

Swedish Offer

Nixon for POW Internment Plan

San Clemente

President Nixon called on North Vietnam yesterday to "take advantage" of an offer by Sweden to intern prisoners of war for the duration of the conflict in Vietnam.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, announced the President had "noted with great satisfaction" press reports from Stockholm that the Swedish government would be willing to transport American and North Vietnamese prisoners to Swedish territory and provide for their internment.

(A South Vietnamese proposal that sick, wounded and long-term prisoners be interned in a neutral country was broached at the Paris peace talks on April 8, and endorsed by President Nixon a week later. But the Viet Cong in effect rejected the plan, again implying release of prisoners would have to be linked with a definite date for total U.S. troop withdrawal in South Vietnam.)

BURDEN

Ziegler said yesterday that the Swedish government had said transfer of prisoners would depend upon an agreement between the United States and North Vietnam.

"The burden falls squarely on the shoulders of theanoi government" to respond now to the American and South Vietnamese initiatives on the issue, Ziegler said.

The Swedish offer was reported in a dispatch Saturday from Stockholm by Agence France Presse.

The White House did not say why it took three days for the President to comment on the offer or why he was relying on the press report rather than on diplomatic channels.

STATEMENT

Ziegler read a carefully worded statement to reporters here shortly before the President left for Washington

after a three - day weekend in California.

Ziegler said:

"President Nixon today 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. The President would hope that Hanoi will move promptly to negotiate and agreement on this issue to take advantage of this humanitarian offer on the part of the Swedish government."

Ziegler said in response to questions that the "basic point" in the President's comment is that it is up to Hanoi to come to terms on the prisoner issue.

If the North Vietnamese are "to any degree sincere regarding the well - being of prisoners of war," Ziegler said, it is time for them to be responsive to the United States, to Sweden and "to international opinion."

(Cannot find clippings on either item in file.)