

Vietnam to Alter 'Tiger Cage' Cells

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, July 21—The Government announced today that it had suspended the use of the "tiger cage" cells at the prison on Con Son pending improvements.

In a communiqué from the office of Premier Tran Thien Khiem, the Government said the section housing the small concrete cells with overhead bars in what was called the disciplinary quarter would be "immediately overhauled to provide adequate hygienic facilities" although the prisoners are classified as "undisciplined elements."

Government spokesmen could provide no details on what improvements would be made in the cells, where the conditions

Continued on Page 3, Column 1

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Continued From Page 1, Col. 3

under which prisoners were held, were recently described by two visiting members of the United States Congress as shocking.

The communiqué said the disciplinary quarter would no longer be used but the spokesmen said that what was meant was that it would not be used until the improvements had been completed.

No reference was made in the communiqué to the July 2 visit of the two legislators and two other Americans whose disclosures stirred controversy in the United States.

One Government spokesman said that the prisoners in the cages—he put the number at less than 500—were removed today to regular cells. This was

presumably made possible by the transfer last week of 500 other prisoners from the prison island, which is 140 miles southeast of Saigon, to the mainland, where they were to be released. The prisoners were carried in United States Air Force transport planes flown by Americans.

The removal reduced the number of prisoners on Con Son to about 8,500.

The Government statement, which followed the completion of inspections of the tiger cages by two delegations of Saigon officials last week, said:

"Results of the investigation indicate that: This is a disciplinary quarter which includes separate cells for temporary incarceration of undisciplined and obstinate prisoners who had created disturbances at the

center when they were detained with other prisoners. After having repented, these prisoners would be returned to their previous cells with the other prisoners.

"It must be noted that the fact that there is a special disciplinary quarter within the prison camp is not unusual. Prison camps in advanced countries also are provided with such special disciplinary quarters."

The communiqué said that improvements in the tiger cage section would be made because it was built in 1895 and "no longer satisfies the criteria of a modern reformation center."

"Finally," the communiqué continued, "in the spirit of providing good treatment to the prisoners, the Government would like to affirm that a general reorganization of the prison centers in the whole country is under way, and, in the process, changes will be made whenever necessary within the limits of our national budget."

An American spokesman said the United States had long encouraged improvements in South Vietnam's prison system.

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