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MSUG, Box 34
APO 143
San Francisco, Calif.
July 25, 1959

The Honorable Mike Mansfield
United States Senate
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Senator Mansfield:

I have just returned to Saigon after several lengthy trips through the Vietnamese countryside. On my return to the office this afternoon I learned for the first time of your request for an investigation of U. S. aid to Vietnam, stemming from the several articles written for the Scripps-Howard newspapers by Mr. Albert Colegrove. I understand also that Ambassador Durbrow and USOM Director Gardiner will be recalled to Washington tomorrow ~~for~~ assist in this investigation. Furthermore, I have just now had the opportunity of reading Mr. Colegrove's articles.

In light of the precise information you are likely to receive from Messrs. Durbrow and Gardiner, and considering also your own excellent firsthand understanding of the situation here, I shall not take your time here with a detailed essay in refutation of Colegrove's sensational charges. However, I do wish to say the following, which you may evaluate in light of your knowledge of me and my experience in Vietnam.

I cannot recall when I last had the misfortune to read anything as irresponsible, misleading, and filled with falsehoods, half-truths, and distortions as the articles written by Mr. Colegrove. Aside from an occasional kernel of truth which has somehow slipped into his sentences, his material is totally at variance with the facts as I have found them to be, and as such competent reporters as Tillman Durdin and Ernest Lindley have publicly testified them to be. In the first place, none of us "lives in fear" here, as Mr. Colegrove would have one believe (article of July 10, I believe). In fact, one reason for the incident at Bien Hoa on July 8 (Saigon date) was that our MAAG personnel simply didn't take security warnings seriously and were therefore taken by surprise when an attack did occur. One cannot defend their judgment in this instance, but in any case their attitude gives the lie to that reported by Mr. Colegrove. I myself have traveled over 800 miles, much of it over back roads and trails, by Jeep and Land Rover, visiting remote villages, resettlement centers, the Cambodian and Laotian frontier areas, etc., and have seen none of the concentrations of soldiers and police Colegrove asserts guard all the bridges, etc. In fact, I would hazard a guess that I met or saw no more than a few dozen soldiers and police in total, through the full extent of my travels throughout Central Vietnam, the Plateau regions, and the border areas, aside from garrisons which I made a point of visiting, and aside from municipal police who are a normal feature of life in any city in the world.

Admittedly, the situation in the southernmost provinces, where remnants of the old Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen have teamed up with the Communists, is difficult. Communist and related activity has indeed been intensified in recent months, and one may expect it to remain at a high peak until after the elections for the National Assembly on August 30. There are firm and excellent reasons to believe that the Communists will do their utmost to embarrass the Government during the forthcoming electoral campaign, to discourage candidates from running, and to frighten people out of voting. But with a very few exceptions these efforts will fail, I feel sure. Public interest in the election is astonishingly high, and the Government has made a determined and vigorous effort to inform the people of the significance of the election to them as a people and also as individual citizens. Many of my Vietnamese friends who are civil servants have been sent out into the most remote areas to explain the meaning of the new electoral law to the peasants, and to urge them to vote (not for particular individuals, but simply to vote for whomever they wish to elect). That there will be pressures on people here and there to vote for a particular candidate is extremely likely, of course. But what is heartening is that some of the best people in Vietnam are planning to run as candidates. Young people, some of them American educated by the way, are planning political campaigns with great enthusiasm and vigor -- and they hope to win: that is, theirs is not a protest action or simply one of futile vanity; rather, they seem sincerely convinced of the Government's intention to have a fair election, and they have also decided that this is the time for them to take an active hand in politics in Vietnam. As one of them put it to me: "How else can we be sure that our country will be the sort of place we want it to be ten years from now?"

Colegrove's accusations concerning our aid program include a number of old chestnuts which must have been unearthed from beneath the rocks. Surely the things he saw when he was here last month support entirely contrary judgments from those he has made. I visited many of the same places he had, and I can say frankly and honestly that I came away enormously encouraged by all kinds of evidence of progress, growth, and development. And so much of this is due to American aid that one can only conclude that he missed the meaning of what he saw entirely, or else that he is simply a malicious sensationalist who decided to make a big splash in the papers. As I am sure you yourself will agree, the evacuation and resettlement of refugees in Vietnam was a remarkably successful operation. Colegrove had the opportunity of seeing the latest chapter in this story: the resettlement of some 43,000 refugees and unemployed or underemployed persons from the overcrowded coastal lowlands up in the plateau areas. The success of this pioneering movement is almost unbelievable. I myself visited ten such resettlement centers, plus a dozen older villages, new roads cut through dense jungles, dams which irrigate thousands of acres of cultivable land, dozens of new schools, etc. Two facts stick out after such a visit: the people there are contented, healthy, and support their government vigorously; and much of this was done with American aid.

I could continue my rhetoric indefinitely, but I think I have made my basic point -- that Mr. Colegrove's accusations are silly and irresponsible. That your investigation will prove this to be so is to be devoutly hoped and expected. However, the damage has been done, for unfortunately, most people read only the accusations, which are sensational and appeal to our baser instincts, while the factual, logical refutation will be read and remembered only by a few thoughtful persons.

My stay in Vietnam will last two more weeks, after which I shall visit, in rapid succession, Singapore, Taipei, and Tokyo. Perhaps I will have the opportunity of talking with you again when I get back to Washington early in September.

Best of luck to you in this investigation. And please give my warmest regards to Frank Valeo.

Very sincerely,