

May 30, 1959

H. E. Ngo-dinh-Diem
President of the Republic of Vietnam
Independence Palace
Saigon, Vietnam

Dear Mr. President and Very Dear Friend:

As I am sure you have recently heard from Ambassador Chuong, and undoubtedly also from Messrs. Ladejinsky and Jonas, I have been asked to serve as Chairman of a national Conference on Social Development and Welfare in Free Vietnam, to be held in New York on October 26 and 27 next.

The Executive Committee of the American Friends of Vietnam has unanimously authorized me to extend to your government its whole-hearted invitation to honor this Conference with the presence of Vice President Nguyen-nhoc-Tho. Accordingly I am writing you to extend the Executive Committee's request that you permit the Vice-President to accept this invitation.

It is our hope that this nationally attended meeting will point up in dramatic fashion the progress your people and your country have made during the five years since independence was achieved. This Conference will be held on Vietnam's National Day and we expect that it will be attended and participated in by this country's outstanding authorities on Southeast Asia--from the government, from academic institutions, from business and industrial enterprises, and from the mass media.

The meeting which we held in Washington last month on the subject of foreign aid ("Vietnam: An American Success Story") played a major role in crystallizing congressional sentiment in favor of continued large-scale assistance to Vietnam. However, you have undoubtedly read of the increasingly frequent attacks on various aspects of the foreign aid program even by such good friends of ours as Senator Mansfield and Senator Humphrey. We believe that our October conference will demonstrate for all to see the sort of progress which can be expected when a Southeast Asian country is well led and when its ideological guidons keep it stable, peaceful, and progressive.

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Vice President Tho's presence would focus national attention on this meeting and, consequently, on Vietnam's National Anniversary. It would guarantee its success.

Perhaps Assistant Secretary Parsons told you of our recent conversation when I broached to him and Mr. Palmer the idea of our extending an invitation to the Vice President. In the event that he refrained from mentioning it to you, let me note here that he phoned the other day to say that the Department of State would be very happy to have the Vice President attend our conference in New York City on October 26 and 27, and to make an unofficial visit to Washington thereafter.

I understand from Mr. Jonas that the security situation in the Southwest has been of a disturbing character in recent weeks, and that consequently you might be reluctant to part with the valuable services of the Vice President for a lengthy period. Of course I can understand this, but I would point out that the Vice President need absent himself from Vietnam only for the time it would take for him to fly to the United States, speak at the Conference, and make such other stops as you and he decided were appropriate or desirable. U Nu recently came to the United States simply to deliver a speech at Dallas, Texas, and was in this country only six days, and was actually absent from Rangoon only ten days. I mention this to indicate how little time need be involved in this proposed visit, though of course, were you willing, there would be no reason that the Vice President should not stay longer and have the pleasure of seeing something of our country.

Perhaps I should add another fact here: Vice President Tho is almost unknown to Americans, and discussions in Washington and elsewhere of the stability and permanence of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam invariably turn to the question of the character of your Vice President, for in our minds at least the man who holds that position might be the key to the future life of the regime. In my opinion it would be highly useful to give our leaders a closer look at your Vice President. I know that you will agree with me that they would be greatly assured by their meeting with him.

If you believe that it will be possible for Vice President Tho to fly to the United States late next October in response to this invitation, we would greatly appreciate it if you would ask Mr. Hai to cable me immediately indicating your acceptance. I ask the favor of an early reply at the request of the Department of State, for although the Vice President's visit would be of the sort they class as "unofficial", nevertheless there are certain formalities which they must be prepared to extend to him, and they would want to begin making their preparations at once. Furthermore, our Conference will be held during the height of the United Nations General Assembly Session in October. Not only would the Conference be likely to attract the attention of a good number of diplomats present for the United Nations meetings, but it is the practice for the foreign ministers and other ranking statesmen who are expected to attend these sessions to flock to Washington at the end of October to "pay their respects" to President Eisenhower and other American dignitaries. Accordingly, Mr. Parsons' office would like to arrange an appropriate bloc of time for Vice President Tho, for if your decision were delayed long, it might not be possible to work him into the very busy Washington October schedule.

In conclusion, let me add that I am looking forward eagerly to my forthcoming visit to Vietnam. I shall leave here on June 18, stopping briefly in Manila and Hong Kong en route, and will arrive in Saigon on 26 June at 5:15 p.m. via Air Vietnam 225. If there is anything which you would like me to bring from the United States or some point en route, please advise me at once.

Very sincerely,

Wesley R. Fishel
Chairman

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