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# 'Give me your tired, your poor...'

By Edward G. Lansdale

ALEXANDRIA, Va.—Last Sunday evening, with an unseasonal April wind storm chilling frail bodies and blowing out candles, several hundred Vietnamese—mostly women and children—gathered on the sidewalk in front of the White House for a prayer vigil. They prayed that Americans would help save their families left behind in Vietnam.

As the wind whisked away their words and tears, it seemed that nobody was listening. The President was not in the White House. Members of Congress were on their way back to Washington from Easter recess. The press, which had covered so many other gatherings about Vietnam in the past, was noticeably absent. Washington, and with it the American people, gave the appearance of a callous indifference to whatever happens next to the people of Vietnam.

Let us hope that we haven't turned callous and indifferent to the plight of friends in need. It is not only that people throughout the world are judging the American character as the tragedy of Vietnam reaches yet another crisis point, so that they can determine our strength of purpose.

It is more important that we do not lose our belief in the principles and ideals towards which we have striven as a people these 200 years.

Many of the women who kept the vigil in front of the White House last Sunday evening are the wives of Americans. They are convinced that their marriage to Americans has made their families "class enemies" in the eyes of Vietnamese Communists, and consequently proscribed for liquidation in a future ruled by the Communists. The liquidation of such "class enemies" during the brief occupation of Hue by the Communists in 1968 has made this judgment all too realistic for them. Their friends were among those listed and executed. No amount of glossing over or facile denial will change this ugly truth.

It is estimated that these Vietnamese families, the in-laws of Americans, number about 50,000 people who are closely enough related to the wives of Americans, (mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers), to be in jeopardy as "class enemies." Nearly all of them have Americans ready and willing to take them in and provide for them.

The American husbands are now busy mortgaging their homes or otherwise obtaining funds to care for these Vietnamese—if they can get passage to the United States from Vietnam. White House and State Department telephone lines are jammed with calls from Americans anxious about their relatives in Vietnam. The waiting time for a telephone call to Saigon has risen to almost a two-week delay. As you read or listen to the news of Vietnam remember the distraught Americans among us who are trying to save their wives' families.

There are other Vietnamese whose closeness to Americans places them in equal jeopardy. About 200,000 Vietnamese worked for American agencies and organizations, serving loyally enough to earn the label of "class enemies." Adding their immediate families to this number, the total of people in this category with ties to Americans amounts to some 500,000 or more Vietnamese. Most of these Vietnamese have neither funds nor ways of their own to escape what fate seems to hold in store for them in Vietnam. They are poignantly dependent upon American help.

Beyond this 550,000 or more Vietnamese who have a close relationship to Americans, there are a huge number of other Vietnamese who feel life under the Communists is unthinkable. Death or punishment awaits them. Their number can only be guessed; there are probably one to two million.

Among them are those who fled from North Vietnam to South Vietnam in 1954-55, in the great exodus of nearly a million refugees. There are thousands who fought in the nationalist cause, broke away when the Communists pre-empted that cause and thereafter fought the Communists.

Others have been in the fight all their lives. There are religious leaders and their adherents, civil servants, military men, village and hamlet militia, politicians, journalists, business people, lawyers, doctors, dentists, nurses, farmers, shopkeepers, com-

posers, performing artists—and even some of the people now in South Vietnamese jails, the political prisoners whose only “crime” was their outspoken activity against the Saigon Government for not defending the needs of the people more intelligently or honestly or diligently.

Some of this great mass of Vietnamese who feel condemned now will insist upon remaining and fighting against the Communists to the end. But, a million or more of them are praying for a miracle to save them from Communist rule. They believe only the Americans can provide such a miracle. Many would flee their country, given the chance and means to do so.

Twenty years ago, it took ten months to move nearly a million Vietnamese in orderly fashion from Hanoi and Haiphong to air and sea ports in South Vietnam. Today's prospects are that at least twice as many Vietnamese are in desperate need of another exodus, over a greater distance—with time running short for such a movement.

Many of us who served in Vietnam and who came to know the Vietnamese people believe strongly that they are a bright industrious, and courageous people who are worthy of the best efforts of the United States to strive to save those who are desirous of being saved.

The emergency demands an organized effort to rescue these desperate Vietnamese. It will require transport and temporary care for the refugees. There is need for a safe enclave in Vietnam from which refugees can be evacuated, made safe by the protection of the United States or the United Nations.

There also is need for making sure of the transit of noncombatant refugees away from military combat zones to the port of embarkation. (Perhaps Moscow and Peking can be induced to help silence the weapons they have heaped upon the North Vietnamese divisions long enough to let the refugees gather and depart.)

American states and communities should be now determining how many of these worthy Vietnamese can be settled among them. They are a splendid citizenry who would make fine neighbors.

Let us be humanitarians, truly.

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