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Vietnamese Prisoners

To the Editor:

On May 24, former American P.O.W.'s will arrive at the White House as the honored guests of President Nixon. If I were permitted to speak to them, I would say:

Welcome home. I am happy to see you reunited with your families. As you know, you were released under the terms of the Cease-Fire Agreement, signed on Jan. 27, which states, "The return of captured military personnel and foreign civilians of the parties shall be carried out simultaneously with and completed not later than the same day as the troop withdrawal." These terms have been honored: you and the other American P.O.W.'s are free.

There is, however, another section of the agreement which refers to the return of Vietnamese civilian personnel captured and detained in South Vietnam. This aspect was to be resolved within ninety days after the cease-fire came into effect. More than ninety days have passed, yet 200,000 political prisoners in the jails of South Vietnam have not been released.

I am a Vietnamese citizen. I love my country and my family as you love yours. My country has been destroyed by the war. The bombing has killed and wounded millions of Vietnamese

men, women and children. It is time for my country to begin the process of rebuilding. But our best citizens are kept in jail—people whose only crime was to criticize the Thieu Government and the U.S. involvement and to ask for peace in Vietnam. These are the very people who are capable of reuniting my country—yet they are kept in jail. My own brother is such a prisoner. He is a captain in the South Vietnam army and was an instructor at the ARVN center for political warfare. He is a patriotic Vietnamese who spoke for peace and against foreign intervention. For this, he is in jail.

I ask you, as citizens of a free country, to please ask your President about the prisoners who have not yet been permitted to return to their families. President Nixon has the power to convince General Thieu that it will be in the best interest of Vietnam to have its best citizens free. He must honor the very agreement which brought you home.

NGUYEN THI NGOC THOA
Washington, May 18, 1973