

TEXT OF DR. KING'S STATEMENT ON VIET NAM

Excerpts of a Speech Delivered by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
at a Mass Rally, Thursday Evening, August 12, 1965
Birmingham, Alabama

Few events in my lifetime have stirred my conscience and pained my heart as much as the present conflict which is raging in Viet Nam. The day by day reports of villages destroyed and people left homeless raise burdensome questions within my conscience.

This is indeed a complex situation. One on which even the experts are divided. There is no need to place blame, and I certainly do not intend to argue the military or political issues involved. Neither the American people nor the people of North Viet Nam is the enemy. The true enemy is war itself, and people on both sides are trapped in its inexorable destruction. To look back and attempt to place blame is only to enhance the negative psychological atmosphere that fosters war. What is required is a small first step that may establish a new spirit of mutual confidence and respect a step capable of breaking the cycle of mistrust, violence and war.

On the occasion of my receipt of the Nobel Prize for Peace in Oslo, Norway last December, I said:

"It is as imperative and urgent to put an end to war and violence between nations as it is to put an end to racial injustice."

It is this belief that compels me to speak on this issue, that the conscience of our nation may be aroused to see that war as a means of solving problems is obsolete.

National Passions Rage

So much hangs in the balance of each remote and seemingly insignificant conflict; national passions rage on both sides; reason and understanding are stultified, and violence leads only to more savage violence. Like all Americans, and, indeed, like all the peoples of the world, I pray for the earliest possible peace for the tormented peoples of Viet Nam. My prayer is made all the more fervent by the fearful recognition that the conflict in Viet Nam is pregnant with the risk of an ever-widening war that may imperil the existence of whole continents.

Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity

to make an urgent plea for all sides to bring their grievances to the conference table. In order to do this, both sides must go all out to demonstrate their desire for good faith negotiations, and the United States should effect a new diplomatic machinery without giving the impression of appeasement and which would in no way mitigate its national aims, in seriously considering bringing to a halt the bombings in North Viet Nam.

On the other hand, Ho Chi Minh and Chou En-Lai must express unequivocally their desire to alter their position in demanding the unilateral withdrawal of American forces from South Viet Nam.

Creative Solution

I firmly believe that because the situation has become so complex, this might not be possible at this time. However, every effort should be made toward some courageous and creative solution to this potentially catastrophic situation. The American people and our government can find this solution if reason can triumph over pride, and statesmanship conquer condition. I further urge that the United Nations be empowered with the authority to mediate this conflict in negotiations involving all parties, including the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam.

In his speech at Johns Hopkins University earlier this summer, President Johnson called for programs of technical assistance and area development which would enable the people of South Viet Nam to develop a sturdy, independent economy and sound democratic government. The employment of some of our forces in rebuilding some of the villages which have been destroyed immediately would be a solid indication to the people of Viet Nam that our interest is in the development of Viet Nam and not in its destruction.

These tokens of our good faith are an extremely small price to pay when there is so much at stake in the destruction of men, the cost of materials of war and the damage done to our national image by our continuous involvement in this ambiguous conflict.