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REMARKS

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OF

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN POW'S IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

FORT SNELLING, MINNEAPOLIS

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↳ Recently the Congress met in joint session on September 22, 1970 to consider a matter vital to all Americans--- the treatment of American prisoners of war by the North Vietnamese. Colonel Frank Borman reported on his recent mission to obtain release of the prisoners.

↳ The plight of these men is indeed a serious matter to all Americans. The anguish that the families of these brave men suffer each day is a cruel burden.

↳ North Vietnam has refused to accord the status of prisoners of war to our servicemen who have been captured.

Instead these men have been termed "war criminals" and have been denied their rights under the Geneva Convention of 1949.

↳ The North Vietnamese government has even refused to recognize the International Committee of the Red Cross to function on behalf of the prisoners. ↳ Nevertheless, the United States and the South Vietnamese government have designated this power to the Red Cross and have allowed them to regularly inspect the prisoner of war camps in South Vietnam where approximately 36,000 prisoners from North Vietnam are being held.

↳ Consistently, the North Vietnamese government has refused to submit to the Red Cross or any other neutral nation, a list of names of the American prisoners who are being held.

↳ Now how many men are involved in this controversy? ↳ There are approximately 1,548 men considered missing in action or prisoners of war. Of this number, 780 men have been lost in North Vietnam, with approximately 376 reported as prisoners through letters received and films. ↳ 277 men have been lost in Laos

with only three reported as prisoners. 541 have been lost in South Vietnam with 78 prisoners reported, reputedly in Vietcong jungle camps.

∟ The only contacts made between the prisoners and their families have come through private organizations who have visited North Vietnam. ∟ One committee, a few months ago, brought back a list of 334 men, confirmed by the Hanoi government as a complete list of all American men now being held. ∟ This list was originally compiled by this Committee from letters which were received from prisoners to their families.

∟ The agreement stated that prisoners would be allowed to write one letter of six lines each month and to receive one package every other month. ∟ The list of 334 names included prisoners who wrote to their families prior to 1969. However, 40 men who were previously reported as being held prisoner did not appear on this list of names.

What was the fate of these men? How sad and how bitter it is that the North Vietnamese will not honor their obligations under International Law. Information is only communicated to us through private organizations.

↳ Under the provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1949, the number of letters accorded to prisoners of war shall not be less than two letters and four cards monthly. ↳ Prisoners who have been without news for a long period must be allowed to send telegrams. ↳ Prisoners are also allowed to receive parcels, including foodstuffs, medical supplies and articles of a religious, educational, or recreational character,

↳ This is a far cry from the one six-line letter each month and one package every other month agreed to by a private organization and the North Vietnamese government for men who by every civilized rule of nations should be accorded the rights of prisoners of war.

↳ Since neither the Red Cross or any other country has been allowed to inspect the prisoner of war camps in North Vietnam, what assurances do we have that our men are receiving proper care or medical attention?

↳ International law specifically provides for the return home of the severely wounded prisoners of war and the transfer of sick and wounded to a neutral country not involved in the conflict.

↳ The North Vietnamese have made no effort to keep their obligations under international law.

↳ In 1966, Radio Hanoi announced that the American prisoners of war who were being held at that time were to be tried as "war criminals". There was an international outcry of protest that prevented this. ↳ Public opinion was too strong and the trials were never held.

These men --- ~~the~~^{these} brave American boys --- have been prisoners of war longer than in any previous period in American history. ↳ The first American was taken captive by the North Vietnamese in 1964 and that man is still a prisoner today.

Under the rules ~~of the present~~^{of} international law, there is no ~~time~~ limitation imposed on the length of time a prisoner can be held. In the past, prisoners have been released when hostilities ceased. ↳ That is one reason why for over two years I have repeatedly called for a stand-still ceasefire agreement in Vietnam. ↳ A stand-still ceasefire will give us a chance --- not a guarantee, but a chance --- to bring these men home.

↳ The North Vietnamese government even refuses to acknowledge the existence of their own men as prisoners of war held in South Vietnam.

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Under international law there are limits to the suffering that may be inflicted by hostile parties.

Talleyrand, Foreign Minister, ^{to} ~~wrote~~ Napoleon Bonaparte ^{wrote} in November of 1806:

"Three centuries of civilization have given Europe a law of nations for which, according to the expression of an illustrious writer, human nature cannot be sufficiently grateful. This law is founded on the principle that nations ought to do to one another in peace, the most good, and in war, the least evil possible."

Humanity itself demands that the suffering of these men and their families be ended.

~~If there are no soldiers involved in war or armed conflict, truly there cannot be recognized, responsible governments to guide their actions or to bear the responsibility for their humanitarian care.~~

Thirty-six thousand human beings have not been given legal status as soldiers by the government of North Vietnam. How in the name of humanity can they do ~~less~~ ^{this to their own} ~~for~~ ^{and to the} 1,548 American men?

This is a barbarous crime. If the North Vietnamese will not act responsibly under international law for their welfare then the welfare of these Americans must rest with all the nations of the world who seek a rule of law.

Just as all men were diminished by the barbarity of Nazism --- so are we all lessened by the inhumanity practised against these men and their lonesome families.

The General Assembly of the United Nations is now in session in New York City.

↳ I urge our Government to place this matter on the Agenda of the General Assembly and bring to the Nations of the

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world there assembled the history of the cruel fate of these men.

Let the truth ring out in the Court of world opinion. Let all who seek peace exert their efforts for these men. Their rights, guaranteed under international law, must be protected.

All the nations of the world have an obligation and a self interest in seeing that this is done.

No man is an island.

But no nation can stand alone.

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