone inform her that her teaching methods or materials were objectionable," the statement said.

A spokesman for the office said the Mennonite officials were currently in Hanoi seeking an explanation for the action.

"This is a big and sudden change," the spokesman said. "Miriam was the first person from our group to be allowed to live and teach in Vietnam. We saw her work as a step toward reconciliation."

The Mennonite statement said the group has been "a public proponent for healing relations between Vietnam and the U.S." since 1975, when the United States withdrew its last troops from Vietnam. It has also provided various humanitarian aid including, agricultural projects, medical supplies and clothing to the Vietnamese.

Hershberger's arrest and expulsion follows the arrest of several foreign travelers including an American businessman and a Thai archaeologist in April.

Security authorities have also rounded up an unknown number of Vietnamese intellectuals and Catholic priests. Some were believed to have supported more liberalization of the country's one-party communist system.

One diplomatic source said the actions were part of a conflict between government officials who want to open the country and those who fear that will lead to the fall of the Communist Party.

"It looks like the security forces under the interior ministry are trying to frustrate and embarrass the foreign ministry in its attempt to woo foreign aid, trade and investment," he said.

Another diplomat said it was clear Vietnam's security agencies have decided they must defend themselves against feared Western subversion meant to lead to a popular uprising as in China and Eastern Europe.

In the past month, Vietnamese media have carried repeated stories accusing the United States of trying to subvert the communist system through "peaceful revolution" using democratic ideas.

This week, official radio warned against "the criminal all-out attempts by the imperialist forces and international reactionaries to take advantage of the difficulties facing the socialist countries by carrying out sabotage from within and without and using peaceful revolution to eliminate the socialist camp."

The MCC statement follows:

MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE
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REGARDING THE DEPORTATION OF MCC VOLUNTEER
MIRIAM HERSHBERGER FROM VIETNAM

On Monday, June 4, 1990, Ms. Hershberger was detained and questioned by Vietnamese security police in Hanoi. They evidently believed Ms. Hershberger, a US citizen, was inciting student unrest through the use of international newspapers in her English classes at the Hanoi Foreign Language College. The following day, June 5, she was deported to Bangkok. Ms. Hershberger was a volunteer teacher with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a Canadian/American relief and development organization.

Ms. Hershberger had been working at the Foreign Language College since September 1989 under an agreement between MCC and the Ministry of Higher Education. The College had asked Ms. Hershberger to teach Newspaper Reading, and at no time prior to her deportation did anyone inform her that her teaching methods or materials were objectionable.

The Mennonite Central Committee states its full support for Ms. Hershberger and rejects the allegations of Vietnamese security police that she was attempting to destabilize Vietnam. Ms. Hershberger is a capable and dedicated teacher. She and MCC have always sought to abide by the laws of Vietnam in carrying out MCC's aid program.

Since 1975, MCC has been a public proponent for healing relations between Vietnam and the US. Building bridges of friendship and understanding was an important part of Ms. Hershberger's work at the Foreign Language College. MCC also continues to call on the US government to work towards relations with Vietnam which will rid the present climate of distrust.

From its beginning in 1929, MCC has sought to respond to human need with Christian compassion on behalf of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Churches of the USA and Canada. MCC assistance to Vietnam, which began in 1959 and has continued uninterrupted through 1985 until the present, has focused on food production, health and education.

page 2, MCC worker deported from Vietnam, June 8, 1990
content and tone of his teaching."

Hershberger and MCC have always strictly abided by Vietnamese laws in carrying out MCC program there, says Hostetter Martin.

Recent Vietnamese broadcasts have claimed that outside agents are trying to destabilize the country. Several foreign travelers and business people have been arrested. The mixed signals between openness and restrictiveness seem to reflect unsettled debate within the Hanoi government concerning Western involvement in Vietnam.

"We lament the continuing suspicions between the U.S. and Vietnamese governments," says Hostetter Martin. "We continue to call on our own governments in the United States and Canada to put meltdowns aside by restoring trade and diplomatic relations with Vietnam."

MCC assistance to Vietnam began in 1954. In recent years MCC has provided relief and development assistance to many small rural communities, and to a number of universities in both the north and the south.

Since 1979 MCC has been a public proponent for renewed relations between Vietnam and the United States. Building understanding between the two countries was an important part of Hershberger's work at the Foreign Language College, says Hostetter Martin.

Currently MCC has two other workers in Vietnam, Janet and Stan Reedy of Elkhart, Ind., who direct MCC program in the country. Reedys are members of Southside Fellowship in Elkhart.

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