

VNR

Ho Chi Minh's Speech at the First Cabinet Meeting
September 3, 1945

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	V. Minh

My dear friends and brothers,

After over 80 years of colonial oppression, exploitation and obscur-
antism, neither you nor I have been initiated in the art of administration.
But that does not trouble us. We will work while learning and learn
while working. Practice makes perfect. We shall undoubtedly commit
mistakes, but we will correct them and will be courageous enough to
do so.

I am absolutely sure that with our deep affection and pure love for
our people and our Fatherland we will succeed.

At present, what are the most pressing questions? In my opinion,
there are five:

First, the people are hungry. Our compatriots are afflicted by two
kinds of famine: the man-made famine and the natural one.

Apart from their inhuman hoarding of rice, the Japanese and the French
forced our compatriots to reduce the rice-growing areas in order to grow

castor-oil plants, flax-plants and other products necessary to the pursuit of their war. Moreover, we have discovered two schemes worked out by the French administrators aimed at creating an artificial famine with a view to hampering the patriotic movement and to forcing our compatriots to work as slaves.

Over two millions of our compatriots have died of starvation owing to this devilish policy. Then the recent flood has ravaged our 8 rice-producing provinces, and the situation has therefore worsened beyond measure. The survivors of the famine are in want of food. We must help them live.

I propose that the Government launch a campaign for the intensification of production. While awaiting for the harvest of maize, sweet potatoes and other secondary crops, the cultivation of which requires three or four months, I propose to open a voluntary subscription. All our compatriots will forgo their meals for one day in every ten. The rice saved through this 'fast' will be collected and distributed to the poor.

Second, ignorance is one of the cruel methods through which the colonialists ruled us. More than 90% of our compatriots are illiterate. It, however, requires only three months to learn how to read and write the romanised script of our tongue. An ignorant people is a weak people. I, therefore, propose to start a campaign for the obliteration of illiteracy.

Third, we were governed by totalitarian monarchy, and then by colonialism, no less totalitarian. Our country has no constitution, our people do not enjoy democratic liberties. We must have a democratic constitution. I propose to the Government to hold the national elections as soon as possible by means of universal suffrage. All citizens of both sexes from 18 years of age upward shall have the right to participate in the elections regardless of wealth, education, religion, race, etc.

Fourth, colonialism poisoned our people with alcohol and opium. It demoralised our people with bad habits: laziness, frivolity, corruption and other vices. It is imperative that we re-educate our people. We must make them a courageous, honest, industrious people, worthy of independent Viet-Nam.

I propose to launch a campaign for moral re-education, the four watchwords of which are:

- "Can" - to work hard;
- "Kiem" - to be economical;
- "Liem" - to fight against all forms of corruption;
- "Chinh" - always to do good, and to avoid evil.

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Fifth, opium is a poison. Poll-tax is an inhuman exploitation. Before being able to abolish or reduce other taxes, I propose the immediate abolition of poll-tax, tax on market sellers and tax on small boats. Finally, I propose the absolute prohibition of opium.

Source: "Biography of President Ho-Chi-Minh," Part II. Rangoon: Viet Nam News Service, 1949 (mimeo.).