

Big Vietnam Step Toward Unification

Saigon

North and South Vietnam agreed yesterday to elect a joint national assembly in 1976 to end the 21-year division of the war-scarred Indochina nation.

A communique issued at the end of week-long reunification talks between North and South Vietnamese delegations said elections for the common national assembly will be held within the first half of next year.

Officials told reporters at Saigon's former Independence Palace that the assembly, made up of one representative for every

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100,000 Vietnamese, will guide the reunification process.

Nguyen Huu Tho, chairman of the Viet Cong's National Liberation Front, said the accord "marked a step forward for Vietnam and opened up a path for our country to advance toward socialism."

"South and North Vietnam are one home," he said in a broadcast over Saigon radio. "We will formally unify the country very soon."

The conference was the most important to the nation's future since North and South Vietnam were created in 1954 at the end of the French-Indochina war.

The decision to reunify so quickly after the Communist victory in South Vietnam last April 30 caused some surprise.

Viet Cong officials had said in May they expected reunification to take at least five years.

The communique and a paper discussing reunification "problems" were signed at the palace yesterday morning by Truong Chinh, chairman of North Vietnam's National Assembly, and Pham Hung, chairman of the Central Office of South Vietnam.

Chinh and Hung, leaders of the two 25-member delegations at the talks, indicated the Communist leadership had decided more problems would arise by retaining two Vietnams than by reunification.

United Press