

SFE Examiner

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Sweden POW

Plan OK: Nixon

SAN CLEMENTE — (AP) — President Nixon acted today to promote a proposal that prisoners of war from both sides in the Vietnam war be interned in Sweden.

Nixon issued a statement responding to a press report from Stockholm three days ago that indicated the Swedish government would provide ships and internment facilities for prisoners if the United States and Hanoi could reach an agreement on the transfer of prisoners to a neutral country.

The Swedish government, on April 30, had been responding to a suggestion made a day earlier by Defense Secretary Melvin Laird.

Ronald Ziegler, the White House press secretary, said Nixon "noted with great satisfaction that according to press reports the government of Sweden has offered the use of its vessels and its territory to provide internment of prisoners of war from the conflict in Vietnam."

Ziegler added that Nixon "would hope that Hanoi will move promptly to negotiate an agreement on this issue to take advantage of this humanitarian offer on the part of the Swedish government."

In Stockholm, the Swedish Foreign Office said in a statement:

"We are of course willing to help in every way from a humanitarian standpoint but

—Turn to Page 5, Col. 1

—From Page 1

feel that a question of internment in a third country must first be negotiated between the parties directly concerned.

"North Vietnam and the United States have the option of making direct contacts at the Paris peace talks table to agree on this and relevant measures which can be referred to us."

Nixon himself has indicated that the prisoner of war issue is a major obstacle to complete American withdrawal from South Vietnam.

His obvious interest in resolving the question was underscored by the fact that he responded to a Stockholm dispatch that the White House indicated was sent around the world by only one news agency — Agence France Presse.

Asked if the United States could vouch for the accuracy of the AFP report, Ziegler said, "I can't go beyond what I have said."

He said that American diplomats in Stockholm had not been in touch with the Swedish government, but "I'm sure that there will be diplomatic discussions with the Swedish government."

Hanoi to date has expressed no interest in the idea of interning war prisoners on neutral ground.

The South Vietnamese earlier had proposed that sick and wounded prisoners from both sides and those imprisoned for four years or longer be interned in a neutral country.

The United States concurred in that move, initiated at the Paris talks, and several times went out of its way to publicize the idea.

Hanoi negotiations made no positive response to the idea.

Ziegler said that on the basis of a Swedish foreign ministry statement reported by AFP he could summarize the situation in these words:

"It comes down to this basic point: Hanoi must re-

spond."

Ziegler went on to suggest that North Vietnam should give a positive response "if they are in any degree sincere" about humane treatment of prisoners and if they have "any conscience at all."

Saigon (Paris, 8 Apr) offered to negotiate repatriation or internment in neutral country of "able-bodied prisoners of war who have undergone a long period of captivity." (John L. Hess, NYTimes 9 Apr, filed Indochina.) Plan apparently coupled with offer to return 570 disabled prisoners to North Vietnam. (John L. Hess, NYTimes 30 Apr, filed POW's.)