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# **OPENING THE SECOND ERA**

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**A political project for a pluralistic democracy in Vietnam**



**JANUARY 1, 2015**

**RALLY FOR DEMOCRACY AND PLURALISM**

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# I. Historical mission

Vietnam ranks 15<sup>th</sup> in the world in term of population, on this earth for every 1,000 people there are 15 Vietnamese. The Vietnamese are recognized worldwide as intelligent and hard working. Our geography is advantageous thanks to long and beautiful sea shores, close to important maritime traffic ways, in an exceptionally dynamic region. We have the potential of a great, rich and strong country, bringing our worthy contribution to build a peaceful, wealthy and civilized world.

Instead of this, we are today one of the poorest and backward countries in the world. Our GNP per capita is far below the world average. We do not have any high technology industry and we are even more backward for culture and arts in comparison with the world; we are at the bottom in all country rankings for human, social development and environment; and we lack the most basic human rights. This painful and unacceptable contradiction must question each and every Vietnamese.

At birth, all human beings, whatever their race, have equal potentials. The differences in the level of development and standard of living of the nations result from cultural conditions, geography, natural resources and social organization. Among these factors, the organization of the society is by far the most important. The way the society is organized, good or bad, ingenious or clumsy, can change completely the fate of a nation. That is why some nations have arisen in spite of narrow land and rare natural resources, while other nations with advantages given by nature are writhing in poverty. Being conscious of this, the current shameful rear position forces us to question ourselves to find a way out; on the other hand, it allows us to believe that, if the country is reorganized properly (meaning it is based on just values), we will surely escape poverty and rise strongly.

We have missed many historical opportunities.

At dawn of the new age, marked by the explosion of ideas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the industrial revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, like other Asian countries, we were unaware that time has come to reassess all values and customs, that we must renew completely our way of thinking and organizing. During many centuries, we were satisfied with the rigid model of Confucius and Mencius, losing the creativity and standing still; while the Westerners, through their objectivity and method, thanks to their continuous reassessments and renewals, have arisen strongly and surpassed the other parts of the world.

Because we did not know how to adapt in time like other lucky countries, we have lost sovereignty and independence. Losing sovereignty, we also lost the capacity of consulting together to find a solution for the country, then we lost the spirit of dialogue to settle disagreements.

Entering the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we had to solve in the same time two difficult problems: regaining national sovereignty and adapting to a new civilization. Because we could not agree on a new national project, we were in conflict even on the objective hoped by all Vietnamese, regaining sovereignty. We missed the opportunity to regain independence and to rise up when the colonial regime collapsed after World War II. We were split, we condemned, we reviled and we exterminated each other, pushing a divided country into civil war, with the end result of falling into one of the most toxic dictatorships after suffering the most terrible destructions. While other

nations without or with only small cost have gained independence and, in some cases, successfully built democracy.

The short sightedness made us losing a big opportunity when peace was restored in 1975. Instead of reconciling the nation to heal the wounds left by the war, the winning side has imposed a totalitarianism which was thrown away one century ago in its very cradle and later was denied in its very heart and condemned by the civilized world as a disaster for humanity. The short sightedness caused us to miss another big opportunity when the communist ideology and the communist movement collapsed.

Looking back, we must recognize that the reason of all disasters that our country had to suffer is our lack of political thought and our lack of intellectual investments to analyze and identify the big challenges and to find adequate solutions. At each period of time, we were lacking a political project suitable to the new age and the country situation. At the end, we exterminated each other for borrowed ideologies that we only received at an elementary level but we nevertheless defended with more ardor than the nations which initiated them.

We urgently need a leap in political thought to quickly reach an agreement on the new founding values to organize a society. This cultural leap must be coupled with perseverance and tolerance. The tragical experiences in history and the humiliation for being inferior force us to draw a definitive lesson: abandon the psychology of impatience, renounce the monopoly of being right, control the passion in order to dialogue and compromise in a spirit of mutual respect. It cannot be different, because all Vietnamese are bound together in a common destiny: if our country is rich, strong and advanced, our lives will be glorious and we will all be respected; on the contrary, if our country is poor, miserable and backward, we will all be looked down upon, regardless of our affiliation, our tendency or our ideology. In today's tragic situation, the best for all is also the best for each one.

Today, the vast majority of our people are destitute, depressed and resentful, our country is lagging behind and deadlocked. The economic, social, environmental, ethical, educational, overpopulation ... issues are accumulating and are not addressed, and they are becoming more and more acute and they have reached the level of emergency, soon unsolvable if this decaying momentum is not quickly reversed. Our country could then be removed from the list of nations having the right to dream of a worthy place in the world. We must assert that there will be no way out for our country under this communist regime. Throughout the course of its existence and rule, it has shown that its unique concern is to maintain its dominance on the nation at all cost, including devastating the country, sacrificing national interests and being a foreign vassal. It is also an extremely corrupted regime, and history of all nations has proved that a corrupted government can only be replaced, not reformed. The historical mission of our time is to quickly liberate our nation from totalitarianism and save the country from the danger of permanent inferiority.

The risk of perpetual inferiority is also the risk of losing the country, because in this age, when the concept of state-nation is attacked from all sides and is being revised, the nations which cannot bring happiness, pride and hope of rise will be dissolved sooner or later.

Our way to get out of dead end and to rise up is pluralistic democracy and human rights, on the basis of patriotism conceived as love and attachment between the Vietnamese.

Democracy to address the problems in a right way and to choose correctly the solutions and the rulers. Pluralism to respect all differences and to carry out national reconciliation after the bloody

conflicts. Human rights to honor every Vietnamese and to promote the vitality and the initiative of everyone. The experience of every nation has shown that human rights have never prevented anyone from building their lives and democracy has never banned a nation from advancing. Democracy goes ahead and paves the way for development, development strengthens and promotes democracy. Democracy is also a wise choice that allows a not yet strong country to take advantage of the sympathy and support of the world to protect its interests and its territory.

Democratizing our country is our obvious goal but it is also full of obstacles. The Communist Party has shown that it can do everything to maintain its political monopoly while too many Vietnamese no longer care about the country, the long-lasting disappointment with a corrupt and tyrannical government has turned into disillusion with the country itself. Therefore, those who fight for democracy must, in the same time, fight the stubbornness of the Communist Party and the psychology of resignation of the masses. The campaign for democracy must also be an effort to restore the patriotic feeling which is seriously injured. It will require a lot of determination, courage and perseverance. But it is a mandatory struggle.

Human history is ultimately a journey to freedom, and since democracy is the most appropriate social organizing formula to ensure freedom, human history is also the journey of nations to democracy. We have been very late in this journey. So far, despite our long history, we have had only slave regimes; periods of autonomy only meant replacing foreign slavery by indigenous slavery. The campaign for democracy is the struggle to bring the nation from the darkness of slavery into the light of freedom, opening the era of democracy, the second historical era of our country. Depending on the choices and attitudes of the men and women of today, they will be assessed by future generations as having contributed to the greatest revolution in the history of our country or scared and shirked responsibility when the country is in peril.

This political project has the ambition to contribute to a new political consciousness for Vietnam and rally those who still have the will and faith to pursue a common ideal: a worthy Vietnam to struggle for and build by the men and women of today, and for future generations to continue proudly. This rally is necessary and mandatory because political struggle is never an individual struggle, it can only be an organized struggle.

A new democratic wave is surging in the world. We have no right to miss this opportunity.

## II. The Fourth Wave of Democracy and the New World Order

We are living in a favorable world context, full of hope. The possibility to end the dictatorship and to enter the democratic era has never been so great. A new wave of democracy, the fourth wave of democracy in the history of the world, has begun and continues to rise while the dictatorships are exhausted, in terms of trustworthiness, intellect, faith and will.

### 1. The Fourth Wave of Democracy

Human history can be seen as the journey of man to freedom, to liberate himself from ignorance, disease, famine, misery, hardship, and especially from the yoke of tyranny; and since democracy has proved to be the most rational way of organizing society to exercise freedom, the world history is also the journey of the nations to democracy.

In that difficult journey, democracy has met stubborn resistance of the dictatorial powers. In addition to blatant violence, the dominant forces have also used ideological weapons. From pessimistic philosophies that consider life as unworthy to live and therefore not worth fighting for to the illusions of a future paradise that requires sacrifices today, through theocratic regimes where the rulers proclaim themselves to be the representatives of a supreme being and are only responsible towards this supreme being, extreme nationalisms, pragmatic doctrines which consider satisfying material needs as the only or the highest priority, collectivist doctrines which consider people only as part of a group on top and above all – the fatherland, the church, the party, etc. The most vicious and persistent attack on democracy is the assimilation of individualism, the foundation of democracy, with egoism, with the consequence that democracy leads to incoherence and chaos.

Due to these attacks, democracy did not progress steadily but in steps, that we can call waves of democracy. Each wave of democracy aims to refute a totalitarian doctrine and then overthrowing some dictatorships which are based on that doctrine. This is followed by a period in which democracy stalls, perhaps even recedes, due to counter-attacks of anti-democratic forces taking advantage of the inevitable mistakes and embarrassments of newly established democracies in the difficult early days.

This up and down has its reason. First, it is because democracy is both difficult to reach and difficult to maintain due to its complexity. The proof is that democracy emerged in Greece only thousands of years after men know how to live in organized communities, then faded away and took more than two thousand years to reappear timidly in some places in Europe. Only recently has it developed strongly. Another important reason is that democratic activity is based on political parties, while dictatorships, after the course of banning and extermination of opposition parties, only leave a political vacuum when they collapse at the end. But democracy is a natural way of life of a civilized society, therefore a regression, if it happens, cannot eliminate the products of the previous democratic wave; democracy continues to mature with the evolution of society, and at some point, it is strong enough to create a new democratic wave. The trend of democratization cannot be reversed as reality has shown. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more than a century after the first wave of democracy, there were only a dozen of democratic countries: the United States and a few Western and Northern European countries. Moreover,



except for the United States, these countries were not really democratic because they were colonial countries which violate human rights in the colonies. Despite the ups and downs, entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two-thirds of nearly two hundred countries in the world are democratic. Currently, in 2015, this rate is more than three-quarters and among the countries considered as dictatorships, only a few countries dare to publicly assert a one-party regime. The world's journey towards democracy is accelerating, a new world order is being completed.

Until the first year of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world witnessed three waves of democracy.

The first wave of democracy began with the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789 and aimed to overthrow the absolute monarchies based on theocracy, whether Christian, Muslim or Confucian. It forced the European monarchies to renounce their real power to become constitutional monarchies, knocking down the Ottoman Empire and the monarchies in Russia and China.

The second wave of democracy began with World War II and aimed at overthrowing national chauvinism. This doctrine, which emerged and developed after the fall of the monarchies, considered conflict between nations to be natural because every nation must protect and expand its vital space. The second wave of democracy rejected this extremist nationalism and affirmed the equality between people of all races and the right of self-determination for all nations. As a result, the German Nazi, the Italian Fascist and the Japanese military regimes were annihilated; all three Germany, Italy and Japan became democracies, Japan became the first true democratic country in Asia; most of the British colonies also became democracies. However, this democratic wave quickly stopped and gave way to the cold war between the two blocks, capitalist and communist, viewed at that time as two democratizing formulas competing with each other. It should be emphasized that the communist movement was born as a democracy movement, it has been a wrong way to build democracy before being exploited to be a crime.

The third wave of democracy aimed at refuting communism and eliminating the dictatorships which were products of the Cold War. It started in 1974 with a revolution that brought down the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal, at the time when the debate between the two formulas claiming to be democratic, capitalist and communist, was over, and the concept of democracy already had a strong enough content. The failure of the communist formula has been quite clear, progresses in transport and communication have exposed the mental and material inferiority of the communist countries compared to the capitalist countries. Communism has lost all its charm. Democracies no longer feared a triumph of communism and were confident enough to abandon anti-communist dictatorships even if the price to pay is that they will temporarily give way to communist regimes. This wave of democracy has taken place in two phases. In the first phase, it crushed the right-wing dictatorships in Portugal, Spain, Greece, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, South Vietnam and many other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Some countries became democracies, but others fell into the communist orbit, such as South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Angola, Ethiopia, Yemen, Nicaragua. But soon it spilled out to bring down most of the communist regimes, including Soviet Union, the holy land of Marxism-Leninism.

This third wave of democracy has stopped since the mid-1990s. The cause of this downturn was, first of all, optimism after the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the cold war. One thought that democracy has now won and that the remaining dictatorships will be wise enough to evolve themselves to democracy. This mentality was the cause of caught off guard. Later, pragmatism was promoted by the Clinton administration in the US and the Chirac government in France. In terms of international relations, this doctrine puts the interests, especially the economic

interests, above all; and whenever there is a contradiction between interests and morality, interests must get priority. Promoting democracy and human rights was no longer a top concern and all governments, even dictatorships abusing human rights, could still be partners of the United States, Europe and the developed democracies in general. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world was absorbed in the fight against terrorism; the optimistic psychology was gone but the pragmatic foreign policy continued and was promoted in the first term of Obama. In addition, the economic face of pragmatism is the policy of stimulating economic growth by encouraging consumption, even at the price of a heavily deficient trade balance, in parallel with real estate speculation and securities. This policy has, for a long time, supported tyrannical dictatorships in China, Vietnam and many other countries. These regimes were able to implement an open-door economic policy to exploit the poverty that they were the cause: exploiting workers as much as possible to maximize exports at really low prices, attracting tourists thanks to cheap travel services. The pragmatic doctrine has allowed the remaining dictatorships, including remnants of communism such as China and Vietnam, to continue to exist, even to get economically stronger.

Ultimately, pragmatism has led to a crisis and forced the world to thoroughly rethink both foreign policy and economic paradigm, meaning: on one hand caring and guarding the democratic values and human rights in international relations, on the other hand, give priority to the production economy instead of speculation, and prudently keep balance both the national budget and the trade balance. Violations of human rights by dictatorships are no longer tolerated, the dictatorships can no longer survive on exports as before. It is this revision that has led to the fourth wave of democracy that we are witnessing. Pragmatism has been a parenthesis in human history. This parenthesis is closing, the grace period of dictatorships has ended.

*The fourth wave of democracy, starting in 2010, targets economically open dictatorships.* These regimes cannot last longer; they are not based on any political thought, even if sometimes boring slogans, like "building socialism", are repeated awkwardly. They are purely plundering regimes on behalf of no ideal or political project. They do not have even an illusion. They completely rely on repression to survive. All are crippled governments. Out of the two necessary pillars of political power, legitimacy and violence, they only have violence and therefore they must take full advantage of violence. And for easy repression, the ruling group must be strong and, on the contrary, the masses must be weak. Exploitation and injustice must increase because they are in the existential logic of the regime. But this is a suicidal logic, because it makes the regime more and more hated, while, voluntarily or not, the opening of the economy and the spectacular advances of the media and transport have also completely changed people, society and balance of forces. People are no longer completely dependent on the government for their daily material needs, in the same time they are informed enough to know the mediocrity and the insincerity of those in power. They also have modern means to communicate, motivate and coordinate with each other. These absurd regimes have survived thanks to the feeble passivity of the intellectuals, but nowadays understanding has been popularized, a new contingent of intellectuals has engaged. The change must come, and has come. The fourth wave of democracy is rising.

In East Asia, it has transformed formal democracies in Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines into substantive democracies, creating a sudden shift in Myanmar.

In Latin America, it has strengthened young democracies, provided a worthy place and voice for indigenous peoples and gradually forced Cuba to open. In North Africa and Middle East, it has

brought down three long-standing dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and is forcing the remaining dictatorships to choose between democratization or collapse. Here, it also addresses an issue of world importance, which is bringing Islam out of politics, to return to the right position of a religion.

In the United States and other developed democracies, it requires a healthier degree of democracy, more solidarity, giving priority to productive activities that create jobs rather than speculation, respect of the environment, individuals and personal choices. A clean environment, clean water and fresh air are considered to be a fundamental component of human rights.

This new democratic wave is also harassing the false democracy in Russia and two remaining communist regimes in Vietnam and China, where the two communist parties have turned into two exploitative classes, living separated from the angry masses. In addition, the Chinese and Vietnamese governments will be in great trouble because the export-based economic policy is no longer adapted to the post-crisis economic order.

The most prominent feature of the present world is that the balance of forces has changed, the remaining dictatorships are no longer a threat to the democratic countries. They are all backward in terms of science and technology, completely naked in political ideology, they do not have even an illusion to cheat, they are inferior to democratic countries in terms of military strength and their economic weight is lower than 15% of the world economy. The democratic world does not need, nor fear dictatorships anymore. An important change in the world context is the metamorphosis of the United Nations. The main mission of the United Nations since its founding was to ease tensions so that the cold war would not become a real war. That mission is now accomplished, the United Nations must find a new mission to continue to have a reason to exist. After a period of fumbling, it is increasingly asserted that the new mission is to promote universal values whose core is human rights and to impose a democratic order. The era of pragmatic doctrine in foreign affairs - meaning a forced cohabitation and economic cooperation with tyrannical regimes to save peace - has ended. Moreover, with a few unimportant exceptions, the remaining dictatorships are heavily dependent on foreign trade and dare not challenge the democratic world. They are living the last difficult days.

The fourth democratic wave will continue to get stronger and it will only be completed after putting an end to the last one-party regimes and leading to the separation between religion and politics in the Islamic countries.

We are standing in front of a very favorable opportunity to democratize the country.

This fourth democratic wave will impose democracy on every nation. Then each nation will have to address two issues: on one hand, identify its own roadmap to understand its own challenges and hopes in a globalized world; on the other hand, continually evaluating its own democracy to improve it; because the characteristic of democracy, understood as a mode of social organization, is the capacity and the need to continually improve.

Along with this democratic wave, the world is completing a major transformation to enter a new era. This is an era based on the values that created the strength of the advanced countries: peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, equality, the rule of law, dialogue, cooperation, profit, environment and solidarity. The cultural, artistic, scientific, technical and economic achievements determine the position and honor (or shame) of the nations, provided they have stable and healthy democratic institutions to continue to exist. Education and training will be the new world war and the existential fight for all nations.

For the time being, world leadership still predominantly belongs to the United States and Western Europe, but the multipolar trend will become stronger. Japan has succeeded in its difficult transition, from a traditional Japan using modern technology to a truly modern Japan in every respect; it has begun a new era of healthy growth and it will play a more and more important role. Many countries, such as Russia, China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Korea, will have an increasingly important voice and weight in the world's major problems. In the near future, an important part of the leadership role will shift to the Pacific region in which China and Russia, if they successfully transform into democracies, will also rise to play an important and leading role. The rankings may change, the alliances will also change, but the rules of the game will not change because the base values will not change. In this game, the deciding weapon is creativity to have outstanding achievements. But creativity only arises and develops with free people, in democratic societies. The upcoming race between the nations will be the competition to organize national spaces having, at the same time, the highest level of knowledge, skills, freedom, solidarity, discipline, dynamism and creativity. The nations that do not understand the rules of this game, or are hesitant to quickly adapt to the new values, must expect a very dark future.

## **2. The United States, China and the Pacific region**

The outstanding characteristic of the world today is still the overwhelming role of the United States.

Although its relative weight has decreased and will continue to naturally decline in a world where more and more nations are rising up or see the way to rise up, the United States are still a superior power in every aspect, especially for their military power; they are also the most creative power with the most potential to move forward, so their supremacy will last well into this century. Within decades, it will be difficult to solve any important international problem without the agreement of the United States. The United States are therefore a world problem, and each nation, voluntarily or not, has its own American problem. The good news is that, together with their unrivaled power, the United States have also proved to be a great power which actively brings democratic and human rights issues into their foreign policy. Worryingly, Americans are less interested in understanding the world and they often choose their leaders and the major orientations on nearly pure internal criteria, sometimes on short-term economic interests. However, with their power being more and more challenged in a globalized world, the Americans are gradually realizing that they can only be safe in a democratic world. Therefore, their active protection of the democratic values and human rights can only increase from now on.

But, if the world has its American problem, the Southeast Asian countries also have their Chinese problem. Thanks to the exchanges with the developed democratic countries, China has strengthened economically, and thanks to it, has significantly increased its military power. The worrying problem is that, though China has strengthened, up to now, China is a totalitarian regime that blatantly denies democratic values and human rights; moreover, it appears willing to use its military power for a regional hegemonic policy. Asia is today the region in the world with the most war threats in a large scale. The fact that China has both increased its military power and revealed some hegemonic ambitions has made the world, especially countries in the Asia-Pacific region, worried. Concern for China has been the cause of an expensive and dangerous arms race in the region, exacerbating the situation.

In that situation, Vietnam, the country having the most litigations with China, is also a country with no financial capacity to renovate weapons and enhance combat capability of air force and naval force, the two core forces in this era. Therefore, a wise and obligatory defense policy for our country is a commitment to democratization to fully integrate into the democratic world and to be protected by democratic countries in accordance with international law, and in the same time, to gain back the sympathy and solidarity of two neighboring countries, Cambodia and Laos, which are bribed by China in its strategy of encircling and controlling Vietnam. It is also a condition for us to live in peace and friendship with China.

However, the prospect of the future is not entirely dark. The fact that, although China is not yet a rich country – output per capita is still below the world average –, it has unusually increased its military expenses and its provocative actions, is creating a global concern towards China, with the risk to become an anti-China movement; this forces China to reconsider itself if it does not want to be isolated. There are already some indications that the Chinese people and some leaders began to be aware of the danger of a regional hegemony policy that China should not and is not able to follow. We have reasons to hope that China will shift its direction toward a policy that is more beneficial to the world and to itself. Another reason is that Japan, which is stronger than China in all aspects, is strengthening and affirming its capacity and its will to contribute to the protection of the democratic order and international law in the region.

But the world's (and our) biggest concern is what is about to happen in China. The Chinese communist regime has chosen a wild growth model, regardless of people and environment; it has accumulated enough contradictions for a major crisis. In recent years, while the whole world has been in crisis, China has hidden its difficulties by increasing credit and public expenses to maintain an artificial growth. This adventurous policy may temporarily postpone the crisis, but it will make it more serious when it can no longer be delayed. The signs of China's crisis are becoming evident and this crisis can be very tragic and last a long time, possibly even breaking up China in violence. On the other hand, the aspirations for democracy have gradually matured among the Chinese people and there is no guarantee that China will survive with its current territory and population after the mandatory (and not delayable) transition to democracy, because China's unity has only been maintained by violence so far. The world may not need to worry that China will raise war to resolve internal conflicts in troubled circumstances. Because of its structure, as shown by history, China has only shown aggression when it has power, not when it is in trouble. However, due to its population, every tragedy of China is also a tragedy for the world. Vietnam is more vulnerable because we are close to China and we depend on China in many aspects. Moreover, we are facing the risk of a major crisis.

If China is a source of concern, on the contrary, Japan is increasingly becoming a guarantee. Japan has completed a difficult but compulsory transformation from a traditional Japanese society to a truly advanced Japanese society, in tune with the lifestyle and values of advanced Western countries. This transformation has puzzled Japan for nearly three decades because it had to revisit the whole social model, from production structure to worker-company relations, to replace an economy based on effort, production and export by an innovative and quality economy, from applying modern technologies to inventing new technologies. But Japan has succeeded and today it is a true democracy, stable and confident, out of crisis and a world leader in culture, science and technology. Japan has become increasingly assertive and bold in foreign policy to assume the role of an equal US ally in the Pacific region, bringing a decisive contribution to ensure democracy, peace and cooperation in the region.

The new Japanese strength underpins an increasingly strong tendency that the Asia-Pacific region is progressing steadily toward democracy. South Korea and Taiwan, two pioneering democracies in the region, have become advanced countries. With the diversion of democratic Myanmar becoming a consensus of ASEAN, the Vietnamese communist regime is becoming the only anti-democracy country in the bloc and it will quickly be isolated if it does not adapt in time.

In addition, one must mention the strong rise of India, the most populous democracy today and soon the most populous country in the world. India is increasing its presence throughout the world and in the region. This presence stimulates a democratic tendency and can only benefit peace and cooperation.

### **3. Globalization threatens every nation**

The phenomenon that we should be aware properly is the global degradation of the concept of nation. Many countries are broken without being invaded, broken in chaos, like in many African countries, or broken into small ones, like Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Ethiopia. The integrity of many democratic and prosperous countries, such as Canada, Britain and Belgium, is more or less threatened.

The concept of nation is attacked from all sides. From the outside due to regional associations that promise a larger operating space than the national space, from the inside by ethnic communities claiming autonomy, and from both inside and outside by multinational companies and unceasing trade at increasing speed. Modern means of transportation and communication have also made the earth smaller and brought people closer.

The current dominant trend is globalization. Capital no longer has a fatherland. Big companies seek investment opportunities around the world and make plans of production, marketing and distribution on a global scale. In an effort to find larger weight and area of activity, companies increasingly merge to create corporations of mighty stature. Many corporations have assets larger than the sum of GNPs of many countries. In a peaceful world, economic power is already by itself the most important power, but it can also encroach on political power. The emergence of giant multinationals is an increasing challenge for the nations and for the idea of nation itself. Trade rules are quickly agreed upon and applied to the world. Human rights are increasingly recognized as universal, considered as the first step of international law and placed above the laws of the nations. Communication networks, especially the Internet, allow people who are far away to communicate and work directly with each other. A person can work for an agency at the other end of the earth. The distance is disappearing. Virtual presence is becoming real and equally effective as physical presence. A citizen may permanently reside abroad and still serve his country on a permanent and regular basis as a person in the home country. A whole "virtual world" has formed with an increasing importance. Right now, the cultural, scientific, technical, financial and commercial exchanges in this virtual world, over the Internet, are already very important. In a near future, this virtual world will overwhelm the real world, turning the real world into one of its manifestations.

This great transformation – delightful in nature – increasingly makes each one a person of the world before being a citizen of a country. The idea of nation is relativized. The nation is no longer a sacred goal but it must be a condition to build happiness for the people and for each individual. In the context of the present and upcoming world, a nation which is not conceived as a sentiment,

a consensus, a common project and a space of solidarity, will not last long. A country that does not guarantee security and dignity, does not bring welfare and pride to the people, will surely disintegrate; it will disintegrate more quickly and tragically if the national border is considered as a wall to discourage progressive values and provide a safe operating zone for tyrannical juntas. In this new era, we must be conscious that the ruling juntas, lacking culture and vision, are disasters for the survival of the nations. The tyrannical dictatorships kill the nations, the worse and the crueler they are, the quicker they will kill the nations.

#### **4. Ideological alliances replaced by development partnerships**

The collapse of communism has ended the ideological debate. Democracy and human rights have been recognized as universal values that even the remaining dictatorships only argue awkwardly to delay rather than deny. Therefore, the ideological alliances have no longer a reason to exist. Instead, more and more cooperative alliances have emerged, most notably regional associations. The world is gradually divided into a number of large geographic blocs in which countries compete with each other, and in the same time, rely on each other in competition with the rest of the world. Within these blocs national borders and customs barriers are increasingly blurred, the movement of people, goods and ideas is increasingly easy. The distinction between diplomacy and foreign trade is more and more difficult to define. Countries look for opportunities, based on geographical, religious, linguistic, production-like reasons, to tie up relations, to create cooperative relationships and to form alliances. In today's world, isolation means death. Countries that do not want, or cannot join or cannot activate these cooperative relationships are considered desperate, because they are marginalized from the activities of an interdependent world. The common rule of the game of these assemblies increasingly includes respect for democratic values, such as rightful and respected laws, independent labor unions, the state's non-interference in corporate governance, freedom of information, freedom of movement, transparency, fair competition between companies. Automatically, these associations impose a democratic order. With the bankruptcy of pragmatist doctrine, the capacity to participate and activate these cooperative alliances will increasingly depend on the respect and expression of universal values of humanity. The remaining tyrannical regimes will be increasingly isolated.

#### **5. Developing countries and the new world context**

Rise or fall is the fate of backward nations. The backward countries that do not understand this will surely disappear. Rising is vital but it is also a path full of thorns and traps.

We can foresee that, before going to competition in all aspects, the world will undergo a fairly long transition period in which, in general, the newly developed countries will produce most of goods, widgets and semi-finished products while the high level developed countries will provide the majority of capital, services, high quality goods and manufacturing equipment. Therefore, for the less developed countries, within a few decades, the toughest competition will be a competition with each other. This competition will be very difficult for the least developed, or the countries which do not adapt very quickly to the situation.

The first threat is the fierce competition for investments that can turn poor countries into hostages and victims of large multinational companies. There will always be countries that accept easier conditions to attract investment capital: low wages, hard and insecure labor conditions, lax environmental standards, etc.

The situation is more difficult because the cascading and important progress in automation, microelectronics and informatics is leading to an increasing trend of automation, hence cheap labor is no longer a single factor convincing enough to attract investment; the less developed countries are losing a strategic weapon. Moreover, after the recent crisis which began in 2008 and has not yet ended, the rich and strong countries have also made efforts to, on one hand, keep investments in their home countries and, on the other hand, limit imports and maintain trade balance. Stable politics, a not corrupted government, honest people, a peaceful society, a guaranteed order, simple laws, low taxes, favorable geographical conditions, a large consumer market, skilled and efficient human resources are the strategic weapons required to attract international investment. These are usually factors that underdeveloped countries have difficulty to possess. In such difficult conditions, sacrifices must be shared in the most equitable manner, the nation must be perceived by the people as a sentiment, a solidarity space and a shared future project in order to be accepted. Otherwise, the elite which has required the most expensive investments in education and training will seek to move to developed countries. Therefore, the prerequisite is to have leaders who are truly patriotic, talented, ethical, with large knowledge and foresight, deep national sentiments and capable of persuading people to accept the necessary efforts, meaning better than leaders of the advanced countries.

In contrast, the new world context also has advantages that the less developed countries can benefit.

First, the dictatorial regimes, whether public or disguised, will no longer be tolerated because of ideological alliances and will be overthrown. The peoples will be untied, energies will be released, the nations will be managed more appropriately, even after a period of fumbling. From now on, they will have the main weapon that helped many nations surpass the rest of the world: democracy. The elimination of dictatorial regimes is a huge chance for the less developed countries. Experience has shown that all dictatorships are toxic. Under the guise of giving priority to economic development, maintaining discipline and order, dictatorial regimes are merely hideout of corruption and abuse of power, allowing gangs of degenerate thugs to maintain grip on people, preventing all progress and cracking down the countries. Eliminating tyrannical regimes is much easier than before, but it is something that the less advanced nations must achieve quickly in this vital struggle.

Secondly, economy becomes the top priority of every nation. The fierce competition between the rich and powerful countries, in a world where the ranking changes constantly, encourages the big companies and the developed countries to constantly search for new markets and new investment opportunities. The less developed countries, if they can create a stable social context, favorable economic conditions, if they are not condemned and isolated, will be able to find very profitable sources of cooperation.

Third, due to advances in communications and transportation, a growing population, the world has become smaller and nations are from now on interdependent. A new consciousness is born, whereby the earth is the common homeland of all humanity. Every nation feels the need to live in a world without threat. The richer and more developed nations are, the more they feel the need to guarantee their achievements by contributing to a peaceful and stable world. Therefore,



whether they want it or not, the rich and strong countries cannot let other countries live in poverty. This is not only a humanitarian obligation; it is also due to an intimate interdependency. A concrete example is the environmental issue. Chernobyl was not a disaster for Ukraine only. The chimneys in China do not pollute only China's space, therefore it is not only a problem for China, but a problem for the whole world. The destruction of Amazon forests is not a Brazilian problem alone. The pollution of a country's waters is a problem for many countries. Another example is the migration movement from poor countries to rich countries, which poses a range of difficult problems for rich countries. This interdependence forces the developed countries to create the conditions to help the less advanced countries to get opportunities for development. This assistance, even though it comes first from the aspirations of the developed countries to live in a world with less dangers, is also a chance for less advanced countries to rise up.

Fourth, the demands for happiness and comfort of the developed nations increase quickly, somewhat faster than their economic development. The number of working hours is decreasing, wages are increasing, the proportion of elderly and retired people is increasing; public spending on society, culture, arts, health and comfort will increase, leading to tax increase. Of course, new inventions will constantly appear to lower down prices and improve quality, but in today's media world, if these inventions appear in developed countries, they will soon be popularized in other countries. As a result, cost prices, profit margins and reinvested portions of GDP are generally less favorable in countries with high living standards than in developing ones. In this situation, the people in less developed countries, because of less demand for comfort and consumption, will be able to accept more sacrifices and efforts; therefore, they may compete effectively with the developed countries, provided that these sacrifices and efforts are equally divided to avoid conflict.

### III. Vietnam facing a big turning point in history

Our nation is facing one of the greatest challenges since its founding, but at the same time, the prospect of getting rid of the yoke of dictatorship and opening up the era of democracy is unprecedented.

#### 1. The challenges

In a favorable international context, our situation is tragic and the future of Vietnam is very uncertain.

We have missed the takeoff phase. When a slow-moving country starts to rise thanks to its integration into the world economy, the success or failure depends on its capacity to create a true class of entrepreneurs who are honest, knowledgeable and daring. The undeniable fact is that the so called 'renewal' policy, i.e., economically open but still politically closed, has only created, in the overwhelming majority, businessmen with faked wealth through power corruption and illicit business. We are also losing the advantage of young population; the number of working age population has stopped and began to decline.

We are moving into isolation. Although in principle our country has normal relations with all countries and has been a member of ASEAN and many regional associations, the stubborn maintenance of a totalitarian dictatorship in the name of a doctrine condemned as a crime, flagrant violations of human rights and civil rights, bureaucracy and corruption, rejection of necessary reforms, coarse manners in international affairs, blatant and excessive dependency to China, are placing Vietnam in danger of great isolation if it does not change direction in time. Vietnam is absent from almost all major cooperation programs and has only a negligible presence in important international markets.

Although Vietnam's foreign trade is not significant in terms of objective stature, it has an overwhelming role in the national economy, weighting nearly twice our GDP, making us heavily dependent on the world context. Investment flourished strongly after Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), creating confidence in an honest integration into the world, but soon after that, it has dropped continuously – as a result of increased repression and corruption that disappoint investors – while other countries are constantly taking every initiative to attract international capital, based on their existing advantages. We have lost a great opportunity and are on the verge of a serious crisis.

The industry that has been clumsily managed is also subject to the illicit competition of tax-fraud imported goods, mainly from China. Most of the production equipment is obsolete, including the equipment recently purchased by corrupted officials. State-owned enterprises, which are considered to be the main drivers of the economic activity and are given the majority of the investments, are also diseased ones; most of them are controlled by leaders who are both incompetent and dishonest, nominated on criteria of party, corruption and share.

We are lagging behind dramatically in both quantity and quality. Our average annual output per capita today, in 2015, is just about 1500 USD, which is 15%, or one seventh of the world average.

Moreover, national wealth is distributed in an extremely unfair way, most of our people live in extreme poverty. The low national income and the irresponsibility have led the authorities to abandon education, infrastructure, production equipment and even minimal hygiene and health concerns for the people. Education and training, too depressed, are completely incapable of preparing youth for the competition with the world. The situation of the vast majority of Vietnamese hospitals is a shame and a crime.

We must look to the truth and acknowledge a painful reality: we are a lost and deadlocked country. Although we are the 15<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world, we do not have any scientific or technical achievement, no invention, no international stature company, no literary or artistic work, even no sports accomplishment known to the world. We are now an insignificant country. Vietnamese people are not only poor, we have no reason to be proud. And we are also one of the last nations in the world still suffering from totalitarian yoke and denial of basic human rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom to vote and stand for election, even freedom to own land. Millions of people are unjustly robbed of their land and are resentfully languishing.

Our social fabric has been torn apart by the prolonged and catastrophic civil wars, the intolerance and hatred that these wars have produced, the discriminatory policies of the communist party during a long period, the evident gap between the rich and the poor and the general suspicion of the people for the basic values of any society; it is even more tattered due to the powerless resentment in front of a brutal government ruling as an occupation force.

At the same time, the nation's most valuable resource, its people, is also dramatically degraded. People's health is depressed due to lack of nutrition, medicine and care. Dangerous infectious diseases spread alarmingly without preventive measures. Teenagers quit school massively. National intellect is seriously reduced with the dramatic degradation of the education system. Drug addiction, prostitution, robbery are on the rise. The difficult life in a depraved society keeps people increasingly away from the essential values of every country: morality, honesty, truthfulness, hard work, discipline, etc. Lies and scams become the foundation of social relations.

In such a dire situation, three particularly serious and urgent dangers are standing out.

First of all is corruption. Both the people and the authorities agree that corruption is a national calamity and an internal invader devastating the country, but perhaps we are not fully conscious of its toxicity and the society has the tendency to accept living with it as a destiny. It is becoming a rule of the game and an institution. But corruption must not be tolerated. It spoils everything. It places unworthy people in important positions, handing over large projects to fraudulent interest groups. It breaks the rules of the market, it transforms people into thugs and it turns social relations into a cheating competition. It eliminates knowledge, research and creativity. It makes all public, private projects and plans senseless and useless. It damages both the environment and the infrastructure by hiding pollution and allowing insidious construction and maintenance works. An example is the Central Highlands bauxite project and the decision to massively build nuclear power stations; both projects are uneconomical and moreover, they threaten the life of the country but they are still imposed because of great benefit to corrupted leaders. Another example is the rapid deterioration of the road and bridge system, though recently built. It even threatens national security because, if money can buy everything, it is not surprising if many senior officials in the state apparatus are in fact foreign insiders. At its current level, corruption breaks down the country, and in the same time, it threatens security and

sovereignty, and it makes the concept of nation senseless. If it is not stopped, it will quickly destroy the country.

The second serious threat is the environment. Over the past few decades, we have witnessed an extremely serious tragedy in our history: the rapid destruction of the very foundations of the country. Trees are cut down, beaches, rivers and waterways are heavily polluted, the land becomes sterile, floods are followed by drought. Water is no longer potable, air is unbreathable. Not to mention the piles of stinking garbage, clogged sewers. City people have to wear masks in the street and become strangers to each other. Pollution has reached the level of health devastation causing tragedy for everyone, especially the poor, that is, the majority of the people. It also has a great health cost, it reduces labor productivity and it can keep tourists away, and make the world boycotting our food. This is a terrible disaster to stop immediately. With a population density of one thousand people per square kilometer of habitable land, we have no choice but to make a clean environment a national priority. The country is first of all land and water; if the country is sterile and so polluted that we can no longer live, then there is nothing to say to each other.

The country has not only been destroyed but it has been sold, many lands of strategic economic value are in the hands of foreigners, many watershed forests have been long-term leased and in fact are controlled by a foreign country.

The third serious threat, at the same time a national shame, is an excessive dependence on China. Presently, we no longer have sovereignty. The Vietnam-China joint statement on June 21, 2013 shows that the communist government has signed many veiled agreements that put Vietnam under Chinese control, such as accepting joint exploration of oil and gas (in fact, letting China explore oil and gas in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone), letting China train Vietnamese military and police officers. Even more serious is the commitment to consult China – that is, to receive instructions from China – in foreign relations. Vietnam is no longer sovereign; this is unacceptable for the Vietnamese people.

This dependence is not only shameful, but also dangerous. The Chinese since ancient times always viewed the neighboring nations, including Vietnam, with the eyes of the superior; they considered Vietnam as a vassal. With the culture of peasants longing for land, their traditional policy towards neighboring countries is that of annexation, by violence or by emigration. Accepting dependence on China means accepting annexation, that our ancestors fought against for thousands of years and poured so much blood to preserve the country.

Escaping China is also a mandatory condition for our country to rise. We need to get rid of Confucian culture, a culture of slavery and intellectual alienation that we have shared for thousands of years with Chinese people and that the Chinese government is trying to rehabilitate. We have a lot to learn from the world, but we can only learn all that properly, thoroughly and quickly with other nations. China is like us, but more developed than us; they have everything that we can produce, but more and cheaper. That is why Vietnam is now on many aspects becoming an export port of Chinese goods bearing the label 'Made in Vietnam', making trade deficit with China worse and worse.

Finally, China is becoming increasingly isolated. Dependence on China means risking to be isolated with China. The world is increasingly recognizing China as a threat that needs to be stopped. This containment policy will likely cause China to decline because the Chinese economy is heavily dependent on foreign trade. On the other hand, economic growth is the only

justification of the Beijing regime, economic slowdown also means that the regime will falter. Like it or not, it will no longer be possible to count on China.

In general, the country is in great danger; but the communist government, instead of putting all efforts to save the country, has the only purpose of retaining power at all costs, in the name of a doctrine that has been condemned by the world as a crime and is considered by the Vietnamese people to be the cause of the current tragedy. The communist state has failed in every way and in all aspects, but it continues to rule as a provocation to the people; moreover, it affirms its determination to keep political monopoly indefinitely. The insolence has culminated with the 2013 constitution, which specifies that the armed forces must be absolutely loyal to the Vietnamese communist party, even before the Vietnamese state. The communist regime is thus a daily provocation to the people and a disaster. The disaster lasted so long that the people, powerless and disgusted, not only hated the government but also gradually lost faith in the nation. Each person wriggles to find personal answers to personal problems. The dream of many Vietnamese today is to leave Vietnam and become a citizen of another country. The state gradually lost its monopoly on violence for the benefit of gangster gangs and outlaw societies, and it increasingly lost its monopoly on tax collection due to smuggling and corruption. We are progressing towards national dissolution. We have to scream the alarm. If this momentum continues, the idea of nation will lose its content, separatist and autonomy intentions will appear and grow, foreign forces will increasingly be more inclined to overthrow us, in a world in which the concept of nation is being questioned. The survival of the country itself is increasingly uncertain.

The danger of loss of the country has never been so big. It can be due to the loss of sovereignty, loss of national identity and especially slow adaptation to a world of rapid change. The scenario of loss is the inferiority, lack of both sovereignty and human rights, that make the idea of Vietnam losing gradually its content and becoming boring; the will and pride to be Vietnamese gradually disappear, the country dissolves in the hearts before its real dissolution.

## 2. Prospects

Our country is in danger but not in despair. Democracy is near and we still have good fundamentals that we can and should use in the revival effort once the country is democratic.

We have a homogenous language that is easy to learn and quite complete to transport all cultural, scientific and technical knowledge. And we are not caught up in an overwhelming religion.

We have a fairly large population, nearly 100 million, 15<sup>th</sup> in the world. This large population is a great obstacle for the effort to improve living standards, but it is also a strength thanks to the important location of our country and because the Vietnamese are naturally industrious above average. In the past, we have demonstrated the ability to quickly acquire the latest sciences and technologies; numerous Vietnamese students have been successful in many difficult contests in every country; Vietnamese workers are quick learners and are appreciated. The emigrated Vietnamese have also shown an excellent ability to adapt to completely new living conditions. We can say we are a fairly intelligent people. Such a capital, even if it is eroded – and indeed it has declined – cannot go away within a generation or two. If a logical social organization is found, Vietnamese people can recover. And once Vietnamese have recovered, we will have a powerful human resource. In the effort to rise, once the country has democracy to be logically organized, we can also exploit the great potential of millions of young people who graduated from

universities and colleges but have not yet had opportunity to contribute. Although young population is no longer an advantage of Vietnam, young and trained human resources are still abundant.

Throughout its difficult history, the Vietnamese have expressed the earnest desire to defend the country, to live together and to share a common future. The patriotism of the Vietnamese, despite its decline due to disappointment and frustration, can still be restored. The Vietnamese have shown an extraordinary vitality and have won many tough challenges. We still have enough strength to overcome today's challenges and to rise if we recompose in time.

We have a favorable geography. Although our land is narrow, it is fertile; our agriculture, if properly operated, will not only be able to produce enough food for the people, but also to export. Our coast is long and beautiful, our country is close to many important traffic axes, in the middle of a strong developing region with all prospects to become a major strategic economic center of the world. We have the potential of a great country for tourism, industry and commerce. The wave of democracy rising across the world, including Southeast Asian countries, is also a new positive element, creating an increasingly healthy and civilized context, an urging factor for the Vietnamese.

We are living a change of mindset full of hope. The fierce wars, destructive for the country, have made the Vietnamese aware of the harmful effect of violence. We have reached a consensus that peace is the most valuable of all values, and that civil war is the greatest disaster. The experience of successive insincere dictatorships also has given us deep faith in freedom and democracy. We have also ended our debates on economic model to assess that only a market economy based on competition and individual initiative can succeed. Our joint indignation in front of a greedy government have made us forget the past conflicts and understand the necessity of reconciliation and unity to get rid of tyranny, to solve common problems and to build a shared future. We have also understood in our brain, our heart, our skin and flesh, the tragic consequences of hatred and division. On many basic points, Vietnamese intelligence has been liberated.

The most important reason for us to be strongly confident is that almost all problems, including the most serious ones, are ones that should not exist. They are all due to the communist regime and so will have a quick solution once the communist regime has ended.

So, our core problem is the end of this regime. But even the parameters of this thorny problem have changed.

The communist party is divided. It has no longer a common ideal to unite party members. In addition, corruption, incompetence and immorality also cause jealousy and contempt for each other throughout the party, even at the highest level. The Politburo no longer has supreme leadership because of conflicts with the central committee, a non-permanent institution that has ultimate authority in appointing and disciplining leaders at all levels. The communist party is only a fiction. The regime is like a ship without crew and is transforming from party dictatorship to individual dictatorship. This transformation is taking place in very adverse conditions: the party is polarized, the people hate it while it has no charismatic figure. This situation can only lead to collapse. In Asian history, there are often two main reasons leading to the collapse of regimes. First, until it is in contact with the West, because the ruling class plundered too much, especially stealing the land of the people; second, after interacting with the West, the regime stubbornly pursued an outdated ideology. The Vietnamese communist regime has both of these elements. It cannot survive.

This regime has lasted so far for two reasons:

The first reason is the pragmatic doctrine that the powers, especially the United States, pursued for nearly twenty years since the mid-1990s; it nurtured the remaining dictatorships, especially China and Vietnam. But the pragmatic doctrine has gone bankrupt and is dismissed, democratic values and human rights have gained a deserved priority.

The second reason, also the main reason, is that Vietnamese intellectuals did not undertake their functions and responsibilities to guide the masses. Due to the cultural and historical heritage, they lacked a heart to suffer, the intellect to know, the courage to fight, or they have taken too seriously the given situations and benefits. But the old intellectual class is gone, a new intellectual class has joined, including a category of intellectuals which did not exist in Vietnamese history: political intellectuals. These young people are more knowledgeable than the older generations and they have no illusion about the communist doctrine and the communist regime. They no longer twist to reform the regime; they have understood that it must end. They dare to do, decide to do and know how to do; they are discovering that they must work together in a team; they have understood that political struggle is never an individual struggle, but always an organized struggle. The country is about to change because it has changed skin.

So far, a common characteristic of tyrannical dictatorships is that they often appear to be very solid until a sudden collapse. The reason is because their stubbornness and brutality require a break point, where the quantity changes have accumulated enough to create a qualitative change. This breakpoint is approaching, thanks to the new democratic wave, the increasing number of the new political intellectuals and the ever-clearer awareness, especially within the police and the army, that the regime cannot last longer; one should contribute instead of obstructing the democratic process, to be the actor instead of the victim of a necessary, mandatory and imminent transformation. The time of democracy may be very close. Especially if the democrats know how to gain trust and participation of the people, with a pure and generous sentiment, rational methods of fighting and a right project to rebuild and promote the country.

## **IV. Basic ideas for our coming democratic era**

The time of systems of thoughts and ideology has ended. From now on, there is no truth that cannot be questioned. Nevertheless, at each stage, a political rally still needs to agree on some fundamental affirmations.

Amidst the dramatic changes that require diverse and complex policies and measures to adapt to the situation, everyone needs to master the fundamental choices that do not change and explain the reason of measures and policies. It is the condition for the country not to lose direction and for the people to understand and contribute consciously to national efforts. We have a large population and we have to face many serious, thorny and urgent problems; our work is certainly very complicated. It is this complexity that requires political organizations to make directional choices, understood in a sense that is neither a doctrine nor an ideology; they are not very complex theories, they are simple ideas which are considered to be correct and which are the foundations for the policies and measures over a fairly long period.

The basic consensus of the Rally for Democracy and Pluralism consists of the following five points: the country must be conceived as a sentiment, a space of solidarity and a shared future; the political institution for Vietnam is pluralistic democracy; the guiding spirit in the effort to rebuild the country is national reconciliation; the organization of the Vietnamese society must really express the progressive values; economic development must be based on market economy and individual initiatives.

### **1. The nation: a space of solidarity and a common future project**

Vietnam has been formed for thousands of years and has more than two thousand years of history. However, like all other countries, we have only known recently the concept of nation, understood in the sense of an entity owned by everyone. The reason is because the concept of nation is a very new concept, born with democracy.

Until the concept of democracy was born, kingdoms belonged only to kings. The territory as well as the people belonged to the king and were placed under the exclusive and absolute decision of the king. Land and the people can arbitrarily change owners depending on the transfer between kings. In that context, there cannot be any true nations. The natural attachment to the land of ancestors and acquaintances is not yet national spirit or patriotism. The people do not have any right in the country and therefore do not have any responsibility toward the country. The idea of democracy has turned kingdoms into nations and has been the foundation for a state, or government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Different from the kingdoms that gradually formed over time, the nation is an entity consisting of a territory, a government, a historical cultural heritage and equal-rights people attached to that territory, accepting that government, sharing that historical and cultural heritage, and most importantly, accepting to build and share a common future. The nation is above everyone and common to everyone.

Along with the concept of nation as an entity belonging to everyone and to each one, a sense of community has arisen that each person alone cannot completely solve his or her problems; on



the contrary, the success or failure of each person also depends on a country that, from now, he/she has the duty, the benefit and the authority to contribute to protect and promote. This community consciousness in turn creates patriotism, a love for those close to us who accompany us strive alongside us. This patriotism cannot be confused with the xenophobic spirit of narrow nationalism.

The democratic state, based on the idea of nation, has been the greatest progress of mankind in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. These state-nations, because they were organized to encourage and accept free and voluntary contribution of all people, have unleashed the vitality, ideas and initiatives of the entire people, has promoted all scientific, technological, philosophical, cultural and artistic progress and made the Western countries go far beyond the rest of the world. The main reason why Western countries have suddenly risen to power is the discovery of the concept of nation.

Luckier than many other people, Vietnamese people have a long and stable tradition of living together due to special geographical conditions. Our long-standing land, the north of Vietnam, is surrounded and protected by thick cliffs to the north and the west, leaning against the sea to the east. Thanks to that isolation, our borders and human structure have not changed much over the centuries. Consequently, the sense of community and the attachment to the ancestral homeland were very strong; they were the foundations for a strong national consciousness. But due to the lack of political thought, we only lately knew the idea of nation as an entity belonging to all people. We only knew the idea of nation at the time of being dominated by foreigners. From then on, we have continuously endured wars – mostly civil wars – and dictatorial regimes. We have never had democracy, the fundamental element of the nation, therefore we have not yet built a true nation and not mobilized the true power of the people.

If nation-states have been the cause of the power and prosperity of the European and American countries, their absence explains the weakness and the sufferings of many countries, including us.

Nation-states are strong and provide great benefits because they have been conceived correctly. The nation belongs to everyone and is above all. The state, or the government, has only the mission to serve the nation, so it must be within and below it. The state is not the final goal, it is only a tool; therefore, it only needs to be built and maintained at the required level. Only the nation is the end, and the nation is first and foremost a community of free and equal citizens.

The state does not have its own interests, but only the interests of the nation, while the interests of the nation are determined by the entire people after a proper conclusion of personal opinions expressed freely. Basically, the nation-state is the instrument to materialize the consensus on building a shared future of free people. That is why that state must on the one hand encourages everyone's contribution and on the other hand ensures that people maximize their capabilities and contribution to the common good.

We, like many other unfortunate nations, have been so far weak and outdone because we do not have such states. In contrast, so far, we only have a state belonging to a ruling junta instead of belonging to everyone. Those states have their own interests and only know their own interests, so their only concern is keeping power at all costs, even if they cause great losses to the people. These states dominate instead of serving the nation, they treat people as objects to be controlled and used instead of persons to protect and serve.

We are currently facing a particularly serious situation because we have not yet built a true nation while the concept of nation is being revised and overcome. Thus, we must at the same time, quickly build a true nation, and be on time with the future, that is, building the Vietnamese nation in the sense that it will have.

Due to the explosion of means of transport and communication, together with the intensive exchanges and the expansion of new ideas, the relative weights of the traditional structural elements of the national spirit have changed.

The sense of safety in the intimacy, the fear of the strange and the strangers, the blood ties, the ties to traditional history and culture, the attachment to a familiar land, the comfort in the contact with people sharing the same habits and lifestyle, etc. all this become increasingly unimportant in a world that allows direct and immediate exchange, including working together, between people at the ends of the globe, in which people move and interact regularly, and receive daily various information, images and opinions. The earth is now the small homeland of all mankind and personal happiness has become the highest value. The traditional sentiments that contributed to the national spirit are increasingly revealing their conservatism and narrowness.

On the other hand, the role and position of the nation are also attacked from all sides. From the outside, with the regional associations creating a larger operating space; from the inside, due to the demands of individuals and ethnic communities; and from both inside and outside due to the rapid expansion of multinational companies whose role and weight are increasing.

In this context, the reasons that bind people to the country must, of course, change and in fact have changed. People are only bound to the country for at least one of three reasons: because the country guarantees special protection and benefit, because it gives a source of pride, or simply because the country is theirs.

In the elements that make up a nation, the territory has no longer an absolute value; one can love his/her country and contribute wherever he/she lives. Historical, cultural and linguistic heritage have also diminished in importance. The government is also not important. The idea of a sacred fatherland that everyone must submit to, honor and serve unconditionally is even more obsolete. The remaining elements, the people and a common project for the future, are of increasing importance.

Thus, a nation can only exist if it is perceived, not as a race or a past, but as a space of solidarity between people who understand each other, value each other and cooperate to build and share a common future. Such a nation is primarily a civil society with its memory, its problems to solve and its future plans. The state is within and below the nation with the mission of serving the nation, so it plays the role of serving, not controlling, civil society.

Such a country still has the ability to bind the Vietnamese people to each other and is still essential for everyone; it is also a favorable environment for cooperation. That country will benefit everyone because it will be a natural development environment for each person. That country will be a source of support for all of us to build our lives, and in the same time, to build together a shared pride and increase common welfare. That country will also be a sentimental support for each person to be fully happy. It must belong to everyone and not to any particular force or party.

That is the view of the Rally for Democracy and Pluralism on Vietnam. The Rally for Democracy and Pluralism believes that only such a concept of nation can give Vietnamese people the reason to love their country and build it together, that is, allow Vietnam to exist and rise.

## 2. Pluralistic democracy

In order to escape the current stalemate and integrate into the modern world, to effectively encourage all national energies to strive for a worthy place in the international community, Vietnam has no other political option than a democratic and pluralistic institution.

Pluralistic democracy is not only an obvious choice for Vietnam but also an inevitable direction of progressive mankind.

The toughest debate in the twentieth century has been the debate on democracy. Tens of millions of people around the world have died in the conflicts caused by this controversy. The core issue is how to let the people decide the fate of the country, and many models have been conceived and experimented.

This debate has now ended. Marxism-Leninism and the 'socialist democracy' model it proposed have completely collapsed. The remaining communist regimes are merely pure tyrannical regimes. The democratic model based on personal freedom has won theoretically and also won in practice. The number of democratic countries is overwhelming and is growing rapidly.

Many say that Western-style democracy, which most nations in the world have accepted as true, has naturally pluralism. This is partly true, but the term 'pluralistic democracy' has its own important meaning, especially for the Vietnamese people in the current period. It speaks of a spirit, an attitude and an ideal. It is a spirit of generosity and tolerance, respect for everyone and every opinion. That attitude frankly refutes all forms of totalitarian dictatorship, including, and above all, the bluffed 'democracy' known as 'centralized democracy' or 'socialist democracy' which reserve a unique position to a doctrine and a ruling group. That ideal is to build a country - Vietnam - with a worthy and equal place for everyone.

Multi-party is not yet pluralism if all tendencies are not recognized an equal place. In its most authoritarian and dogmatic days, the Vietnamese communist regime had at times three or four parties, but it was not pluralistic because of that. Multi-party is only a necessary element, but not sufficient, of pluralism. Pluralism is a spirit, while multi-party is just a number.

In the relentless battle with the communist movement, Western countries have taken an extremely bold decision: instead of falling back in a sclerotic self-defense discipline, they maximized the development of their democracy, whose most remarkable characteristic is the respect for all differences in society, and they gradually moved towards pluralistic democracy. Yet many Western capitalist regimes are not yet true pluralistic democracies. Western countries are on different levels of pluralism.

Pluralistic democracy is the integration and application of pluralistic philosophy in political life. The basis of the pluralistic philosophy is the spirit of tolerance, the recognition and respect of all differences in society. Of course, pluralism exists in every society; a fallacious reasoning is that all societies are pluralistic, but the unique thing is that pluralistic philosophy, instead of treating the existence of differences as a reality to recognize and overcome, considered them as natural,

an enrichment to encourage and exploit. It is a style of political life. Pluralistic democracy is democracy but not all democracies are pluralistic democracies.

Pluralistic democracy is a new political system with its obligatory characteristics. We can emphasize five characteristics:

*First:* pluralistic democracy recognizes and respects the equal standing and voice for all people of all social backgrounds, all races, all faiths and all political trends. Pluralistic democracy condemns all discriminations, it strongly opposes the one-party regime. Practically, the constitution of a pluralistic democracy cannot contain any reference to a political party, a doctrine or a religion.

*Second:* in addition to the principle of separation of powers that must exist in every democracy worthy of its name, pluralistic democracy demands decentralization to respect the differences between localities. A government, even coming from free elections, is not a pluralistic democracy if most of the power is concentrated in the hands of the central government. In a pluralistic democracy, local governments, elected by the local people, must have broad statutory rights to organize life in accordance with the context of each region. Each region must have adequate size and population in order to be entities of sufficient stature for self-governance and development. Thus, some causes of conflict will naturally be resolved. Ethnic minorities will gain significant voices in the localities where they are concentrated. Political parties that do not have a majority in national elections can still hold government in the localities where they are trusted. Pluralistic democracy eases the tensions between the government and the opposition, at the central as well as the local levels, and eliminates the source of conflict described in a Vietnamese proverb: 'the winner is king, the loser is rebel'. Decentralization has the consequence that the central government does not rule directly; it only undertakes the missions of national defense, diplomacy, monetary policy and coordination of localities. Another role of the central government is to carry out infrastructure works on a national scale and to support local programs which deserve to be encouraged.

*Third:* pluralistic democracy is based on civil society. In addition to the political parties, the ethnic, local and religious communities, the civic associations organized by industry, interests, preferences, life views, wishes, concerns, etc. are free to operate independently of the government and are recognized as having an important role; they have a voice and an influence in daily life and in the evolution of the society. The state considers itself to have the mission to serve civil society, not to control it, not to determine daily life for civil society. Economically, this means that the national economy must be based on private enterprises, the state sector must be limited to a minimum, and even better: no state sector. A strong and diverse civil society is the best guarantee for a permanent, natural and continuous transformation of the society, avoiding the sudden and destructive disorders of the revolutions.

*Fourth:* pluralistic democracy respects the minorities and is always seeking compromise. In a pluralistic democracy, the 'minority submits to majority' principle is not used automatically and mechanically, but only after all efforts are made to find consensus. Pluralistic democracy is against all forms of tyranny, including the tyranny of the majority. Normally, in a democratic regime, the legitimacy of a government is based on the results of the last election, but in pluralistic democracy, the legitimacy of a government also lies in the sincerity of seeking consensus in every important decision.

*Fifth:* pluralistic democracy naturally respects all categories of people; it does not accept to sacrifice any category and it cannot allow a category to exploit and trample another category. So, pluralistic democracy attaches great importance to social solidarity and it cannot go hand in hand with what is often called 'jungle capitalism'. Social solidarity is also a necessary condition to nurture and strengthen the national spirit because, among people with too different living standards, lifestyles, concerns and social statuses, the sentiment of fellow countrymen is only theoretical.

Absolute social justice, in the sense of eliminating all disparities, flat raking, dividing in equal parts, is something impossible and not desirable. What can and must exist is a social solidarity policy that guarantees everyone equality before the law and the equal ability to succeed, while supporting those who are weak or unlucky.

In a pluralistic democracy, the state is no longer the absolute leader. The role of the state is to undertake three functions: arbitration in the relationships between the elements of society, punishing the violations and reconciling the conflicting demands of different groups of people. The state of reconciliation rather than the state of control is a characteristic of pluralistic democracy. It definitely distinguishes pluralistic democracy from the autocratic regimes, but it also makes pluralistic democracy different from many democracies in which the government still has the ambition to decide for civil society.

Pluralistic society is an extremely complex combination of countless interwoven relationships, respecting all differences, with the fundamental role of civil society including countless communities, civic associations and enterprises, with decentralized political organizations. Such a complex society can only exist with clear, transparent and thoroughly applied laws. The state in a pluralistic democracy can only be ruled by law. Every civilized state must be a ruled by law state, but a pluralistic democratic state must be a complete rule by law state. In order for the law to be absolutely respected, it must be right, that is, made by real representatives elected by the people, solely for the common good; its goal is to specify the expression of individual free rights in social activities.

Looking at the situation in Vietnam, if there is one thing we can assert, it is that with the accumulated hatred, the crisis of faith and the lack of common viewpoint, it is impossible to impose any force or any direction without strong opposition. The future Vietnamese institution must be an institution that respects all differences, giving equal standing and voice to everyone and to each person. This institution must therefore be a pluralistic democracy.

It is impossible to take as pretext the fact that our people do not have enough experience of democracy, that discipline is not high, that hearts are scattered, etc. to say that democracy is a luxury product for Vietnam. So, do we have to temporarily accept a certain amount of dictatorship? To answer this question, we only need to compare the achievements of democratic countries with the poor achievements of the communist regimes, looking at what the right-wing dictatorships once brought to countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In the opposite way, the nature of democracy should not be misunderstood. Democracy does not solve immediately and completely the problem of development. The success of every regime requires the right choices and right persons. Democracy does not mean free meal. Democracy is no substitute for choices and people. But democracy is a lifestyle that allows to address the problems in a proper way and choose correctly the responsible persons. Democracy, and especially pluralistic democracy, is also a social organizing method that allows a full promotion

of ideas and initiatives, the most basic motor for progress. So, the level of democracy determines an upper limit for development. The higher the democracy, the higher the possibility of development.

On the contrary, authoritarian regimes prohibit opinions and initiatives, prevent the peaceful and continuous evolution of society, tolerate corruption, injustice and abuse of power, and thus prevent development. We must be vigilant: there is no smart dictatorship, because the basis of every dictatorship is the sick arrogance of a person or a group of persons who think they are smart enough to think for a whole nation. They are too ignorant to either see the complexity of problems or see their own ignorance. The dictator is first and foremost an anesthetic. Besides, if we look carefully, we can see that most dictatorial groups lack culture.

Of course, pluralistic democracy cannot bring all its benefits in the poor intellectual, social and economic conditions; but even in this case, pluralistic democracy is much better than dictatorship.

We assert: true pluralistic democracy now.

In order to have true pluralistic democracy, what we have to do first is to eliminate the grudges left behind by a bloody past, and nourished by a discriminatory policy over time. National reconciliation is mandatory due to historical circumstances. On this condition only, we can accept each other, admit fault with each other and forgive each other, to live together and shake hands to build a common future. Otherwise, pluralism only means temporarily tolerate each other due to a temporary balance of forces. Pluralism without national reconciliation is only a sick pluralism, in preparation of a settling of scores. In contrast, pluralistic democracy is also a necessary condition for real national reconciliation. Reconciliation without political pluralism is just a tricky reconciliation, the submission of the dominated to the dominant, that is, an impossible reconciliation.

Our country has not only the hatred left by the war. We also have a multitude of divisive causes that we have not been able to resolve because we were not aware of the importance of the problems, or because the war situation did not allow us to solve them. The distinctions due to religion, locality, ethnicity, rich and poor, human viewpoint, political opinion, etc. are numerous, and because they are not addressed, they become more and more serious. Pluralistic democracy, due to its tolerant spirit and its decentralized model, is a solution allowing all categories of people to have a place and a voice, and thus, they can accept each other, come closer, reconcile to build a common future.

No one can deny that pluralism is a beautiful ideal, so beautiful that the dictatorial regimes, though afflicted by it, dare not deny it definitively.

Pluralistic democracy is becoming the basic consensus of our people on the journey to the future. That is also the inevitable direction of mankind. Those who fight for pluralistic democracy have the right to be proud because they are pursuing a beautiful ideal and also have the right to be optimistic because they are fighting for a viewpoint that will win.

### **3. National reconciliation and concord**

For more than four centuries, since the Mạc dynasty usurped the throne of the Lê dynasty at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, our country has continuously moved from one war to another. The country has been divided many times during two centuries, it has been colonized and placed under various administrative regimes for nearly a hundred years. Wars, rebellions, revenges, vengeance, persecutions have been permanent elements of our recent history. The last war of 1945-1975 was the fiercest, when we fought each other ideologically for the first time, then the victorious camp implemented a policy of imprisonment and humiliation, along with countless measures of discrimination.

Due to historical circumstances, our social fabric has been badly damaged. The destructions require a very long period of healing, so the basic spirit of every policy for generations to come must be national reconciliation and concord. National reconciliation to eliminate the hatred of the past, to move towards national concord in the effort to build a common future.

In a such rapidly changing world, every country is subjected to incessant disturbances. One activity moves forward while the other is in recession, one sector is expanding while another is stagnant. Social disparities continuously emerge and policies, no matter how complete, cannot satisfy everyone. So, every country, every nation must constantly reconcile with each other because conflicts of interest and tensions always occur. National reconciliation has become the philosophy of national administration.

Reconciliation is compulsory for all nations, regardless of their level and history. But the people of Vietnam are among those who most need reconciliation.

We need to reconcile the national community in general with the ethnic minorities that have been in this country since the beginning and have always been trampled and rejected throughout history.

We need to reconcile the religions, especially Buddhism and Catholicism, which have been persecuted, repressed, discriminated and opposed each other by Vietnamese and foreign authorities. In addition, the rancor, the consequence of a historical situation in which both religions are victims, instead of being cleared, is sometimes exaggerated and exploited for illicit ambitions.

We need reconciliation and concord between the South and the North which have been frequently divided and placed in an opposition position and, since 1975, divided by a policy not different from an occupation by the Communist Party.

We need to reconcile the country with the overseas Vietnamese community who had to abandon their relatives, possessions, ancestral land only because they could not accept a harsh government, and thus had to endure great suffering and loss due to pirates, storms and police.

We also need to reconcile Vietnamese people with Vietnam. We have to admit that, being a Vietnamese to date has been a misfortune. Fatherland only means sacrifice. Moreover, the successive ruling gangs have committed very serious crimes in the name of the country. Of course, the country does not identify with those in power, but it is materialized by the rulers. Therefore, when for a too long time, there are only fraudulent or/and tyrannical rulers, the image of the country is compromised and patriotism vanishes. Reconciling the Vietnamese with the country is mandatory to restore patriotism, an indispensable factor if we still want a future for Vietnam. For that, the state, the representative of the country, must be humble, gentle and

absolutely honest. The Vietnamese fatherland must be felt like a love and a common future project.

But the closest and most painful breakdown was that we have slaughtered each other in a thirty-year conflict. This war was a civil war because the overwhelming majority of the proponents, those who wielded weapons to kill each other and the victims were Vietnamese. It was a shameful civil war because both warring camps accepted orders and equipment from abroad. The fact that the communist party did not recognize this as a civil war only made it fiercer, because they did not recognize those in front of them as compatriots. One should be aware that a civil war is far more devastating than a war with a foreign country because, in addition to the loss of lives and material, it also destroys the national spirit and the will to live together, which is the foundation of a nation. To date, no nation has returned to normal after a civil war within one or two generations, even with dedicated conciliation efforts and even though the civil war only lasted a few years. Our civil war was much longer and fiercer. The wounds that were still bleeding, instead of being healed, were subsequently exacerbated by a brutal discrimination policy.

In the last conflict, we had no good choice. We had only distressing choices, between the bad and, subjectively, the worse. We have endured but not mastered the events. Very few Vietnamese have really fought for what they liked. In the overwhelming majority, the Vietnamese, the nationalists as well as the communists, were only against the camp which they saw as worse than their own camp. Those who could not stand the corruption of nationalist governments stood in the communist ranks, despite knowing their brutal nature; those who found that letting the country fall in the hands of the communists is a disaster, stood in the nationalist ranks, although also disgusted by their badness. Siblings, close friends, because of a different evaluation, or just being pushed, even forced by the circumstances, had to turn their back, revile and kill each other. So, apart from the material and life losses, there is a major break in the heart and mind of each Vietnamese.

At the end, some lost the war, were imprisoned and humiliated; others realized that all their sacrifices only contributed to a project to destroy the country. No one had any reason to catch anyone's fault, we all failed shamefully. We were all victims. We must shake hands and redo history together.

The challenge before us is a ruling clique which has caused serious destruction to the country, has failed in all respects, is still insolently giving itself the exclusive right to rule the country indefinitely and is cruelly repressing all opposition voices, even peaceful voices. This clique uses all means to prevent national reconciliation, it knows that it can only maintain its control if the Vietnamese people are powerless because of hatred and division. Not only did it not soften the wounds of the war, it also expands its hostility to many groups and to the new generation by means of political repression, categorizing the people and discrimination.

Today, the aspiration of the overwhelming majority of Vietnamese is democracy. Recognizing brothers and sisters again and smiling at friends again must be the guiding spirit of a new national rally, in which there are no right and wrong people, but only equal brothers and sisters who feel sorry for the country and unite for a democratic campaign. National reconciliation and concord are the core conditions to isolate and defeat the stubborn dictatorship.

Transcending momentary excitement, national reconciliation and concord are also a necessary historical step to break the vicious circle of hatred and division that has imprisoned us for centuries, especially since half a century. This is a very difficult break in history because the



concept of national reconciliation is completely absent in the Vietnamese political usages. For nearly eight centuries, since the Trần dynasty, weeding the roots, eliminating the three bloodlines, eradicating the whole, were the methods used by the rulers instead of reconciliation. Gradually, this violent behavior has taken root in collective psychology and made the concept of reconciliation become alien to Vietnamese people. That is why many people have said that Vietnamese people have no need for reconciliation when we are actually one of the people most in need of reconciliation. In fact, we are imprisoned in hatred due to a lack of reconciliation spirit. That vicious circle has prevented us from mobilizing all the vitality of the country to rise up and it explains why we are writhing in poverty and inferiority.

National reconciliation and concord are the necessary conditions for the success of the current democratic struggle and also for the success of our future effort to revive the country.

The implementation of national reconciliation is not merely a sentiment, it also requires concrete measures. The future Vietnamese state will put the free person as the highest object of service. The future Vietnamese state will consider pluralism as an absolute value. Pluralism in all aspects of spirituality, culture, politics, economy, society. The future Vietnamese state will severely punish all offensive languages and attitudes to all races, communities, beliefs and views. On the contrary, the state will encourage and wholeheartedly support all initiatives and efforts to bring Vietnamese people closer, from all regions, all races, all religions, all viewpoints, all political opinions, in the spirit of respect for all differences. The future Vietnamese state will have to restore the honor of those who have been humiliated, compensate the victims for damage, even though in an incomplete way, without creating new victims. Removing hatred means that there will be no political trial; on the contrary, there will be a law prohibiting the state from prosecuting anyone for the position he/she has held, unless he/she has seriously violated the laws in effect while he/she was in office. Every citizen has the right to denounce the intimidation that he/she has been a victim; the state will treat those disputes as those between citizens who are equal before the law, in the spirit of national reconciliation.

These measures, applied with sincerity to heal the wounds left by history, will help us gradually reaching national concord in our effort to build and share a common Vietnam future. We will close a sad page of history and open a new page written in national sentiment. National reconciliation and concord must be our determined policy for many generations.

#### **4. Accept and affirm the progress-driving values**

An advanced society must be built on the foundation of progress-driving values.

Western countries have developed strongly and surpassed the rest of the world because their societies are based on true fundamentals. Those values are peace, freedom, democracy, equality, human rights, the rule of law, dialogue, cooperation, profit, environment and solidarity. These values are not exclusive to Western people but are inherent in every society and in every civilization. The merit of Western countries is that they knew how to promote and fully develop most of these values to serve as a foundation for society. Thus, they have gained strength and prosperity. In contact with the West the other countries recognized their inferiority and seek to compromise with Western civilization. However, natural inertia has led most countries to accept only some elements of Western societies in order to integrate them into their traditions, such as learning Western technology, while maintaining the old social structure. But a civilization is a

whole made up of intertwined values, so it is very difficult to take an element of one civilization to graft on another civilization. It is not possible to accept Western technologies while still rejecting the fundamental values that gave birth to them and promoted their advancement. The experience of the nations has shown that this half-hearted attitude brought only limited success, before leading to crisis. Although Russia began to innovate since the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it had failed to catch up with Western Europe and fell into disorder and eventually to communism with the disastrous consequences that the world had seen; Japan accumulated contradictions that led to a self-destruction war. Today, Japan has realized that mistake and has embraced all the values of the progressive world since World War II and has just completed a three-decade restructuring to adapt its society to these values. Russia also will have no other choice; the half-democratic half-mafia regime now begins to vacillate. China with the policy of 'socialist-oriented market economy' and restoring Confucianism has also come very close to crisis.

Accepting honestly and firmly the political, cultural and social values of the modern world is a prerequisite. Japan because of such choice has become a leading power in the world. Some Asian countries, such as South Korea and Taiwan, have been rising strongly since the last four decades following the Japanese model. Accepting all progressive values is the choice we must make decisively. In the midst of the hesitation of other countries in the region, this choice is an opportunity that allows us to rise, catch up and overcome them.

Among these values, the one we most need is peace. The tradition of fighting against foreign aggression has gradually made us see violence as a natural way to resolve conflicts. We are accustomed to glorify heroes who had famous victories and we minimize the peaceful building efforts, the foundation of all progress. From now on, we must curse violence and raise peace to an absolute value.

We should not be afraid that accepting new values will make us lose our national spirit. These values are already present in every society, including our society; it is unfortunate that we have not fully promoted them, this is the cause of our present humiliation and inferiority. Accepting them is not denying ourselves, it only means promoting the positive things within us. Besides, moving forward and catching up with the world are the condition for us to exist as a nation and preserve our culture and national identity.

On the common values, Western countries have built many different lifestyles depending on the unique characteristics of each country. British society is different from French society, German culture is different from Italian culture, the United States are different from Sweden. On the basis of new values, Japan and many other Asian countries have retained their traditions. On the basis of new values, Vietnam will still be Vietnam, but it will be a more glorious Vietnam.

We need a great cultural campaign. Our education, our laws, our cultural, social and economic activities must emphasize and honor progressive values. The school, apart from its core mission of transferring knowledge, must be an environment accustoming youth to tolerance, sense of responsibility, free and objective thinking, love for the country, the compatriots, humanity and nature. A special effort will also be devoted to physical education and sports to promote the objective mind, the spirit of friendly competition, the spirit of respect of law. This thought campaign is the most important effort of all, because this is an effort to build the foundation of a new society. We will not only accept but we must have the ambition to contribute to complement and perfect universal values. This thought campaign will also help us to strengthen and promote an essential category of people for the nation, that we are only starting to have: political intellectuals, those who invest time and effort to understand the problems of the country,

who dare to have their opinions and are willing to pay the price to engage in fighting for what they think is right for the country. They are the guides for the masses and the intellect of the nation. It is this absence of political intellectuals throughout history that has made our country inferior, drifting from one mistake to another tragedy.

## **5. Developing the country on the basis of democracy, market economy and individual initiatives**

The most painful thing for us is our backwardness and poverty. The focus of all national efforts must therefore be development, and a thorough insight into development is critical.

Half of humanity is still living in poverty, nearly a quarter is living in extreme poverty. Two centuries ago, even in the most developed countries, more than half of the population died before puberty. Therefore, development is a very new phenomenon in some countries thanks to some special conditions that we need to identify to catch.

First of all, how do we understand development?

Development is a continuous and lasting change over time, allowing more and more efficient use of resources and manpower, giving the nation a greater and greater income and giving people a better life, materially and intellectually.

Development is a relative concept. A country is considered to be developed when it achieves high results compared to the rest of the world in terms of per capita income, education, health care, housing and infrastructure, when economic activity is strong and modern, environment is clean and beautiful, means of transport, information, education and entertainment are abundant.

Development, even with the above definition, is not everything. The success of a nation, besides development, is also the fact that all people voluntarily stick together in the effort to build a common future, each person feels in control of his/her life and lives according to his/her will, everyone feels to be respected in a non-threatening society, enjoying the benefits of his or her efforts, is assured of equal advancement opportunities and believes that tomorrow will be better than today, and the life of his/her children will be better than his/her life. That is the goal we want to achieve.

Development is not just an increase in gross national output. Therefore, a 5% growth of gross national output with good education and health systems, a protected and improved natural environment, a fairly equitable income sharing, must be considered much better than a 15% growth in which all cultural, social and environmental issues are abandoned. A specific example is the case of China. The growth rate is quite high, but the damage to the environment, if converted into expenses for recovery, is even higher. The disparity between rich and poor is excessive, the disparity between regions is increasingly alarming; in addition, a significant portion of the population becomes nomads wandering in the streets or in fortuitous gathering places in the suburbs. We cannot tolerate such a growth. We seek a harmonious and balanced development, because only that development can be sustainable and deserves to be considered a national goal.

Although development is not only economic, economic development is the most important factor and also the key for a balanced development of the whole. We are one of the poorest and less developed nations, therefore economic development is the most urgent goal for us.

We need to dispel immediately a catastrophic confusion.

The greatest deception that still persists is the allegation that a society wanting to progress quickly needs an enlightened dictatorship, a delay in building democracy and sacrificing some basic freedoms. This deception has been the cause of terrible mourning. It has created and nurtured fascist and militarist regimes in Italy, in Germany and in Japan. It has helped the communist movement to arise, develop and survive. It has helped to maintain dictatorships in Latin America and Asia in the past. And it is still being used as the theoretical support of many other authoritarian regimes, including Vietnam.

These regimes have only brought bad results. The dictatorships in Italy, Germany and Japan have accumulated conflicts, stagnated and have to plunge into self-destruction wars. The communist regime in the Soviet Union destroyed the resources and the environment, deported the people and collapsed. All other dictatorships have the same effect: poverty, backwardness and oppression.

In fact, development is a consequence of freedom and democracy. But because development also encourages and promotes freedom and democracy, it is easy to mix up the consequence and the cause, leading to the erroneous patience: temporarily accept dictatorship to develop, then development will bring democracy. This misperception has been exploited by the authoritarian cliques.

The experience of the nations proves that democracy and development go hand in hand.

The phenomenon of development on a national scale began to appear in Europe and the United States after societies based on democracy were established. The cause of development is that the weight of the state in everyday life is reduced, a democratic and stable constitution is respected, the law replaces arbitrary decisions of the rulers, people are respected and protected, the economy operates in accordance with the rules of the market, business is honored, trade and exchange are promoted, ideas and initiatives are encouraged and rewarded, profit is promoted as a value.

The only Asian country that has caught up with Western countries at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is Japan that has developed by quickly accepting Western economic life. Under the dominance of an arrogant knight class separated from the masses, a democratic society has quietly formed among the majority of Japanese and has made Japan rise since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, then strongly from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The fact that the fascist regime in Italy and the Nazi regime in Germany made some initial progress, and the Japanese military regime maintained development for several decades, helps us identify another element of development, inherent in previous developments: national consensus. All three nations at that time were upset with their inferiority and all had charismatic leaders to unite them in a common effort.

The experience of recently developed countries in Asia needs to be looked at precisely because, contrary to the superficial view of some people and the tricky explanation of dictatorships, these countries have developed because they were more democratic and freer than other slow-moving countries, though they may not have achieved full and proper democracy.

Latin America countries with rich resources were writhing for more a century and a half in backwardness under dictatorships and have only risen since the 1980s thanks to democracy.

In Europe, three countries, Spain, Portugal and Greece, because of entanglement in dictatorial regimes, have dramatically lagged behind; they have only risen since the 1970s by dropping the tyranny.

Even the recent economic advances in China and Vietnam are no exception: they were made possible by the market economy and a greater degree of freedom.

Experience of all nations has proved that democracy, private property right, market economy, light state apparatus are the factors that give rise to economic development.

But experience also shows that the same factors have created economic developments different in speed and intensity in different countries, and many countries with unfavorable natural conditions have developed stronger than others also democratic and with more natural resources. That is because psychological and cultural factors have played a decisive role.

After observing the history of nations, we can also approach the phenomenon of development by economic reasoning.

Economic development requires three factors that are needed and sufficient: people have a desire for business, they can do business and they have the means to do business.

To want doing business, people need a favorable psychological context: business activity is respected by society, ideas and initiatives are promoted, risk acceptance is honored; they also need reason to be optimistic that the business will be profitable and that the profits will be theirs. In other words, to do business, along with an optimistic economic context, businessmen need a social psychology favorable to business and a sure guarantee of private property. This startup element of development explains why the communist countries have collapsed because they do not respect private property. But more importantly, it explains why the phenomenon of development appears only in some countries thanks to a favorable social psychology.

To be able to do business, businessmen need an orderly and secure society, they need to be guaranteed by law and be free to act; they cannot be bound by too many regulations, not confined in a rigid national plan, not be overtaxed, not harassed by a corrupt apparatus of government. We see here the need for a rule of law democracy, a market economy rather than a planned economy, a light state apparatus. But we also see once again the psychological factors: morality and honesty. Corruption is also a consequence of the decline of social morality.

Of course, businessmen also need the means, that is, the necessary human resources with the required capabilities, a good infrastructure, investment capital, a strong banking credit system to mobilize working capital. Investment capital is only one of the factors and not the most important one. Few capital means few investment and profit will generate capital. Moreover, capital has its own wisdom and logic, especially in the context of globalization today; capital will go where business is profitable. The most important factor is still people, the people who are frank, honest, skilled and responsible. Once again, the core factors are psychological and cultural.

In general, development needs a context of freedom and democracy and is mainly a cultural and psychological problem. That is why some countries, despite their scarce resources, despite terrible destruction, have risen strongly. Germany and Japan, two defeated and devastated countries, only needed a few decades to become the most developed countries. The Dutch

people, pressed in a small land with few natural resources, have built one of the most prosperous countries in the world. Because development is primarily a cultural and psychological issue, it has so far been limited to a number of countries.

One must distinguish psychology and culture from intellect and knowledge. Congenitally, human beings have the same or nearly equal intellectual ability; therefore, thanks to education, they can reach an equal level of understanding. The difference is the psychology and culture, the values that are esteemed and expressed in society, the progressive mind, the acceptance of risk in business, the sense of responsibility, the behavior in the collective life.

We need to change society and people to develop.

We need a democratic society, which values people, places trust in them, allows them to freely decide to build their lives. We need a rule-of-law state, with comprehensive laws and not too many regulations, we need a market mechanism instead of an imposed plan.

We need people who are free, responsible, honest, attached to the community, progressive and competitive, not jealous and destructive. We need people who are eager to do business, to be rich honestly.

We need an economic system that operates without coercion. Businessmen must be allowed to freely act according to the objective rules of business and the market. Social solidarity is a permanent concern of a righteous government, but social solidarity must be exercised in the phase of distribution of national income, through taxes, and cannot interfere with the governance of business activities.

We also need a stable legal context, the constitution and the laws, so that people can rest assured to build their lives and make plans for the future without fear of a change in rules, suddenly ruining their business projects.

But stable constitution and laws do not mean a stable government. The constant change of the rulers in a stable legal context does not prohibit the police from continuing to protect order and security, it does not prohibit judges from continuing to pronounce judgments, it does not prohibit a factory from functioning. What could be detrimental to economic activity are revolutions that upset everything, sudden changes in national laws and orientation.

Pushing the argument further, we can say that democratic governments without overwhelming majority to arbitrarily change laws and policies, can also be a guarantee of the stability of the legal context, which is beneficial for development. An overwhelming government with many powers is only needed to decide quickly changes and impose a national development plan. But national plan is something we should avoid. National plan is an unrealistic product, a remnant of the time when the world was not lucid and not experimented enough to recognize that it is necessary to let society decide what to do, how much to do, how to do, through objective market rules. Economic planning is an obstacle to development that we must eliminate; what we need is a national orientation and projects for each problem, especially infrastructure projects. Of course, in a difficult context with many obstacles for development, we need a government capable of deciding the necessary options to remove the bottlenecks left behind by the past. A democratic and light government is still able to do this, through persuasion to create public consensus and support on a number of mandatory fundamental options.

In short, to develop the country, first economically, we need a democratic institution, a rule-of-law state, a market economy, an absolute respect for personal ideas and initiatives, a strong

belief in people. That institution will give rise to creativity, a progressive spirit, a sense of responsibility. But we also need an important cultural effort to uphold the values of progress and bring those values into everyone's soul and reflexes. Those values are peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, equality, the rule of law, cooperation, profit, solidarity and the environment.

Building a pluralistic democratic society, promoting progressive values, we will have development, especially economic development. That is our doctrine of development. We assert that in such a society, with such values, even if we do not want to develop, we will develop. In contrast, in a society without democracy, or without progressive values, no matter how you want and try, there will be no development or only a low level of development. Natural resources and investment capital are secondary factors.

In such a development doctrine, the role of the state is mainly to preserve peace, security and order, to ensure national defense and justice, to create good relations with the world community, to reconcile and arbitrate civil society disputes. The role of the state in economy will be limited to three areas: taxes, public spending and monetary volume adjustment. Taxes allow the state to have the budget to do its duty and ensure social security and solidarity. Public spending is used to build, maintain and improve infrastructure, promote and stimulate a number of industries. The adjustment of the amount of circulating currency, mainly through fixing a base interest rate, issuing or withdrawing bonds, has a direct effect on prices, investment and growth. In all three areas, the state also needs to act with caution to avoid disrupting economic activities. Stability is the core element of business. For monetary management, we must avoid the case of the government acting on short-term political requirements, by entrusting to a central bank institution stemming from the government, but not subject to arbitrary directives of the government.

Once again, the need for development forces us to have a state of reconciliation and arbitration so that civil society can take care of development instead of a state that commands and decides for civil society. The role of conciliation and arbitration in economic activities forces the state to abandon all business functions. State-owned companies should not exist, or if so, they should be regarded as indispensable only for a limited period of time. In our development doctrine, the state does not interfere with civil society, but it focuses all efforts to fulfill the true function of a state.

## **V. Major orientations of the Vietnam model**

To rebuild the country after the devastation caused by the communist regime, we will have to completely change the political, economic and social system, the relationship between the state and the people, the relationship between our country and the world; we will also have to reconsider the role of civil society, to choose long-term solutions to issues of social solidarity and population limitation.

On the basis of the thoughts just explained, we will rebuild the country on the following major orientations.

### **1. Making freedom a driving force to promote creativity and a rising spirit**

Our nation has a glorious tradition of defending the country, but in return we have also spent too much time and energy in the effort to fight foreign invaders. In those hard struggles, we must always uphold discipline and consensus, and we must always put aside discussions to deal with urgent problems. On the one hand, this difficult history made us highly able to adapt to living conditions, but on the other hand, we have gradually lost long-term vision, initiative, inventiveness and the spirit of adventure.

We have a long coast and a gentle ocean, but the sea has almost no call to us. We have lacked the determination to conquer and make use of the ocean. We do not have shipbuilding and seafaring technology, no merchant fleet, no great navigators. Until recently, we only lived with the land as a continental people. We have been satisfied with the Confucian model from generation to generation, without being aware that Confucian culture is a slavery culture that blinds the intellect and alienates people, especially the intellectuals. That authoritarian and draconian mold, after allowing us to get some initial accomplishments, has forced us to stand still for centuries to come.

Criticism and creativity, the spirit of adventure and advancement are things we must learn and get used to. To do so, we must encourage and honor the freedom to think and speak. We need to raise to the level of an absolute rule that in the future Vietnam, there will be neither banned discussion nor banned idea. No Vietnamese can be punished for his way of life or for what he says, except in case of direct call for violence.

### **2. Promoting voluntary patriotism**

Throughout most of our history, we have lived under absolute monarchies that considered the nation as a private property of a dynasty, when we were not subject to foreign dependence. Our patriotism therefore had no condition to develop. When the idea of a nation belonging to everyone and requiring the contribution of everyone appeared, it was quickly absolutized, as a legacy of the time when the king was God and the people were slaves. The fatherland becomes sacred and supreme, it has no responsibility and it accepts no demand. That fatherland was used as a guise for so many crimes. War, mourning, despair, the long-lasting sufferance of a dictatorial



regime that is both mediocre and tyrannical, the inferiority complex towards other nations have seriously harmed our patriotism. Because our patriotism was not strong, we let the communist party - whose ideal is to serve an international movement instead of the nation and which worshiped a doctrine advocating the abolition of the nation - attract a large number of compatriots and control the political scene. Because our will and our patriotism are eroded, we have not reacted fiercely today to a one-party dictatorial regime that considers the country to be its own like the kings of the old days, while all humanity is moving toward democracy and we also know that the country really needs democracy.

But we are Vietnamese, and our future is tied to the future of Vietnam. We have no other choice than to build a common Vietnam future. And to build that common future, patriotism is still a common denominator. We need a new impulse of patriotism. We need to recover and reinvent patriotism.

We need to affirm patriotism as a voluntary sentiment of free people, closely bound together to build a shared future for themselves, their children and grandchildren. We need to let each one to be patriot in his own way, we cannot allow patriotism to be assimilated with the endorsement of a doctrine. We need to reconcile the Vietnamese people with the country. We need a peaceful fatherland instead of a ferocious one, a fatherland with a heart instead of claws, a lovable fatherland instead of a scary and detestable one, a fatherland which encourages instead of forbidding, a fatherland which is responsible and close to everyone instead of being so sacred that it becomes abstract and distant, a fatherland of human rights and civil rights.

In order to do so, the government who represents and acts in the name of the fatherland must be an honest, humble, thrifty and devoted government, cherishing each citizen and letting each person see that he is respected. That government will neutralize all hatred, will on behalf of the national continuity apologize, restore honor and compensate all victims of injustice. That government will be constantly alert so that no group of population feels left out. That government will not force anyone to be patriotic, on the contrary, it will put all its efforts to create the conditions for people to be patriotic.

Along with democracy, freedom, ideas, initiatives and, above all, patriotism will be a key weapon to help us accept the legacy of the communist party and join hands to conquer the future.

### **3. Honoring and promoting civil society**

Every civilized nation must lay its foundation on civil society. One of the main reasons why we are lagging behind other countries is the absence of a true civil society. Civil society is the totality of churches, associations, clubs, charities, workers unions, cooperatives, companies, businesses. In general, these are all the associations of people, established outside the government to pursue common goals with no ambition for political power.

The concept of civil society appeared at the same time with civilized societies. These are the intertwined ropes that attach people to each other and bind people to society. Those interconnected links create a nation's enrichment and strength. The citizen unions that form civil society are also the cradles for ideas, initiatives and progress. A strong civil society ensures that new ideas arise quickly, conflicts are discovered and resolved in a timely manner, society constantly evolves in peace and order. More importantly, a healthy civil society also provides

what we might call the miracle of union. It has a superior effect, meaning that a union can give rise to entirely new characteristics and capabilities not found in its elements. For example, the combination of elementary particles under different special conditions produces atoms; in turn, the atoms combine to create molecules, and then molecules combine to give birth to life. Similarly, the coordinated movement of neurons creates emotion and opinion. Dictatorships, especially communist dictatorships, while stifling civil society, have deprived the nations of this remarkable ability. Perhaps, this is the reason why democratic societies are superior to dictatorships.

In our social model, civil society will be valued and encouraged; moreover, it will be entrusted with the important role of exercising solidarity, helping and defending the weak and unlucky people.

Every association creates strength. The power of civil society is the synergy, yet never unified, of civic unions that are sometimes in the same direction, sometimes isolated, sometimes opposing each other. The power of civil society sometimes integrates with the state, sometimes opposes the state, but it always influences the state; it never has the ambition to compete with the state because it does not and cannot have political ambition.

Civil society ensures dynamism of the society and at the same time it guarantees freedom, democracy, human rights, and it prevents all authoritarian intentions. Every tyrannical dictatorship first wants to destroy civil society. The nature of dictatorial regimes is to lean on a minority to control a divided society. The dictatorships do not need trust and love from people, they only need people not sticking together so that there is no strong resistance. Nothing satisfies tyrannical cliques more than the indifference and emotionlessness of powerless masses because of division.

The philosophy of a democracy is, on the contrary, considering civil society as an overwhelming and fundamental element of the nation; therefore, the role of the state is to increase the number of civic unions, make them progressing and strengthening to contribute positively to the prosperity of society. The pluralistic democratic state considers itself an instrument of civil society with the mission of ensuring the healthy functioning of civil society, so that civil society can create happiness for the citizens. It is not a resignation but a new political philosophy of a government confident enough to put its trust in the citizens. In its relation to civil society, the pluralistic democratic state considers itself to be the arbitrator, coordinating and expressing the aspirations of civil society. The state serves but does not control civil society.

There will be no obstacle to the establishment and development of citizen unions. In particular, non-profit associations will only need to declare their establishment, not the operating license. Associations with cultural and social purposes also have the right to ask the state for help.

#### **4. Confirming Vietnam as a country built on communities**

Although our country has a long history, it is a new country. The Central has only been integrated since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the South since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Our country has received many new contributions on land and race. Yet our organization is not adapted to these changes and the country is incorrectly considered as the country of a single community: the Kinh community. Our history is the history of the Kinh. Our culture is the culture of the Kinh. The concepts of morality,

society and law are based on the Kinh and mainly serve the Kinh people. Perhaps, our difficult process of opening and defending the country did not give us the time and the means to think seriously about a community policy, but to be honest we are very flawed on this point. Throughout history, with a few exceptions, the Kinh have hardly recognized any responsibility toward ethnic minorities; they have only imposed their model, if needed by violence. This situation, if not clearly identified in order to timely have appropriate policies, can lead to very disastrous consequences, especially in the context of the present and upcoming world. Many countries are facing or will face a very difficult situation because of violent uprisings of ethnic minorities claiming their identity. If we are not vigilant and let this occur, two large areas of the country, the northern mountains and the central highlands, may become unstable and impossible to develop.

The communities must be equally respected in a country defined as a country of communities. The Vietnamese community of Khmer origin has lived in the South for a long time, the Vietnamese community of Chinese origin has contributed greatly to the opening of the South; they must be considered fully Vietnamese before the law and in the national sentiments.

The Vietnamese nation must completely abandon the idea of homogenization in order to seek common progress in differences. We must assert that Vietnam is not defined by a race but by the agreement to build and share a common future.

Today the Kinh have the majority throughout the territory, the solution of establishing autonomous regions for ethnic groups is no longer feasible, but decentralization will allow ethnic groups to have a significant say in the local governments. The cultures, the languages of ethnic minorities must be considered as a part of Vietnamese culture, which the State has the duty to preserve. Vietnamese history must also be revisited and regarded as the history of ethnicities, united to form the country of Vietnam.

The spirit of respect for communities must also be extended to religious communities, ideological communities, professional communities and informal communities due to particular lifestyles of each locality. These communities must be guaranteed a foothold and a voice in national activities.

Since April 30, 1975 we have another important new community: the overseas Vietnamese community. These Vietnamese had to leave the country because they could not bear measures of humiliation, repression and discrimination. The country of Vietnam must open its arms and heart to them. Their citizen rights must be recognized immediately and fully, for them as well as for their children born abroad.

The formation of the overseas Vietnamese community is a very new element and a great chance for the country. Thanks to this community, the Vietnamese have become familiar with all walks of life and civilizations, have tried all social organizational models, and crept into all scientific and technical subjects. This community, once normal relations are restored with the country, will be a guarantee that Vietnam will be an open country, which will get rid of stubbornness and prejudice and will definitely get out of stubborn dead end. This community, although it is not yet large and it still needs to be strengthened, has the potential to contribute greatly to the country. The overseas Vietnamese will be very valuable scientific, technical, cultural and commercial bridgeheads that the Vietnamese state has no means to create. Experience has shown that the countries that have developed rapidly recently have benefited from the contribution of a strong overseas community. Any wise Vietnamese state must encourage communication between

people inside and outside the country, recognize an overseas Vietnamese entity and seek every initiative to make the Vietnamese overseas community larger and stronger.

## **5. Definitely choosing market economy and private enterprises**

Experience of the world over the past decades has shown that collective and state economic policies have all led to failure. Experience has also shown that the free market is the most accurate guide to production and the surest guarantee for an efficient distribution. The economic choice that must be made for Vietnam is a market economy, taking private enterprises as foundation, taking business mindset and initiative as strength, taking ambition and enrichment as engine, taking benefits as reward and stimulant.

That choice means that the state will not do what private business can do. The main economic role of the state is to ensure the stability of money, prevent illicit competition, invest in promising industries that the private sector does not yet dare or cannot yet afford to invest in, undertake a number of necessary research and prevention programs. The state also has a function of alerting harmful business trends and encouraging beneficial economic activities, but it does so primarily with information and support, not by command and banning. The state will concentrate its effort to protect territorial integrity, protect order and security, protect justice, protect the environment, promote beneficial international relations, build and strengthen national consensus, that is, doing the right functions of a state.

To fulfill that function and ensure a healthy market economy, the state must continuously strive to build a proper legal system in an empirical spirit, starting from the right basis and continuously supplemented by case law.

## **6. Moving towards an industrial and service economy**

With a small but fertile farming land, Vietnam has considerable agricultural potential. Agriculture in the short term is a lever for revival and the starting point of economic development. Therefore, agriculture is our immediate economic focus and will also be our economic focus for some time.

However, because of its limited land and large population, Vietnam cannot continue to be an agricultural country. On the contrary, our position is advantageous, our human resources are abundant and high-standard. Our natural function is that of an industrial, commercial, service and maritime country. We have to prepare now for that future, especially because in addition that transformation will allow us to turn many mountainous regions that cannot be used for agriculture into activity surfaces, meaning that the country will be practically enlarged.

Our economic goal for the next twenty years is to transform from an agricultural economy to an industrial, commercial and service economy. This means that the weight of agriculture in total national output as well as in manpower allocation will decrease. The first step of this transformation effort is to develop industries associated with agriculture such as food industry, fertilizer manufacturing, pesticides, agricultural machinery, etc. in parallel with trying to find export markets for agricultural products. Our national goal in this transition period is that

Vietnamese food be known to the world as of super high quality, Vietnamese farm implements and tools as unrivaled in quality/price ratio.

In addition to our efforts on industries with clear perspectives such as fisheries and tourism, we will pay special attention to two new perspectives: port services and information technology. Both of these industries require a full, frank open policy to the outside world.

Due to our advantageous location and coastline, Vietnam can have very large trading ports. We will be ready to sign long-term contracts for construction and operation of a number of commercial ports with foreign corporations. But the important thing to attract international trade services is that the security and order situation must be stable, the political institution must be open, the government must be honest and the telecommunications system must be complete.

Vietnamese people are quite good in information technology. This is an industry with a lot of potential for development and it still needs a lot of experts with high prices. Informatics, if used properly, is also an objective management tool that can eliminate many causes of corruption. Our country currently has a lot of computerization needs of the public sector hoping to be funded by international institutions. We can use the implementation of these projects as a springboard to train a team of good and up-to-date IT specialists. The outlook is even higher because advancements in communications are increasingly enabling performing IT contracts without going abroad.

The state must aim to connect every family to the Internet to make the most of this network as a means of communication, learning, exchange and trading.

We will not establish economic zones with special regulations like 'manufacturing and export zones', but we will give all incentives and ease to economic activities across the country, with a common business law for the whole territory.

Our country is fortunate to be a coastal country, densely populated areas are not far from the coast and not far from good ports. Based on that advantage, we will establish industrial zones spread across the territory. This policy requires an important investment in transport and communication systems, but in return, it will save even more important costs on migration, and it avoids the problem of overpopulation in big cities that all developing countries encounter. It should be emphasized that any future policy is absolutely not coercive. The redistribution of the population and the labor force is a permanent and natural phenomenon in all countries, especially in developing countries; but the best way is to give people full choice of career and place to live after being fully informed about the opportunities. It is a way for individual intellect and national strategy to complement and regulate each other.

The condition for the success of this important transformation is to have good relations with all countries, especially developed countries, and be fully accepted in large cooperation blocks.

## **7. Strengthening the domestic market**

We will use the domestic market as a springboard to move forward. With nearly 100 million people, our country is a huge market and the exchange between Vietnamese people is itself an extremely important economic engine. In any economy, even in the era of globalization, except for the very special case of oil exporting countries, the domestic market is always more important than import and export activities. The domestic market is both important in terms of volume and as a testing ground for exports, it is also a necessary buffer to cope with changes in the international market. Export activities can only develop healthily if the domestic market is strong. The domestic market will be stimulated by releasing all business coercions and promoting important public programs. Agriculture, fishery, food industry, textile, cloth industry, manufacturing of household goods, construction materials, equipment and furnishing will be the first stepping stones for our domestic market.

Domestic market development must go hand in hand with domestic business development. We do not have great capitalists, so we need to actively promote, support and encourage individual enterprises and small-scale companies, helping them thrive and increase in stature, gradually becoming big capitalists.

An urgent imperative of the domestic market development policy is repairing and strengthening the road and communication systems, the means of transportation and transmission of information.

## **8. Constantly alert to strengthen social solidarity**

Among the missions of the pluralistic democratic state, the most important mission is to ensure social solidarity. In its philosophical basis, pluralism respects every part of society, so it does not tolerate one group to exploit and trample another. We honor profit as a value and seek profit primarily to have the means for social solidarity. Besides, a nation without solidarity is no longer a nation. We cannot abandon the weak, fall behind, just as a civilized society cannot refuse a crutch for the disabled. We recognize the equality of the rights and dignity of every human being in society and we need to dedicate the means to honor that equality.

Social solidarity is a mandatory condition to preserve the stability of the social foundation, ensuring the active and enthusiastic participation of all people in the future of the country, avoiding conflicts that can break the momentum of the nation toward the future and lead to riots.

In fact, economic development often spawns and worsens social disparities. The central mission of the state is to prevent and minimize the causes of tension that development will certainly bring, because it cannot be completely balanced.

Social solidarity requires a sustained and careful effort in distributing national income to defend the weak categories.

Social solidarity requires a social protection system that ensures minimum food and health needs for all.

Social solidarity requires a general and continuing education and training system that ensures equal promotion opportunities for all citizens.

In the short term, social solidarity can be a burden to the nation and an obstacle to economic development, but looking lucidly at the long term, it is mandatory so that the economic development momentum can continue. Solidarity is also an essential condition to ensure national sentiment and national attachment.

Of course, the state undertakes the task of implementing social solidarity. But the state will also particularly encourage civil society, through charitable organizations, to make a positive contribution to that important mission. A part of the social budget will be used through civil society. The charitable organizations will be funded in proportion – depending on the budget capacity – to the resources they have mobilized from the masses for the social missions.

The active participation of civil society in the effort to realize social solidarity has the effect of mobilizing the contribution – emotional as well as material – of the masses, and has a special moral effect. In a state welfare office, the person in need of help may only meet a civil servant, but in a charity agency, that person will meet a volunteer for social work with faith, a person with a heart; the bond of social solidarity and the spirit to overcome obstacles can only be stronger.

Absolute social equality is not possible. The important thing is that the state considers social solidarity to be a permanent concern. Social solidarity is both necessary and delicate, we must take care of it very carefully, treating it as a fight to preserve the country.

However, we need to affirm that social solidarity is the duty of the state, with the cooperation of civil society, and not the responsibility of enterprises. Enterprises, apart from the duty to respect the dignity of the workers, respect the laws of the state and respect the contracts signed with the workers, have the sole function of making profit to contribute to the wealth of society and pay taxes to the state, so that the state has the resources to guarantee social solidarity. We affirm that social solidarity cannot interfere with economic activity and become an obstacle for businesses.

## **9. Adopting a 'small country doctrine'**

We are now a very inferior country; our most urgent requirement is to develop and catch up with developed countries. Therefore, the basic policy of Vietnam in this period must be one that we can call 'doctrine of a small country'.

What is the doctrine of a small country? Simply put, it is keep humble today in order to grow tomorrow.

Internally, the doctrine of a small country means that we will not divide and conflict with each other over sophisticated doctrines, we will humbly recognize the weakness of the country, we will treasure, love and protect each other to get out together of the present painful situation. The state will refuse boastful spending for prestige to concentrate all resources and forces on the efforts to get out of inferiority. The state will respectfully protect and preserve the few achievements. The state will place its emphasis on education and training, and will invest in a pragmatic education first.

Externally, we will not compete for an international role, will not involve in international disputes, except to defend human rights, justice, ethics and international law. We will try to create a peaceful and humble image to be accepted by the international community as a nation to trade with, we will definitely not engage in any international conflict. However, being humble does not mean accepting dependence. We will review the agreements that the communist government has signed with foreign countries and abolish those that are either dependent or insulting national sovereignty and interests, first of all the underhand agreements that the Vietnamese people was not informed of.

What is worrying now is that we live in an area with possibility of tension, even conflict. We regard the active US military presence in the region as an essential element for ensuring peace and stability, and we will encourage that presence.

We see the cooperation with the United States, Japan and other democratic countries as a great benefit that not only opens us up to large markets, provides valuable scientific and technological transfers, but also helps us to embrace the way of organizing, thinking and working of advanced societies. We will honestly cooperate with them and learn from them.

With a modest and peaceful foreign policy, we will not need a large army. With a domestic policy that respects all freedoms and is based on the spirit of national reconciliation and concord, we will not need a massive police apparatus. The army and the police will thus be reduced to a minimum, but sufficient, to fulfill the duties of non-political tools to protect the territory, the environment, security and order.

The spirit of 'the doctrine of a small country' is to acknowledge our inferiority and mobilize all resources and forces to bring the country up. With a large population and industrious people, a favorable position, Vietnam has a great potential and the right to desire an honorable place in the world, if we persevere in our efforts for a few decades.

## **10. Pursuing a peaceful and cooperative foreign policy along with a good neighbor policy**

In today's competitive world, good relationships are indispensable. We will not miss any opportunity to establish and strengthen all cooperative relations with every country in the world, first of all with neighboring countries.

For Western countries, especially France and the United States, with which we had complicated and tumultuous relationships, we will normalize not only diplomatic relations but also cultural and emotional relations. We have a lot to learn from them and a lot to expect from a mutually profitable cooperation. We also need to pay special attention to countries where migration policy is still permissive, or is expected to be permissive, to develop as much as possible the Vietnamese diaspora, with a medium-term goal to have one Vietnamese out of ten living in the developed countries. A peaceful and humble foreign policy, in parallel with exploiting the potential contribution of a large, successful overseas Vietnamese community attached to the homeland, is the basis of our diplomatic efforts.

But most of all, we have to strengthen our foothold in the Asia and Pacific region, especially within ASEAN. Within this bloc, we will actively contribute to strengthening solidarity, lowering



cultural and trade barriers, promoting the real formation of a free exchange zone. We need to strive to join all Trans-Pacific partnership blocs and take every opportunity of these blocs so that our country can rise and catch up.

Most urgently, we have to tighten our cooperation with our two friends and neighboring countries, Laos and Cambodia, which are increasingly influenced by China. We have been the victim of a divide-and-rule plot stemming from the French colonial period that we must break today. Our borders with these two countries have not changed since more than two centuries. These are among the most stable borders in the world, testifying to the possibility of peaceful coexistence between Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. But we also need to explicitly proclaim a truly pacifist policy and make great diplomatic efforts to dispel misunderstandings left behind by a relatively recent past. We need to solemnly declare to these two neighbors that we absolutely respect the existing borders and are willing to facilitate communication and commercial ports usage so that they have access to the ocean. We will propose to them to cooperate in the construction of roads to the sea, and if possible, to reach an agreement on freedom of movement and migration. Both Laos and Cambodia need access to the sea via Vietnam, so cooperation will be natural if they firmly believe that Vietnam respects their sovereignty and territory. Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have great prospects for forming an equal block of cooperation in which all three benefit and promote their specific economic strengths.

With China, we need to resolve in a friendly manner the disputes over territorial waters and islands in order to start a truly healthy era of cooperation. The two countries share a long border, once shared a culture and also have a lot of similarities in human behavior, so cooperation is a natural thing. The current concern is that China is on the one hand increasing its military power, and on the other hand demonstrating a regional hegemony policy. To China, we need to demonstrate a modest, amiable yet resolute attitude of defending our sovereignty over land, sea and islands. We have reason to hope that the active US military presence and the new Japanese assertive policy in the region will be a guarantee for peace and security. We also have reason to believe that China will choose restraint, peace and cooperation, but modernizing our defenses is another factor to encourage China to follow that good path. In the short term, when the relationship between China and Taiwan is unclear, we will pay special attention to the development of economic cooperation relations with Taiwan.

We need to identify the important economic role of Japan in Asia and we must promote Vietnam-Japan relations to a national development policy.

Finally, we also need to have a wise and pragmatic judgment about the countries of Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union. These countries are potential markets in which we already have many friends, relationships and knowledges to exploit.

## **11. Pursuing a civilized birth control policy**

We now have a population of nearly 100 million, ranking 15<sup>th</sup> in the world, with a very narrow surface, 330.000 square kilometers. In addition, the proportion of our actually arable and livable land is very low, at only one third. Meanwhile, our population continues to grow by over one million people each year. On the other hand, our economic capacity and our level of transformation to an industry and service economy do not yet allow us to invest heavily in the expansion of living areas. Although population growth has been declining in recent years, there

is still a big problem that requires a clear view. On the one hand, although the population has increased significantly, the rate of population growth cannot be reduced abruptly without creating in the near future an economic burden due to the reversal of the young-old ratio. On the other hand, the decline in population growth has been largely achieved at a high cost so far that makes us one of the countries with the highest abortion rate in the world, with disastrous psychological and social consequences.

The experience of the communist governments of Vietnam and China has shown that a policy of restricting childbirth determined to the point of barbarism only degrades people, but it does not reduce population. The problem needs to be solved at the roots of culture and concept of life. In school and mass education, it is necessary to disseminate knowledge about contraception and normalize male-female relations, to separate the fact of building a family and having children with the satisfaction of physiological needs.

A high birth rate is also due to two other reasons that we need to overcome, that is, the educational level and the low social role of women, and the anxiety of old age. Improving women's educational level and actively integrating women into socio-economic activities is a necessary investment to limit population growth. All experience in the world has shown that the higher the educational level, the more actively involved in economic activities, the more women are inclined to restrict giving birth. Experience has also shown that securing a minimum income for the elderly, a must of every civilized society, will significantly limit population growth, because large number of children is first and foremost a guarantee for old age in countries lacking social security. We must take care of the elderly if we do not want to receive so many more children that we cannot afford to nurture and educate. This policy will create a safe mentality and will certainly reduce fertility, especially with the belief that the guaranteed income for old age will increase with economic development.

Finally, we also have the right to believe that population growth will decline in a civilized society that does not 'value men and devalue women' to the point of trying to give birth until having a son, a society with complete information and opportunities to advance for everyone. Once optimistic enough to plan for their future, couples will naturally realize that they have to limit the number of children.

## **12. Building a quality national happiness right in the effort**

The communist rulers are very deceptive or foolish to say that Vietnam today is a middle-income country. The truth is the opposite. We are very poor and very well below the world average. In this year 2015, the average output per capita in the world is nearly 11.000 USD per year; in our country, a moderate estimate is nearly 1500 USD, that is only equal to 15% of the world average. We lag behind tragically. Even if we achieve a steady growth of 2% higher than the world from now on, a positive record, it will take another century before we truly become an average country. But do we have that time before discouragement and despair disintegrate the country? Certainly, we do not have that time, we must catch up within a generation. That is a great challenge.

The challenge is greater because all factors are detrimental. The society is corrupted, the hearts are disappointed and dispersed, the national spirit is very low, the environment is polluted, morality is decadent, the criminal gangs are raging while the civil society is absent. The legacy

of the communist regime is horrible. We will have to mobilize tremendous efforts in all aspects while still living with poverty and inferiority for a long time.

In that situation, we have no choice but to build in the country a quality happiness, that is a peaceful and enthusiastic national context, where people, although not yet rich, are free and respected; their dignity, their interests, their health and opportunities for advance are protected in a harmonious, peaceful and solidary society, with a friendly environment. Besides, that is a condition to rise up; the bigger the effort, the more it should be shared equally. The social model must have the image of a happy family because it is harmonious and joyful, sharing willingly and rationally the sacrifices and the achievements, under a simple but clean and orderly roof, in the belief that tomorrow will be better than today.

The most important thing is also something that can be done immediately because it does not require large expenses. It is improving the environment, landscapes and public places. Due to traditional culture, we are not aware of the importance of the environment even though the problem is very serious and directly affects everyone. Blindness makes successive leaders unaware that development, including economic development, can only be sustainable if the environment is protected. Polluted plants cause long-term damage to society many times greater than the short-term income they generate. Corruption is a major cause of environmental destruction; the absence of civil society is another cause. The amazing fact is that so far, our country has not had an environmental protection association, yet the environment has been ravaged to critical levels and continues to be devastated, while in rich, strong and civilized countries, environmental protection has become the target of countless associations, including political parties that take the environment as their highest priority. For today's world, environment has become a fundamental political issue.

We cannot tolerate plants that do not treat smoke and waste in the name of economic gain. We must also strictly prohibit deforestation, filling and encroaching ponds and lakes. Public sanitary facilities must be adequate. Drainage system must be complete. Construction must be orderly; each area can only have a few types of houses with some colors. It is necessary to increase public transportation, create environmental tax on cars and motorcycles, encourage the use of bicycles, ban petrol motor vehicles in the center of cities and crowded areas, strictly punish the fraudulent companies constructing bridges and roads. We will stop the Central Highlands Bauxite Project, suspend nuclear power projects, even those under construction, and eliminate nuclear power until adequate waste treatment techniques are found, and our country has the full capacity to ensure the absolute safety of the reactors. Those measures may in short term reduce the profits of some companies, but ultimately, they still have great economic benefits because they protect and encourage investment in many other industries, especially tourism; the most important thing is health and a peaceful life. Pollution is a serious violation of human rights because clean water, fresh air, quiet space are the most basic human rights.

Building a harmonious, peaceful and solidary society does not require great costs beyond the national capacity as many people think. The costs are negligible compared to the sums stolen by the corrupted officials; an honest government will have the means. What it requires is something we can do even without being rich yet. It requires that the law is absolutely honest, transparent and respected, a government determined not to compromise with corruption, run by knowledgeable and visionary persons who make serving the nation their ideal, a government which cannot be suspected of fraud. The Vietnamese people are so used to sacrifices and sufferings that they can accept extraordinary efforts; they can also forgive mistakes, provided

that they believe that the leaders are wrong, but not ignorant and deceitful, they only make mistake because everyone can make mistake on difficult and complex decisions. We may have such leaders, but they have not had the opportunity because they have not yet the strength of a team. The main endeavor of the Rally for Democracy and Pluralism yesterday, now and in the future, is to discover, regroup and train such people that the country needs.

## VI. Institutions and constitution for Republic of Vietnam

The choice of a political regime cannot be purely theoretical, even less copying an existing model that has succeeded in another country, no matter how much we respect the experience of peoples in the journey to democracy and prosperity.

We will choose a political regime, at the same time a constitution, that meet the basic requirements of the country:

- Building honestly and irreversibly democracy to firmly integrate into the democratic world.
- Achieving real and definitive national reconciliation and concord to mobilize all brains, hearts and hands to strive to rise and build a common Vietnamese future.
- Developing the country following the model of market economy with freedom and creativity as engine.
- Decentralizing to allow the regions to maximize their special advantages in a unified Vietnam while minimizing regional disparities.
- Promoting civil society and satisfying the legitimate aspirations of ethnic and religious communities.
- Achieving real unification, that is, in national consensus.

In the light of these basic requirements, we will choose a parliamentary and decentralized democratic political system.

### 1. Two false prejudices about the political regime

Before discussing a politically appropriate regime for Vietnam, we need to clear up two prejudices, which are also two incorrect but very common worries of Vietnamese people.

#### 1.1. *Pluralistic democracy and political stability*

The first worry is that a pluralistic and multi-party regime can cause partisan dispersion, in which no party has the majority to seize power, and thus cause political instability. One may fear that the government will change continuously according to the unity or disunity of temporary alliances.

This concern is groundless, it stems from a misunderstanding caused by a poisoning propaganda that many Vietnamese have been victims.

The fact that there are more or less parties and whether a political party has a stable majority in parliament depends mainly on the voting method, not on the level of political freedom. To put it simply: single name vote in one round ballot leads to bipartisanship because it eliminates small parties, while proportional ballot leads to the emergence of many political parties.

Single name and one-round ballot means that each electoral district will elect one representative, and the candidates run with personal legal status, although they may bear the brand of a political party; whoever gets the highest number of votes will be elected. This electoral method is beneficial to large political parties, eliminating small parties and ensuring the permanent presence of a majority to form and run a government in a stable manner, in contrary it does not

allow the minority trends to have a say in parliament. In fact, it often leads to a bipartisan regime. Thus, the nominal and one-round voting way is a technical solution to the concern of having a stable government without the need to limit political freedom legally.

Proportional voting means that the ballot is organized in the whole country or in each region between political parties, the number of elected representatives of each political party will be proportional to the votes it gets. For example, a party which gets 20% of the votes will in principle win 20% of the delegates. This way of voting is very democratic because it allows all tendencies to have a say and a place in parliament, but in contrary it presents the danger of leading to a fragmented parliament in which no party has a majority enough to rule.

The optimal solution is a combination of these two voting ways to both ensure democracy and ensure the relative stability of the government. Technically, there could be a multitude of formulas, including the single name, two-round voting method, that has the effect of combining the parties sharing the same tendency in the second round.

These statements allow us to assert that, giving political stability as reason to limit the activity of political parties, is groundless. In the future Vietnam, there is no need for restriction, and there will be no restriction on the right to form and develop political parties.

There is also a need to put an end to the tricky confusion about stability. Stability has two meanings.

The first meaning is civil stability, which means stability in the life of every citizen, ensuring that there is no arrest, no confiscation of property, no ban on business, not being victim of sudden and frequent changes in the law, or arbitrary decisions of the government. This stability is essential for economic development, so that people rest assured to anticipate and plan their activities. This stability requires democracy, human rights and a rule of law state.

These observations allow us to assert that using the pretext of political stability to limit party activities is unfounded. In the future of Vietnam, there is no need of, nor can there be, any restrictions on the right to form and develop political parties.

The second meaning is the stability of the ruling group, or in other words, the prolongation of a government with the same rulers. This extension, if it is not due to free elections, but to a tyrannical dictatorship, is very much at odds with civil stability and therefore completely at odds with development, because the people must always live in fear, they dare not and cannot make long-term business plans.

Experience has shown that civil stability is essential for development, while the stability of the ruling group is completely unnecessary, it even has a bad effect because governments that last too long almost certainly lead to abuse of power and corruption. In Japan, since the end of World War II, few governments have lasted two years. In Italy, the average life expectancy of governments is much shorter. Instead of this, the economies of both countries are growing rapidly, they are both members of the group of the seven most developed countries. While countries with long-lasting governments like Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea and many countries in Africa and Latin America are very stagnant and backward.

When dictatorships – such as the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam – say that stability is needed for development, many persons agree because they understand it as civil stability, while the dictatorships think of stability in the second meaning, that is stability of the ruling group. It is a fraud that needs to be denounced.

## *1.2. Unity and decentralization*

The second worry is that decentralization may undermine territorial unity and restore the warlords' situation.

The answer is definitely no.

Regions are not nations, self-governing is not synonymous with independence. Regional laws cannot conflict with national laws.

There should be a healthier view on unity, transcending the administrative, heavy and bureaucratic unity. Unity is mostly unity in people's hearts. When each person and each locality feel they have a foothold and a voice in the national community, while their own characteristics are respected, they will feel better integrated in the nation, and national concord will be stronger. On the contrary, in the present fast changing and complicated world and in a country with nearly one hundred million people, a centralized government cannot decide everything, localities are in practice autonomous; but this autonomy is illegal, that is, always in a logical but illegal conflict with the central government, and thus with the national community. Centralized power therefore led to warlords instead of unity. Because it can unite the nation, decentralization needs to be carried out both on the national level and in the organization of each region.

Decentralization is the overwhelming trend of this era; it is the conclusion of two centuries of democratic experimentation on earth. Surprisingly, it took the nations a long time to discover a simple truth: a government can only consist of a small number of people, and a small number of people cannot decide everything for a large country with a large population, living in territories with different geographical and human conditions.

Decentralization has clear advantages: it encourages political activities in the localities, it brings democracy everywhere to everyone, it avoids long and complicated administrative lines for daily activities, it stimulates local cultural and press activities, it allows each locality to choose the most suitable living way for its characteristics and therefore to develop.

The impoverished regions will have a separate government that will give all the priority to develop the regions and bring them to the national level of development, instead of being forgotten by a central government busy with urgent problems of the developed and strong regions. No one will faithfully and precisely alarm the predicament of a region like the government of the region, whose sole mission is to develop the region.

Decentralization also contributes to the stability of the nation and democracy. On the one hand, it neutralizes coup plots (overthrowing the central government, then what to do with the local governments?). On the other hand, it avoids crises at the central level that should not happen, because of problems that only appear in regions at different times. Another extremely important advantage of decentralization is that it alleviates political conflict, because a party may lose at the central level but it can take power in some localities, where it is trusted. Conflict between government and opposition will therefore be less fierce. In the context of Vietnam's current history, decentralization thus avoids the situation where winner takes all, loser loses all, thus decentralization contributes positively to national reconciliation and concord.

Decentralization allows minority trends, religions and ethnic minorities to have significant political weight in the regions where they are present in numbers, thereby alleviating feelings of discontent and ideas of separatism and autonomy.

Another important advantage of decentralization is that, thanks to the local governments, whenever there is a change in government, those who come to power at the central level are not apprentices, they have at least experience at the local levels.

However, in order for decentralization to have a real content and effect, the regions must have a viable and developable size and population.

Our country now has over 90 million people; when the population growth will stop, our population will stabilize around 110 million. We can have ten to fifteen regions, with five to fifteen million people each.

To avoid administrative burdens and especially for civil status, each region will be a combination of several existing provinces. Grouping provinces into a region will be based on ethnicity, economic function, natural resources and transport criteria.

Each region will have its own parliament with power to appoint the regional government, enact regional laws that are not in conflict with the constitution and national laws, vote on certain taxes and local budgets.

The regional government is elected by the local parliament to implement policies that have been voted by the local parliament.

The regions cannot have an army, they cannot issue their own money, they do not have diplomatic representation, they cannot sign treaties with other countries, they cannot own companies with business purpose, they cannot organize referendum with political purpose. All elections and referendums must be authorized and recognized by the central government to be valid.

The regions cannot sign treaties with each other. Coordination between regions is entirely within the authority of the central government.

Each citizen has the right to choose a residence across the territory. The regions do not have the right to prohibit immigration into regions, but only the right to restrict the mobility of citizens under legal investigation.

The number of regional police cannot exceed a percentage, as determined by the central government, compared to the number of national police present in the region.

The central government has the right to set a minimum content for each level of education. The degrees allowing legal free practice professions must be recognized by central government.

Provincial and sub-provincial government agencies will be defined by a national law that follows the principle of decentralization.

## **2. The political regime**

### *2.1. Parliamentary regime: the most democratic and stable institution*

We are determined to exercise democracy most effectively and prevent the return of any form of dictatorship. We choose the political institution on the basis of that determination. The first thing to do is to choose one of three formulas: a presidential regime, a semi-presidential regime and a parliamentary regime.



First of all, we explicitly eliminate the presidential regime, that is, the regime in which a person is directly elected through universal suffrage and holds full executive power. This regime has many unacceptable handicaps. We can name the two most common handicaps.

The first handicap is the formula of voting for one person instead of a political party. This way of voting prevents the political parties from growing, because the main condition to seize power is to have a candidate who attracts voters; so, the core condition is to have a good campaign committee, not a party apparatus. He or she may be elected for superficial reasons such as being young and good-looking, walking gracefully, speaking eloquently, etc. rather than because of his/her party's prestige and his/her political ability. Once elected, this candidate will control the party, he/she will not depend on the party. Experience has shown that in every presidential regime, including the United States, there is no strong political party like those in parliamentary regimes; this is a great damage, because the political parties are both the place of training for political talents and the environment of production and screening of ideas on the major issues of the country.

The second handicap is that it gives too much power to a person for a predetermined time. In the context of a country that does not yet have a democratic tradition, it easily leads to abuse of power and dictatorship, with the consequence of repression, riot, even civil war. Moreover, if the president for any reason is discredited during the term, the national activities will be dangerously deadlocked for the rest of the term because the president cannot be replaced.

In pure theory, the presidential system has the advantage of ensuring a strong government that is able to decide quickly on necessary strategic options, but the reality is that the risk of war is now over, even the cold war has ended; there is no longer a need for a strong government which takes quickly important decisions. Moreover, what a president can do, a prime minister supported by a majority of parliament can also do. The historical truth is that so far, all presidential regimes in the world have failed or at least shown weakness, often have led to an individual dictatorship, as in the case of most countries choosing this regime, or have led to a conflictual deadlock between the executive power and the legislative power.

It was the failure of presidential regimes that led to the emergence of 'semi-presidential' regimes, which mean having both a president and a prime minister. The president is the head of state and shares – more or less in accordance with constitutional provisions – the executive power with a prime minister who is accountable to parliament in most cases. The president, directly elected through universal suffrage, is very powerful, on par with a president in a pure presidential system even if the constitutional rights may be different. This supremacy is a guarantee of political stability, similar to a presidential system; in return, the price to pay is, on the one hand, some disadvantages of the presidential regimes, and on the other hand, the unavoidable conflicts of authority within the executive branch between the president and the prime minister.

Semi-presidential regimes have the effect of alleviating the disadvantages of the presidential system by reconciling it with parliamentary regime. There have been several successful semi-presidential regimes. However, the semi-presidential regime is a very complex regime, the nature and content of the regime may vary depending on coincidental factors: the president and the prime minister are from the same party or not, the term of the president and the term of parliament are the same or not, the president or the parliament is recently elected, etc.

In a parliamentary regime, the executive power is in the hands of a prime minister elected by parliament and accountable to parliament. Thus, when electing a parliament, indirectly, people

also choose a prime minister. The advantage of parliamentary regimes is that people vote first for the political project of a party instead of voting for a person, and then they select a representative among the candidates who are close to them that they can evaluate; through their representatives, they are able to monitor and control government activities on a permanent basis.

The parliamentary regime is the most democratic and judicious regime, provided that it does not lead to political party inflation and a paralyzed parliament because it is divided between many opposing tendencies. This condition, as proved by experience, can be satisfied by electing all or most representatives through the single name one-round mode.

We will choose the parliamentary regime because of its simplicity and its democratic aspect.

## *2.2. Government organization*

A decentralized institution leads to the obvious existence of two parliaments at the central level. The Senate represents the regions while the National Assembly represents the masses. In each region, we need only one house of representatives playing the role of parliament at the local level.

The Senate exists only at the central level. Each region has an equal number of senators directly elected by voters of the region; the community of overseas Vietnamese will also be represented. The Senate plays the role of ensuring national unity and harmony across regions, presenting law propositions, appealing, if necessary, laws passed by parliament, recommending and proposing to the government the policies and the appointment of senior personnel. The Senate reserves the right to request hearings from government officials at all levels.

The National Assembly consists of representatives who are in majority elected according to the single name, one-round mode, the rest are elected proportionally. In a Vietnam with a population of 100 million, the National Assembly can consist of about 500 representatives, of which about 450 are elected on a nominal one-round basis, the rest are elected proportionally on the country scale. The fact that the majority is elected on a nominal one-round basis guarantees that there will be no political party inflation and there will be a majority (of one party or a coalition of several parties of the same trend) to form a government. The small part elected proportionally allows all parties to participate in parliament; it also allows the leaders of the political parties of national stature to avoid running in local elections and to focus their efforts on the issues of the country.

In each region, the number of representatives elected proportionally may be higher, a half may be elected according to the single name, one-round mode, a half may be elected proportionally.

To limit the number of political parties, it is necessary to set a minimum to be present in the National Assembly or regional parliament through proportional vote, for example 5%.

On the executive branch, at the central level, the Prime Minister is elected by the National Assembly and is accountable to the National Assembly. The ministers are appointed by the Prime Minister. In the regions, the executive is in the hands of a governor elected by a regional parliament and is accountable to the regional parliament.

The head of state, the president, may be elected by an electoral college of all deputies and senators at the central level. The head of state, because he/she is elected by a large electoral college, will be trustworthy. The president does not hold any specific power, but is a true head

of state, standing outside and above the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, ensuring the continuity, stability and unity of the nation.

The Supreme Court, composed of judges selected among lawyers, has a long term of office, about ten years; it is appointed by the president, the head of the Senate and the head of the National Assembly, one third each. The Supreme Court has the right to adjudge the constitutionality of laws, to arbitrate disputes between authorities, to judge senior leaders, to review judgments made by national and local courts.

### *2.3. Political parties: an intimate component of the government*

In such a regime, there may be a lot of political parties, but due to the electoral procedure – the majority of representatives are elected in a single name one-round manner – there will be only a few important parties at the central level. In each locality, there will be only a limited number of local parties besides the parties of national stature.

All true democracies must respect the activities of the political parties. There is no decent political activity without political party. In the context of our country, after so many years under dictatorships in which all political activities are repressed, political parties are not only necessary, they need to be created, encouraged and nurtured. Political parties are an indispensable element for the country; therefore, the state cannot ban the political activities of parties, it must support them instead.

Political parties must first fund themselves with the contribution of party members and sympathizers, but large parties will be funded by the budget. In return, all other funding methods including accepting financial support of companies and enterprises will be severely punished under the law. A share of about 1% of the national budget will be dedicated to funding political parties at the central level and an equivalent proportion at the regional budget level. Funding, at the central as well as the local level, is divided into two parts: one part is for political parties according to the number of representatives; another part is divided by the total votes of each political party. In order to avoid political party inflation, it is necessary to set a minimum stature – based on the number of representatives or the number of votes – to receive funding. The cost to fund political parties is of course high, many persons may think it is too high, but it will avoid even greater losses when political parties, because they are not funded, become hostages of the power of tycoons, or when they have to obtain resources through unrighteous means. Once the national community has funded political parties, in return it has the right to ask an absolute honesty from the political parties. Political activity will be more respected and therefore democracy will be healthier.

### **3. The constitution of Vietnamese Republic**

The constitution of the Vietnamese Republic formalizes the above-mentioned political institution and, at the same time, expresses the determination to build democracy according to the social model contained in the basic ideas and major orientations presented in the previous two chapters.

Right in the preamble, the Vietnamese Republic will solemnly declare the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations and its associated conventions as an intimate component of the constitution, with national reconciliation and concord as the leading spirit of all policies.

In the first chapter of the constitution there will be assertions that in Vietnam there is no idea banned to raise, and no subject banned to discuss; the Vietnamese people and state condemn civil war and any intention of using violence to achieve goals or resolve conflicts; the Vietnamese state does not approve and will abolish the death penalty.

After the chapters and articles on the organization of the state apparatus, the constitution will also have a special chapter with articles emphasizing major national goals: Vietnam has the vocation of a commercial, industrial, service and touristic country; Vietnam will make every effort to live in a spirit of friendship and cooperation with other countries, contributing to strengthen peace in the region and in the world; the particularly important responsibility of the Vietnamese people and state is to preserve and continuously improve the environment, air, forests, coastlines, continental shelf and territorial waters.

To build laws starting from the constitution, we will choose the empirical method, that is, at first enacting, or amending to retain, basic laws that are simple but accurate and transparent, then relying on jurisprudence to resolve similar cases, and at the same time, supplement and amend the laws.

## **VII. Struggling to establish a pluralistic democracy**

The major problem ahead of us is to end the party-ruled dictatorship in the shortest time and in the best conditions. The Communist Party of Vietnam has been a great disaster for our people. It has been the culprit of the thirty-year civil war that shattered the country and killed many millions of persons. In its frenzy to impose communism, it has also committed horrific crimes, it has intentionally massacred hundreds of thousand patriots or innocent people. It has used all tricks to rob power, and after robbing power, it has failed in all areas and in all aspects, making our country poor and tragically backward compared to the world. We are one of the last nations on earth to still be denied basic human rights. Moreover, our country is still dependent on foreign countries and has lost land, sea and islands. The communist regime maintains itself purely through violence and persecution.

No one can deny the right to resist such a tyranny by any means, including by violence. However, we definitely reject violence in the name of wisdom and patriotism. The country of Vietnam has suffered too much destruction to accept a new civil war, we also cannot accept a period of post-communist chaos. Recent world history has also shown that nonviolent struggle is the most appropriate and effective way to bring victory to democracy. That is the method we choose.

The most prominent feature of the country today is that all Vietnamese agree that the party-ruled dictatorship is a disaster; the struggle to establish pluralistic democracy is a national consensus. Nonetheless, the Communist Party of Vietnam still stubbornly sticks to a dictatorship that is not only completely wrong but also is condemned as a crime against humanity; moreover, it defiantly gives itself the monopoly to rule the country for an infinite time. The prolongation of the communist regime is a great challenge to every logic and to the honor of Vietnamese people. The future generations of Vietnam will not be able to understand this historical period and will not know how to judge today's people. This paradox has a cause we must identify, it is the absence of a political intellectual class. Because of the Confucian tradition, we only have professional academics whose vocation is to serve as tools of a government; we do not have persons who dare and are able to think independently about the problems of the country, and dare to accept every challenge struggling for their viewpoint, that is, political intellectuals. It is precisely the absence of political intellectuals that makes us unaware that ending the dictatorship and establishing democracy is the greatest revolution in our country's history; it is also why we do not identify the conditions to have or to create in order to make this revolution successful. Also because of this absence, we cannot agree on the roadmap campaigning for democracy and what to do for each stage.

### **1. Four necessary and sufficient conditions of the democratic revolution**

The history of major political movements in all countries across the ages suggests that there are four conditions that are both necessary and sufficient for a revolution – in the positive sense of a comprehensive change of both the regime and the national orientations – to succeed:

The first condition is that everyone in the country agree that the current regime is unacceptable and must be replaced.

The second condition is that the ruling party or ruling class, because it has lost consensus on a common ideology or it is corrupted, is divided and has lost the survival instinct of a group.

The third condition is that the vast majority of the population has reached a consensus on a new political regime and new national goals.

The fourth condition is that a political rally appears in accordance with the wishes of the entire people to serve as the meeting point for the aspirations for change.

Of course, no condition can be 100% fulfilled, but to some degree of maturity, one might consider a condition to be achieved.

Looking at the current context of the country, we can confirm that the first two conditions are met. The entire population is disgusted with the regime and is eagerly awaiting change. The desire for democracy is increasing among the people; moreover, the transition to democracy is increasingly seen as natural and mandatory, the more it is delayed, the more damage is done to the country. Not only the people but also a large number of cadres and party members of the Communist Party are losing their patience before the immobilism of the communist party leadership.

On the other hand, the communist party is ruined. The cadres and members have lost all confidence in socialism and view the party leadership as corrupt oligarchs, whereas the party leadership also sees the majority of party members as cheating, incompetent and lacking quality. Very serious conflicts have occurred even among the highest levels of leadership. The dominant psychology in the party is competing to grab, each for himself. The communist party has lost the will and vitality of a union. The five million block of communist party members is no longer a political party but a plundering class.

The third condition is also nearly achieved. The vast majority of the public, including the communist party members, has agreed that the future political regime of Vietnam must be a pluralistic democracy, giving equal standing to everyone and each one; everyone agreed that Vietnam's economy must be a market economy based on private business, using competition as strength, and using profit as stimulant. Moreover, we are aware that this democratic revolution must be carried out in a non-violent way, in the spirit of national reconciliation. We just lack a clear and transparent political project, posing major problems of the country along with ways to solve. In that spirit, this political project is a contribution.

Finally, we also see important collaborative efforts. Some activists with different political backgrounds are also becoming familiar to each other and to the public. Awareness of the imperative need of an organized struggle is increasingly shared. The conditions for a gathering of democratic forces are becoming more and more favorable.

So, what remains is to complete the third condition, that is to reach consensus on a political project, and build the fourth condition, that is to form a large democratic rally. We can say that we have traveled three quarters of the road to democracy. But the remainder of the road, building a political rally as a focal point for democratic aspirations, is also the hardest. The reason is because we encounter a strong alliance between, on the one hand, the brutal repression policy of an extremely stubborn ruling party, and on the other hand, the passivity of a disbanded nation after so many disappointments and injuries; that passivity is encouraged by the absence of a strong democratic rally.

## 2. The five stages of the campaign for democracy

How to build that democratic rally? The history of many countries in all eras has also shown that every revolutionary struggle must go through five distinct stages to succeed. The campaign for democracy, though tolerant in its spirit and non-violent in its method, is still a revolutionary struggle because it aims to change both the political regime and the social organization. So, we also have to go through those five stages, a long and difficult journey that requires persistent efforts over many years.

### 2.1. *Building an ideological basis*

The ideological basis of a political rally, in addition to the values that are agreed and honored, includes a political project, the arguments to defend the project choices and a consensus on the struggle strategy. That project must be an elaborate synthesis of a serious observation of the country's context and the most correct thoughts of the time. A political movement needs to be built on a strong ideological basis to succeed. The ideological basis must be an ideal that is attractive and feasible enough to bind together all comrades and to win support for the movement. The phase of ideological basis building can be considered to be almost completed when there is a political project deemed both serious and feasible by the best intellectuals of the country.

### 2.2. *Building a core team of cadres*

Winning the support for the political project, organizing human resources and means to bring the struggle to success is the work of the core team of cadres. In the current campaign for democracy, we are facing great difficulty because the persons having political ability are both rare and dispersed. Therefore, the main effort is, on the one hand, gathering these rare and precious elements and, on the other hand, trying to train new core cadres. This work is very difficult but cannot be avoided, because in the final analysis, any political struggle is a competition between teams of cadres. A political organization must always respect a certain proportion between its team of core cadres and the total number of members. Health is more important than size. Quality is more important than quantity. In the present age, when the modern media allow a small group to interact directly and permanently with the masses, the role of the core cadres is even more important.

### 2.3. *Building and reviewing the means*

Any struggle needs the means to succeed. The means are not only the material means. The means may come from the organization, from its members and sympathizers, from allied organizations, or from the capacity of mobilizing the support of international organizations, media agencies, organizations defending human rights and press freedom, trustworthy personalities in a certain context. The means can come in many forms and from many different sources. It is important to anticipate and plan their readiness. Building and reviewing the means is of the utmost importance because in the political struggle, either we have the necessary means for our political line, or we have to implement more or less the political line of the supplier of the means.

#### *2.4. Building a popular base*

The popular base should be understood as the group of members outside the team of core cadres. A member belongs to the core team or to the grassroots team depending on his/her political level or other reasons: his/her health, time he/she can devote to the struggle, his/her family situation or personal situation at a certain time. The popular base is also the community of sympathizers, especially the trustworthy sympathizers. Finally, the popular base is also the capital of sympathy that the organization has won. The effort to build a popular base is essentially an effort of communication with two goals: first is to convince the masses of the need to contribute to a common solution for the country instead of each one trying to solve his/her own problems with his/her own means, second is to win the agreement of the masses with the organization. The popular base can be considered as satisfactory when it is strong enough to be the drive belt between the organization and people in big cities.

#### *2.5. Standing up for power*

Only after the above four stages have been achieved, meaning that the organization is strong enough, that an effort to gain power can be thought of and the method to win power can be decided. In fact, the Vietnamese democrats must definitely reject the armed option from the beginning, because winning power by violence requires starting a civil war, which all Vietnamese must definitely condemn. Nothing destroys a country more than a civil war and nobody has the right, on behalf of anything, to start a civil war. The civilized world has renounced violence as a means of political struggle, the Vietnamese people, after the painful experiences of the recent civil war, must refuse violence even more explicitly. The strategy of the Vietnamese democrats is a peaceful evolution. That strategy means that the victory of democracy will come from social pressure. This pressure manifests itself mainly in two forms; firstly, the change in the thinking and acting of people will put the regime in a ridiculous offside position, the official language of the government becomes a joke, the leaders are ashamed of their positions; secondly, the masses gradually get rid of fear and will be increasingly encouraged to participate in large protests; to a certain point, the government will have to choose between making concessions or being overthrown as the people stands up. Of course, we prefer the scenario in which the communist government gives in and participates in the democratization process.

But how to mobilize the masses? All research and experience show that, no matter how discontented a population is, it will only rebel to fight if three conditions are met:

1. Everyone feel attached to a common destiny and there is only a common exit, sneaking is not the solution; on the other hand, everyone agree that the common tragedy comes from a clearly identified group. In other words, there must be a consciousness of two distinct groups, the group of 'us' which is victim of the group of 'them'. In the case of Vietnam, this condition means that the Vietnamese people are aware that the communist party is the cause of the current ugly situation and there is only a common solution for the whole country, no one can sneak to find personal solution.
2. There is an organization to encourage and lead the masses; the organization's core role is to maintain the enthusiasm of the struggle and avoid discouraging mistakes. The public is not patient. The effort to motivate the public will fail if different organizations make different calls, or if the leading organization is divided.



3. The leading organization must be strong enough for the public to firmly believe in victory. The masses are not romantic.

In the last few years, there have been many protests against Chinese encroachment or against the government robbing land. All of these protests, if the goal is to change the regime, are still far below the necessary level, even to achieve a relative success, because they all follow the wrong process. Mass mobilization can only be the last of the five stages mentioned above. Moreover, these protests do not meet any of the three conditions required to motivate the masses.

The five stages must go in order, but there is no need that a stage completes before the next stage can start. The stages overlap each other. The five-stage process is a recipe for action, it is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Not following this process will surely lead to failure, but following this process does not guarantee success. Success depends also on many quantitative factors: to which extent is the ideological foundation accepted, are there many cadres, how are their skills, how abundant are the means?

A very important remark: the first two stages, building an ideological basis and forming a team of core cadres, account for most of the time and effort of a revolution. It takes several decades to have a right, healthy ideological foundation, accepted by the masses, and a team of cadres of a few hundreds of persons, with a few dozens of hard-core cadres, mastering the ideological foundation, with a strong personality, determination, with the technique and discipline of struggle. But once these two elements are in place, the organization can rely on a historic opportunity to grow very quickly and succeed within a few years, even a few months.

The view of the Rally for Democracy and Pluralism is that the campaign for democracy is currently in the middle of the first phase only, and in the beginning of the second phase. But one cannot conclude pessimistically that the victory of democracy is still far.

### **3. The content of the campaign for democracy**

From the above analysis, the struggling effort to end the dictatorship and build democracy of the Rally for Democracy and Pluralism will focus on the following key tasks.

#### *3.1. Awaken the masses about the need for a common solution for the whole nation*

The painful contradiction between the great potential and the tragic situation of the nation, between the widespread desire for democracy and the defiant prolongation of the totalitarian regime has one main reason: that is the sneaking psychology to find personal solutions to personal problems. That mentality is our historical and cultural heritage of thousands of years in which people have absolutely no voice, have to endure the government as a destiny and try to adapt to survive. Sneaking to survive, on the one hand, forced people to accept acting dishonestly and contribute to rot society, on the other hand, forced people to compromise with the regime, contribute to the regime and thus help the regime to survive, something that no one wants.

The first, great and arduous effort of the democrats is to awaken people that a common solution, i.e., a change of the political regime is mandatory, it is a mistake to isolate oneself and sneak to solve personal problems by personal solutions. Only a negligible minority will succeed in that way, and the success, if any, is only temporary and full of uncertainty.

We must begin to strike down the philosophy of sneaking and promote the will to be honest, worthy and responsible. As long as the public does not believe that all Vietnamese are bound together in a common destiny, and therefore need a common solution, the campaign for democracy cannot succeed and the dictatorship will continue to exist, or if it collapses due to its own ruin, it will only give way to an anarchic situation worse than a dictatorship.

The main difficulty of this psychological revolution is that it requires both reasoning and stimulation, therefore only political groups can effectively mobilize. Researchers, thinkers, even reputable notables, if any, are powerless, because the very fact that they stand alone is the proof that they have chosen personal solution and make their exhortations for a common awareness losing a lot of effect. The Rally for Democracy and Pluralism understands its responsibility and its role in this psychological breakthrough.

### *3.2. Winning a decisive victory in terms of thought and reasoning*

In the revolutionary struggle, the victory in terms of thought and reasoning sooner or later leads to political victory; on the contrary, a government with nothing left to say will be eliminated at the end. At present, the communist government is completely confused on the ideological front, but the Vietnamese democratic opposition has not yet won a definitive victory. The Rally for Democracy and Pluralism will continue to contribute positively to the struggle of idea to completely knock down the fraudulent arguments in favor of the dictatorship, and dissipate all confusions remaining in the population, including some democrats. This ideological struggle is very important, even after democracy is established, because it is the core campaign to change the way of thinking and acting, that is, to change the course of history.

We have to break the argument that democracy will lead to chaos. We need to prove that democracy is the basic condition to ensure there is no chaos, a way of life that allows society to constantly evolve and innovate in order. We need to assert that the country will not be able to rise if corruption is not pushed back, because corruption demolishes all plans, projects and works. But the experience of every nation in the world has shown that one cannot improve a corrupt government, the only solution is to replace it by another government. Democracy is in fact the institution that allows change of government without causing chaos; democracy is therefore the mandatory solution for countries with a serious corruption problem like Vietnam.

We have to break the argument that, to have development, one needs discipline, and to have discipline, one needs to sacrifice democracy, limit freedom and human rights. The Vietnamese people need to be clearly explained that there can be no other national discipline than the constitution and laws. The Vietnamese people also needs to be convinced that democracy, freedom and human rights are not obstacles, but are imperative conditions for a healthy, continuous and sustainable development; the initial progress in some dictatorships such as China and Vietnam is only a consequence of the relaxation of some freedoms and the partial removal of the authoritarian administration policy; it will quickly reach its limit if there is no real change towards democracy. In reality, the development momentum in these two countries has stalled

because the two governments of China and Vietnam refuse to push further reforms towards democratization.

We must break the argument that the East is different from the West, and therefore we cannot wholly accept Western values such as individual freedom, democracy and human rights. Freedom, democracy and human rights are universal values of all mankind, not only the West. These values are present in every civilization, including in Vietnam. The advantage of Western countries is that they know how to promote these values and so, thanks to that, they have prospered and surpassed the rest of the world. We need to promote those values to move forward. And because we are late, we need to promote them strongly and assertively.

We need to expose the fallacy of the argument that Asian cultural values are more profitable to development than Western cultural values. Behind that demagogic argument is the intention to justify authoritarian regimes. It is no coincidence that the Chinese communist regime is trying to restore Confucianism and it is not surprising if the Vietnamese communist regime answers favorably. We must be vigilant to defeat this propaganda plan. Of course, Asian cultures have many positive points, but the negatives are more numerous and more serious. The most developed Asian countries have developed by accepting the Western way of organizing and working democratically, not by denying the West and boasted their own characteristics. Besides, Asian countries have very different cultures and customs, so it is not possible to talk in general terms of Eastern or Asian values.

We must be aware that these are not just theoretical debates. Behind the fallacious arguments in favor of dictatorships are harsh prisons, brutal tortures that the most precious people of the country are the victims, while a minority of exploiters freely plunders national resources.

We also need to strongly reject a kind of 'economism' that some governments, including the Vietnamese communist government, have used as an excuse to deny or to limit freedom, democracy and human rights. Economy is not everything, and even in a purely economic area, the growth rate is not all. An achievement of 10% economic growth does not allow a complacent government to take credit, then impose a dictatorship on the people, especially when that growth only means partially shortening the delay due to the government and when the country had to pay a very high price on culture, morality and environment. The national goal that we strive for the entire Vietnamese people to share is a prosperous society with a high cultural level, a rational distribution of national income, an equal opportunity for everyone, a society with solidarity between citizens and with patriotism ensuring freedom and dignity for all, a country with the potential to constantly rise up and with a protected and continually improved environment.

Another very important effort is to convince all members of the Communist Party and state officials that they have absolutely no reason to be concerned about the end of the totalitarian dictatorship; on the contrary, they will have every reason to rejoice in the victories of democracy. Their honor, dignity and legal rights will be respected. Moreover, they will abandon the guilt complex of collaborating with a bad and fraudulent regime. They will be proud to contribute to bringing the country forward with greater welfare for everyone, including themselves.

The effort to gain the sympathy of the Communist Party members and cadres is not difficult in theory, because most of them are also victims of the regime and are also very dissatisfied. The difficulty is the psychological legacy of the war and the harsh rule of the Communist Party. Many people do not believe that hatred can be easily erased, while there is still extreme rhetoric of an unconscious and irresponsible minority creating further concern. Therefore, the democracy

campaign, on the one hand, must affirm assertively the spirit of national reconciliation and concord, and on the other hand, must strongly commit that there will be no discriminatory measures. To do so, the democratic ranks must bring together people from all political pasts. A political gathering, no matter how well-intentioned and righteous, that only includes people from one of the former factions, nationalist or communist, is hopeless.

In order to win decisively the thought and reasoning battle, the democrats themselves must have the right thinking and reasoning. The first and foremost effort is to convince those who want to contribute to the campaign for democracy, the intellectuals as well the masses, that a political struggle can never be an individual struggle, but always an organized struggle only. The struggle to end the dictatorship and establish democracy is a very difficult political struggle. It must be organized, and the organization cannot be established quickly; it requires intelligent and enduring efforts for many years. But building an organization cannot be discarded. Experts, commentators, writers and artists may contribute individually, with information, reasoning and sympathy that are beneficial to the democracy campaign, but they cannot defeat the dictatorship; only a democratic organization can do it. We appreciate those contributions but we must also recognize their limitations. Conversely, these persons also need to see their own limits and recognize the need for the organization, even if they have their own reasons for not joining an organization. Struggling for democracy without joining an organization should be considered an exception, not a routine.

The problem is that there are still many people who think that it is possible to fight for democracy without joining an organization. Some are also proud to belong to no organization, considering it as a sign of an objective and righteous spirit. They need to be warned that this is a very wrong attitude, harmful to the democracy movement and contradicting their own desire. They need to understand that personal political struggle is only effective for a very small number of persons, with very high prestige, level or position; in nearly all cases, the positive effect is less than the negative effect of distracting attention from the most correct and necessary effort, that is to build a strong democratic organization.

Another big mistake to beware of is thinking that a political organization can be established quickly. This superficial belief led to a frequent situation: many people were eager to hastily form organizations when the political context seemed to be favorable to the democracy campaign, with the final result of contributing to miss the opportunity by distracting attention from serious efforts. The analysis of the conditions for a successful revolution, and the stages to go through, has shown that a serious political organization can only be the result of intelligent, continuous and persistent efforts for many years, starting from a complete political thought. Practical experience has also shown that in the last four decades, thousands of organizations have been created, all were in an embryonic state and all have disappeared; even some veteran political parties, which made many sacrifices and won a lot of trust, have faded out because they could not update their political thought. Therefore, building a political organization requires a lot of intelligence, effort, time and also luck. That is why the attempts to form a new organization instead of contributing to an existing serious organization should not be encouraged.

We must also be wary of a misconception that all efforts should be concentrated on building civil society organizations. It is true that the absence of civil society has been the main cause that makes us lagging behind the world and makes our nation helpless against a tyrannical dictatorship. No one denies the necessity of civil society, but its role must be exactly identified. Each genuine civil society organization can only give special attention to one problem of the

society and therefore is trustworthy on that problem; however, it does not take care of all problems of the society and cannot have political ambition. Each organization exposes the errors of the dictatorship and exerts pressure on an area that it is particularly interested in and has experience of, and therefore has an authoritative voice. The strength of civil society organizations is that they have clear definite goals. They are valuable support for the democracy campaign, but they do not have the function of leading the struggle for democracy. That is the function of political organizations.

### *3.3. Forming a democratic front and fighting for free elections*

The struggle to end the dictatorship and establish democracy requires a unified leadership in order to win the support of the world, create confidence in the victory and mobilize the masses. In particular, the mobilization of the masses will surely fail if the democratic movement is dispersed and there are conflicting calls and instructions.

That unified leadership may be an organization that outperforms other organizations in terms of force and prestige, forcing other organizations to cooperate because there is no other option. In reality, this possibility does not exist. The practical solution is a democratic front gathering the genuine democratic organizations.

All democrats are aware of the need for a strong democratic front, or a democratic alliance.

This democratic front is necessary for the Vietnamese opposition to appear in the eyes of the world as a reliable alternative, avoiding the situation of many organizations competing for the support of the governments and the international organizations, creating an image of a fragmented Vietnamese opposition with a low self-respect.

This front is also a mandatory condition to bring to the masses the confidence in victory, so that we can mobilize them and lead them to fight to get concessions from the communist regime.

This front can be established because time has filtered opinions and today there are only very few differences in point of view.

The first step of the effort to form this democratic front is to further promote contacts and direct exchanges, in a spirit of mutual respect, about the international context and the situation of the country, about the basic choices for the future, about the urgent issues and the ways to solve them. It is through these exchanges that a consensus can be reached and that the required persons for a successful campaign for democracy can be found.

This phase of mobilization should be done both in the country and abroad, in parallel with the efforts to spread the ideal of democracy and pluralism to the masses. It aims to find the persons sharing the same goal to unite for action. It is also intended to understand and compare all political stances to identify the political organizations that, although not completely sharing each other's views, can still act together. Equally important, it allows the detection of fraudulent 'democratic' organizations created by the Communist Party in an attempt to undermine the democratic movement.

This union in a democratic front must surpass all divisions left by the past, in the spirit of sincere and complete national reconciliation, fully oriented to the future. The strength of this union is mostly based on the consensus on the purpose and method of struggle, along with mutual trust. This union must be open to all individuals and groups of all backgrounds, as long as they sincerely

share the ideal of democracy and pluralism, sincerely approve the spirit of national reconciliation and concord, and firmly reject violence. A compromise can be found for all other disagreements.

We affirm that this democratic front is a front against all forms of dictatorship in which the communist dictatorship is only one, against oppression, against mediocrity and evil. This democratic front is not at all an extension of the past conflict, but it is a future-oriented union. It is open to all democrats from all political pasts and inclinations. But it is only open to the true democrats.

In order to be effective, like all political alliances, the democratic front will need a member organization to act as the locomotive to ensure stability. With that observation in mind, the Rally for Democracy and Pluralism, on the one hand, will strive to develop itself so that it can take this leading role, but on the other hand, it will be willing to cede this leading role to another democratic organization with more or even equal potential.

However, the awareness of the need for a leading organization cannot make us forget that the tricks to gain the upper hand only worsen a situation that is already difficult in itself. All organizations must see their own efforts as contributions to the victory of democracy. All organizations, including the large ones due to the combination of many organizations, must consider themselves as the elements and the stages of an ever-larger union. The Rally for Democracy and Pluralism is committed to always behaving according to that motto.

The form, tactics and leadership will be flexible according to the situation. When the communist government has made concessions and accepted the democratic rules, the campaign will be public and the leadership of the front will be based in the country. As long as the communist government continues stubbornly its repressive policy, the domestic activities will be discreet and the leadership will be located overseas.

In both cases, we need an active presence across the country and in all areas. We will take advantages of all loopholes, seize every opportunity, befriend all persons who want to renew the country to create and multiply opposition bases that are more and more active, more and more public. On the one hand, we strive to further open the closed door of the communist regime and take advantage of the flow of exchange between inside and outside the country; on the other hand, we use every initiative to create more intense pressure, in many ways, on the regime, attack the stubborn conservative faction of the Communist Party on all fronts, blocking all its escape routes, except the escape to pluralistic democracy.

The mission of the democratic front is to fight for democracy and free elections. That mission is considered accomplished after the first truly free election. Whether and how the front will continue is up to the member organizations to decide in the aftermath.

This free election will not be decided and organized by the communist government alone. Which institution to elect, when to vote, how to vote, who is entitled to vote, who is eligible to be candidate are the decisions on which the Vietnamese democratic opposition must have a say.

The free elections can only take place when all fundamental political freedoms have been officially and solemnly confirmed and the laws that conflict with political freedoms have been repealed.

The free elections must take place in the spirit of national reconciliation, transcending all administrative barriers created by the current government or by circumstances. Practically, before the elections, all political prisoners must be freed and their civic rights fully restored; all

former political judgments must be abolished, overseas Vietnamese must also be recognized as nationals and have the right to vote and to be candidates.

The free elections must be held by a qualified government, recognized as capable of ensuring fair and honest elections. This government will welcome the unlimited presence of impartial international observers.

The above-mentioned requirements, though very modest and very reasonable, will certainly meet the opposition of the communist government; that is why all public and international pressures must be used to force the communist government to make concessions and participate in the democratization process. In fact, the Communist Party has no other choice. Democracy has become the rule of the game of the world and a new wave of democracy is rising while China, its last support, has vacillated. It only has to choose to be the actor or the victim of an inevitable transformation.

The outcome of the free election does not matter much. Even in the case the Communist Party, or its successor under another name, obtains victory, it could no longer be an authoritarian ruling party; the democratic regime has been established, the democracy campaign has been successful and the big winner is still the Vietnamese nation. However, with the tragic state of the country and the responsibility of the communist party – mistakes as well as the crimes – exposed through democratic discussion, we can predict, without fear of being wrong, that the communist party will lose miserably, it may even disappear after the first free election. Besides, there is every chance that the electoral competition will not take place between the Communist Party and the democratic organizations, but between the remaining conservative faction of the Communist Party and the democratic forces, because as soon as democracy and free elections have been accepted in principle, certainly a significant part of the communist party members, including some sections of the Communist Party, will secede and join the democratic ranks.

In the struggle for free elections and for the victory through those free elections, the Rally for Democracy and Pluralism always advocates the elimination of hatred and the respect for all people and every political opinion to collaborate and build together a common Vietnamese future. This spirit of national reconciliation and concord cannot be confused with an attitude of willingness to collude and complicit with anybody. The attitude of the Rally for Democracy and Pluralism is very transparent. The Rally has clear goal and direction and will persevere. The Rally will make every effort to win the free elections. If it wins, the Rally will, with the allied political organizations, share responsibility before the nation. If unfortunately, victory goes in the hands of forces with other viewpoints, the Rally will continue to fight in the position of a decent and responsible opposition.

Like all political campaigns, this struggle will require a lot of compromise. Non-violent struggle means accepting final victory through phased compromises. The Rally will accept phase compromises without fear to lose its soul because it has a founding ideology and main directions as guide. The Rally will accept phase compromises that shorten the road to democratic but it will not compromise on three basic standpoints: the ideal of democracy and pluralism, the spirit of national reconciliation and concord and the non-violent method of struggle.

## VIII. For a successful transition to democracy

### 1. The transition problem

After the end of the dictatorship, we will go through an extremely difficult transition period. In a period of about five years, our country will have to make extraordinary efforts to overcome extremely difficult challenges before it can become a normal country and truly integrate into the international community.

We will have to transition from a monolithic, centralized, autocratic system to a pluralistic and decentralized with separation of powers regime.

We will have to replace a planned economy based on state-owned enterprises with a market economy based on private enterprises.

We will have to turn a corrupt, bureaucratic and haughty state machine, instrument of a party into an effective, responsible, healthy state serving the common good.

We will have to end an arbitrary management by resolution and directive to establish a true democratic rule of law state.

We will have to replace the police apparatus, conceived and organized as a tool of repression of the Communist Party, with a police apparatus that protects security, order and civil rights; replace the courts considered as an extended arm of the police with independent courts that only have the mission to express the law.

We will have to replace an education of propaganda, indoctrination and low quality with an objective, liberal and high-quality education. We consider education and training as a vital struggle for the country.

We inherit a totally declined country; banditry is rampant, corruption is an institution, deception and fraud have become national reflexes, infectious diseases are uncontrolled, youth are illiterate and they abandon school, people are depressed, pessimistic and disappointed, the gap between the rich and the poor is blatant and provocative, tens of millions live in extreme poverty, millions of land victims are frustrated since many years after being expropriated and only being compensated at a stolen price, the environment is destroyed and polluted, sovereignty and even lands are lost in the hands of foreigners. We will have to turn that country into an honest and clean country, disciplined, with full sovereignty, confidence, solidarity, economic resilience and attractiveness to foreign investments.

We inherit a country piled up with hatred due to war and discriminatory policies. We will have to heal the wounds without causing new ones. We will have to restore the honor of those who have been offended without offending others, to compensate the victims without creating new ones.

Our Vietnamese society is in a serious crisis of faith. People, with good reason, associate politics with domination, business with profiteering. The transition should be the decisive and persuasive first step of an ongoing effort to reconcile the masses with politics and business. It must inaugurate a new political philosophy and a new way of doing business, with politicians who have chosen to serve society instead of getting rich, entrepreneurs who are knowledgeable, creative, who dare and know how to take risks.



We need to clarify: the question is not to find a miraculous formula that can quickly turn the country into a rich and strong country, there is no such thing. The question is, from the realities of the country and the world context, to identify the problems that need to be prioritized and to propose the solutions.

The goal of this transitional period is to lay the foundations for an honest and responsible democratic government, to double the national product in the span of about five years, while improving the environment and the social relations, dissolving all hatred and animosity, clearing psychological deadlocks and really putting a harmonious Vietnam in the orbit of progress. This goal can be achieved, and will have to be achieved, by policies and measures that do not conflict with the broad directions outlined.

We have so many serious and urgent socio-cultural problems that need to be solved but we have only very limited resources. If we spend too many resources on these issues, we will have no resource for economic development and will stand still in poverty. On the contrary, there are social and cultural issues so severe that, if they are not solved, they will destroy all economic efforts. We have to recognize the harsh reality that we will still have to live with poverty and destitution for many years. In the context of tight budgets, we will have to set a priority for the problems. The leading spirit is to urgently address the issues essential for national reconciliation, social security and economic development; other issues will be addressed in a different order of priority as soon as the economic possibilities allow.

## **2. The political measures**

### *2.1. Return the government to the people*

Every patriotic and lucid Vietnamese must expect the transformation to democracy to take place in peace and order, in the spirit of national reconciliation and concord. We will make every effort to involve the Communist Party in the democratization process. But in any case, the transition period will start with a Provisional Covenant of the Republic of Vietnam, returning the government to the people and solemnly affirming the fundamental freedoms including freedom of speech and freedom of the press, the right to form and join organizations, the right to vote and stand for election, the right to own land. This Provisional Covenant will summarize the principles contained in the major directions for building a pluralistic democratic Vietnam and will guide all actions of the transitional government until the new constitution of the Republic of Vietnam has been voted and put into effect.

The first concrete thing to do is depoliticizing the governmental apparatus, the army and the police. Civil servants and military personnel have the right to join political organizations but not to engage in political activities. All partisan activities in all administrative, security and military organs of the state will be strictly prohibited. The administration, the army and the police must be non-political tools, completely independent of all political parties, absolutely respectful of the constitution, absolutely submissive to all elected governments. The military and police will return to the noble mission of defending the country, maintaining security and order, and therefore need to be completely separated from all business activities. The companies currently owned by the military and police will be privatized. The persons working at those companies can be demobilized to continue their job.

The army will be modernized in equipment and training and will also be reduced in number. The defense budget will primarily prioritize strengthening the navy and the air force.

The peripheral organizations established by the communist party to impersonate and control the civil society – whether calling themselves front, unions or associations – will lose all official roles and benefits, and if they continue to exist, they will be ordinary associations, equal before the law to all other civil society organizations.

## *2.2. Implementing national reconciliation and concord*

An effort that must begin immediately and continue for many years is to implement the policy of national reconciliation and concord. National reconciliation and concord are the national policy of the transitional period and is the subsequent political philosophy of Vietnam. National reconciliation and concord require fairness with the past and respect for the future.

All political prisoners will be released and their civil rights will be immediately restored.

All persons who, for political reasons -because of anti-capitalist policies, land reform, or because they were former civil servants and military of the South - were imprisoned, humiliated, will have their honor restored; they will be compensated for their losses, at least symbolically.

In the name of national continuity, the state will assume responsibility for past mistakes, especially for those who have died unjustly, whatever their camp and whatever the period of time.

Those who have their property confiscated for political reasons will be reimbursed by the state, the actual reimbursement will be implemented gradually over time according to the state's economic capabilities.

All citizens have the right to ask the state to reconsider the sentences that they, or their relatives, were victims if there is evidence that they were wrongly tried. When it is proved that a judge has betrayed the laws and professional conscience, and has intentionally tried unjustly following orders, he/she will no longer be authorized to exercise the profession of judge, and in serious cases may be prosecuted.

All citizens whose land has been expropriated have the right to ask the government to reconsider their case to either get their land back or be compensated more appropriately; they also have the right to denounce forced land sales at low price in the name of public interest.

Overseas Vietnamese, if they desire, are granted Vietnamese nationality, for them as well as for their children born abroad.

A special agency, at ministerial level, will be set up to implement the national reconciliation policy, especially to receive and resolve the people's complaints and claims. A committee of the parliament will be responsible for ensuring that all laws and regulations do not go against the national policy of reconciliation and concord. A council of national reconciliation and concord, independent of the government and composed of representatives of political parties, representatives of religions, representatives of ethnic groups, and prestigious figures of civil society, will be established to oversee the implementation of national reconciliation and concord.

The state will strictly prohibit any act of vengeance and discrimination. All Vietnamese, regardless the past, are treated equally in their obligations and their rights. All civil servants and military personnel will in principle be retained in the position they are holding. There must be objective and legitimate reasons for all personnel changes.

The implementation of national reconciliation and concord will take a very long time. All measures of the state must always show goodwill to truly heal the wounds left behind by the past, so that all Vietnamese can voluntarily join hands to build the country.

In order for the policy of national reconciliation and concord to have a legitimate foundation and be stronger, a law on national reconciliation and concord will be drafted for the whole people to vote through a referendum.

### *2.3. Promulgate a new constitution for the Republic of Vietnam and amend the laws*

This constitution will be voted by a constitutional parliament, the first elected institution. This constitution is in line with the pluralistic, parliamentary and decentralized political regime that has been chosen and presented; it will not contain any reference to a doctrine, a religion or a political party. It will also affirm Vietnam's definitive and complete integration into the world community; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations and the attached conventions will be considered an integral part of the Vietnamese constitution. The death penalty will be abolished because it is uncivilized, and in fact, it does not have the effect that its barbarism misleads us. The 'treason' crime will be removed in the language of Vietnamese law. After the vote of the new constitution, the legislative parliament – perhaps the constitutional parliament will vote to turn itself into the legislative parliament, if the situation allows it – will vote on fundamental laws. The guiding spirit to draft these basic laws is simplicity, clearness, ease to understand and to respect in the context of the country. The first laws are not necessarily perfect. It is important to lay a healthy foundation for the national activity; the laws will be completed later to be increasingly complete and perfect. The existing laws will be reviewed; some new laws may come from existing laws, after removing the references to socialism and the Communist Party, and provisions that are either anti-democratic or contrary to constitutional liberties.

### *2.4. Start to bring decentralization into practice*

Right after that, it is necessary to bring decentralization into political life. This means that we need a territorial organization law that specifies the powers of the regions, the number of regions, their boundaries and a schedule for the elections and establishment of the local governments. The guiding principle is that the regions will consist of pre-existing adjacent provinces that are fairly homogeneous in terms of geography, transport, ethnic structure, economic vocation; they must have an adequate surface area and population to be regions viable and able to develop.

### *2.5. Keeping the land of Vietnam for Vietnamese people*

For many years, the communist government has ignored, even intentionally, and let many lands of strategic value falling in the hands of foreigners. The purchase and sale of these lands, sometimes done through Vietnamese intermediaries who lend their names as owners, is a great loss for the country. Many strategic watershed forests of high strategic importance have been

long-term leased by the government to foreigners, and they have almost become foreign areas in the territory of Vietnam. Many almost exclusively foreign settlements have also formed in practice. This situation cannot be tolerated. We need to review the transfers of land to stop the shady land sales to foreigners. The unrighteous transfers of land will be recovered, in the serious cases, they may be confiscated without compensation.

A measure to both harmonize the need to attract capital and keep Vietnamese land for Vietnamese people is, not only allowing, but also encouraging Vietnamese residing abroad to get Vietnamese nationality and buy houses and land. It is also a measure to attach the overseas Vietnamese to the homeland.

More important is to review the treaties that the communist party and state have signed with foreign countries, especially those whose contents have not been published. Treaties only signed by the Communist Party of Vietnam with foreign countries will be declared immediately null and void; treaties signed by representatives of the communist state but not approved by the National Assembly or not announced to the public will also be denied. Only treaties consistent with national interests will be maintained, after renegotiation if necessary.

### **3. The socio-cultural measures**

The most acute and pressing issues facing the country are not economic but social and cultural issues.

#### *3.1. Strengthening security and order*

Vietnam today is one of the most insecure countries in the world. The first security threat is the Communist Party and State. Illegal arrest, imprisonment and savage beating have become common practice. The lack of security is also due to the increasing number of rogue elements, in many cases with the protection of the police. Of course, the social evils are a natural product of today's stalemate society and will certainly decline with the return of hope and faith. But anyway, our country will remain unstable for a long time, and security and order will be a painful problem for a newly established democratic government. Ensuring security and order is not a limitation of freedom, but a mandatory condition for real freedom.

The law needs to be strict; it does not need to be harsh, and especially not violent.

All Vietnamese, at the age of majority, will receive identification cards and passports, they have the right to stay wherever they want and to move freely within the territory or abroad.

Unclear laws are also a cause of law breaking. In the future, our country needs laws that are simple, easy to understand and respect, but also severe with the violations.

The current government has a large number of police, but the police are primarily used to protect the Communist Party's political monopoly instead of protecting security and order, to repress the aspirations for freedom and democracy rather than repressing the social evils. Therefore, immediately in the transition period, a majority of intelligence agencies and political protection agencies will be transferred to security and environmental protection forces. Strengthening security and order is a matter of reforming the security apparatus. This reform is not only

inexpensive but can also save a lot of money for the budget. A truly democratic Vietnamese government, without the need to repress opposition, can reduce the security budget and at the same time, significantly enhance social order.

### *3.2. Overcoming corruption and social evils*

We are witnessing an ambiguous relationship between the communist government and illicit gangs under the cover of state officials. Smuggling, tax evasion and illegal trading become usual. This plague must end because it is a challenge to the nation, a great loss to the budget and a dangerous obstacle to the proper business.

Fighting corruption will be given the highest priority in the transition period because if corruption is not repelled, any national policy, no matter how sound, will fail. Corruption today has reached a suffocating level. The main cause of corruption is first and foremost the nature of the totalitarian regime in which the appointment and replacement of officials are entirely independent of the masses and public opinion. In addition, there are an overwhelming and cumbersome state apparatus, cumbersome and contradictory laws that allow subjective, biased, arbitrary explanations encouraging gang collusion between officials to cover each other.

The communist government is the cause of corruption, so a favorable period to fight corruption will open as soon as a democratic government has replaced the communist government. The problem of the transitional government is to give corruption a fatal blow and not allow it to recover afterwards. Corruption is an abuse of public power, so in order to fight corruption, the weight of state power must be reduced, which means replacing the heavy and authoritative state apparatus with a light state, with limited power. Then, there is a need for simple, transparent laws so that people know surely what they can do and what they cannot do, and they are no longer hostages of state officials. To mark a new phase, the new democratic government will need impressive measures such as strictly forbidding civil servants to receive gifts in any case, forcing all civil servants to declare their assets annually, compelling all agencies to periodically review the results of their anti-corruption efforts, etc.

The democratic government will decisively eliminate the gangs. They will not be entitled to any mercy, under any circumstances, for any reason.

Fighting corruption, as well as fighting smuggling and other social evils, requires determination but also the trust and support of the entire population. One of our allies in this tough battle is freedom of speech. In a truly free regime, corruption and bullying of the people, if not completely eliminated, must be reduced to a low level. The accusation of free citizens who know all their rights is the most effective anti-corruption weapon.

All initiatives will be welcomed to win the active support of the entire people for the efforts to make the country healthy.

### *3.3. Completely abolish all censorship policies and measures*

The Provisional Covenant, as well as the new constitution, will solemnly recognize the freedom to compose and publish books and cultural products, and prohibit all laws aimed at censoring. In the future Vietnam, there will be no restriction on freedom of speech from the government. The law will only sanction blatant statements calling for violence, offending the honor and rights of

citizens or groups of citizens and are sued by the same individuals or groups. Such civic associations will play a pivotal role in protecting the health of culture. Let us not forget that civil society is the foundation of pluralistic democracy.

### *3.4. Ensuring the objectivity of education and a minimum level of education for all citizens*

There will be no problem of the state imposing official textbooks. The right to create textbooks will not be limited and the right to choose textbooks entirely belongs to the teachers. But an institution independent of the government, coming from the teachers, will draft the first textbooks, then it has the authority to recommend, without imposing, the textbooks having the quality to be used for teaching. Education is a very expensive investment of the country; therefore, it must be purely oriented towards spreading knowledge and developing the intellect, and not being exploited for one-way propaganda.

A special focus is on teaching Vietnamese language. It is something that cannot be underestimated because a minimum level of education and a minimum of communication capacity are both an essential condition for economic development and a necessary condition for stability of the society and peace among people.

Since many years, the communist government has completely abandoned all educational efforts. We have lost a lot of pupils and students and the quality of education at all levels has been seriously reduced, especially since the communist regime implemented a wild market economy policy. Compulsory and free education must be enforced, at least through the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. It is very likely that the budget will not allow the recruitment of the required number of teachers, in which case we need to launch a national cultural solidarity movement, with students helping to teach pupils, the upper classes helping to teach the lower classes on a voluntary basis or with symbolic remuneration. It should be noted that the tragic situation of the current education sector is not difficult to overcome. The current deterioration of education is due in large part to the policy of the communist state. Education is viewed as a money-making service for the state rather than an investment for the future. The communist state also does not distinguish education from propaganda. The students are brainwashed with knowledge that both educators and learners know to be false and useless. In addition, the economic impasse as well as the gangrene of the society make young people and their parents not knowing what education is for. All these causes will disappear under a regime which respects freedom, people and considers education and training as a vital struggle of the nation.

### *3.5. Improve the living environment and the landscapes*

Our country has been so devastated that we must preserve and carefully maintain the historical sites and places of interest. These are valuable assets, sources of pride and links between Vietnamese people. The restoration of these historical sites will not be very costly because of their small number, and may also has no cost for the state. We will bid the right to exploit and the obligations to maintain some historical sites and landscapes with value for tourism to Vietnamese private companies; we will entrust some religious historical sites to the churches.

We have a narrow area and a large population, therefore the country must be conceived and organized like a big city, that is, clean, beautiful and safe, with administrative, legal, cultural,

educational and medical agencies spread evenly throughout the territory, with forests that are cared for as parks, places of meeting and entertainment for equal citizens.

We need to specify and strictly implement construction standards to prevent unsafe or chaotic constructions from damaging the landscape. Tourism will be an important economic activity and it is difficult to imagine that it will be successful if our country is not beautiful.

The current policy of disorderly fishing has seriously reduced our seafood resources. We need to have immediately simple, transparent and strictly applied regulations to save the sea and seafood resources. The movement of indiscriminate deforestation and selling wood – still continuing – is in danger of turning our country into barren; this movement must be stopped immediately. The restoration of forest trees is capital intensive and requires regular protection and care, so the state budget may not be able to assume it. It is necessary to study the solution of contracting each forest area to Vietnamese private companies for restoration and exploitation, with clear rights and commitments.

In parallel with the effort of industrial development, there must also be clear regulations on treatment of waste.

The bauxite mining project in the central highlands must be immediately and permanently suspended.

The projects to build nuclear power plants must be suspended until safe waste treatment techniques are discovered and Vietnam is able to ensure absolute security in operating the plants.

## **4. The economic measures**

Economically, the first thing a decent government must do is to end the rule by resolutions, announcements, decisions, directives, and replace it by clear, transparent and stable laws. A new set of business laws is indispensable and cannot wait. At the same time, we need to focus our national efforts on urgent issues.

### *4.1. Privatize the majority of state-owned enterprises and land*

The state does not have the vocation to make cars, to sell clothes, to run touristic companies and restaurants, to manage hotels and discos. The state-owned companies, the state-owned farms weaken the spirit of risk taking, stopping the initiatives and losing accountability. We consider private business to be the cornerstone of the national economy, therefore privatization of the state-owned enterprises and privatization of the land are a core policy of the transition period. Experiences of the countries evolving into market economy show that privatization must be carried out with all vigilance to avoid speculation, dispersion of national assets, degradation of the enterprises to privatize.

We will immediately privatize all state-owned companies and enterprises that can be privatized, that is, operating normally in a sector without defense secrets, to bring a new vitality to the economy.

We will immediately promote the privatization of the land according to the principle of returning ownership to the people who are cultivating on their land; depending on the case, granting or reselling to farmers the land allocated by the state.

The guiding principle of privatization is that, the state will not do what the private sector can do. This policy will have to be basically completed after five years.

#### *4.2. Encourage maximum investment, including foreign investment*

The current investment laws will be gradually abolished because they are too restrictive and because they give foreigners the rights that the Vietnamese do not have; they also divide the domestic people from those living abroad. In the future, foreign investors will have all the rights they currently have and will have more freedom than today, but they cannot have the rights that the Vietnamese do not have. Time to complete all the procedures to establish a company will not exceed a week. It is important to be aware of the relative value of laws that support investment. If the privileges are only effective in the short term, the investment law will only attract superficial investments, but if the investment privileges are valid in the long term, the investment law will tend to become a normal law. Besides, the investment decision depends very little on the incentives and very much on the political and economic context.

#### *4.3. Concentrating efforts on two strategic transportation works*

The two great works that we have to start immediately and continue for many years, through many stages, are the works of modernization and expansion in accordance with the international standards of the Thống Nhất (Reunification) railway and transformation of the national road Xuyên Việt (Trans Vietnam) into a highway, linking Hanoi and Saigon. These are works that are essential for economic activities, concretizing the unity of the country and creating many jobs throughout the territory. The current expectations for these two projects are still very low compared to the needs of our country, most of whose activities are concentrated along these two transport axes. Expanding and modernizing these two works is also essential for the project of construction and operation of Cam Ranh port, a key project that we will carry out vigorously for many years to bring economic power to the whole country and to the Central region, the most promising region of the country due to its coastal location, but currently the least developed area.

With the very special shape of our country as well as the recent difficult historical period, the Xuyên Việt (Trans Vietnam) highway must be both the main transport axis and a great landscape symbolizing the beautiful and strong unity of the country.

## **5. The sources of funding for the renaissance effort**

A renaissance program, even a modest one, requires a lot of money. The goals of the transition period are also very ambitious. We will face many difficulties, but we will also have funding.

Firstly, we have to end the unthrifty expenses created by the communist government, the biggest one created by the Vietnamese communist party itself. Hundreds of thousands of persons are



paid today to work solely for the apparatus of the Communist Party. Thousands of houses and rooms are illegally occupied as headquarters, offices for the party cells. Corrupt cadres and party members abuse the power to embezzle an important part of the national output. In the future, when the Communist Party has to accept a normal standing, on par with other political parties, the state will save a large budget, release a large human resource and recover some large assets.

The second source of funding is the reduction of defense and security budgets. We have no intention of conquering any country, and on the contrary, we are no longer afraid of being conquered militarily. The defense of border areas, seas and islands does not require a large infantry force as it is today but an elite motorized army, mainly the air force and navy. The current police apparatus – main and auxiliary – may include over two million persons, used primarily to protect the Communist Party and suppress democratic aspirations. A truly democratic state can reduce a significant part of the costs, but also enhance the capacity to protect the territory and maintain security and order.

The third source of funding comes from the privatization of the state-owned enterprises. As stated above, the main purpose of the privatization policy is to rationalize and make economic activity healthy. However, the privatization program will also bring an important resource.

The fourth source of funding will come from the more active contribution of the overseas Vietnamese community, when a real democratic regime, in line with the deep aspirations of the overseas compatriots, has been established. The community of overseas Vietnamese, with more than three million persons, mostly settled in the developed countries and with an annual income over 50 USD billion, can save 10 USD billion per year. But the overseas Vietnamese community is not only a source of investment, it can also make other important contributions to culture, science and technology. Once relations with the country have been normalized, the overseas Vietnamese community will be a great lever for the efforts to develop the country.

But the most important source of funding, increasingly abundant, is due to the economic development itself. Currently, many industries are paralyzed, many talents are neutralized because of the prohibition or harassment by the communist government. Returning true business freedom to the people will unlock a lot of new energy and we can expect new contributions. Our correct and honest economic policy is able to mobilize the remaining financial resources among the people. There is no force greater than the force we will have, thanks to the liberation and the mobilization of the vigor of a nation of nearly 100 million industrious persons. We have the right to expect quick and tremendous results. The goal of doubling total national output within the five years of the transition period requires a growth rate of 15% per year, but that is a goal within reach, because we are a coastal country with a convenient location and a diligent people; the ability to entice foreign investment is huge. That is the rate that the China's coastal provinces have achieved, even under the communist regime. Moreover, our country has a lot of untapped potential. We lag behind, not because of objective difficulties, but because of the bad and corrupt communist government.

## **6. The transition to democracy will succeed, the country will rise**

We have the right to hope and be optimistic. Although our country has stumbled, it is still capable of standing up and move forward.

We do not need to expect any miracle or any favor at all. We can create that miracle for ourselves, we can give that favor ourselves in a simple way.

Normalizing relations between Vietnamese people. Solemnly asserting that the country belongs to all Vietnamese and not to any party or any doctrine. Recognizing an equal standing for everyone and for each person. Removing the chains of hatred and intolerance to look at each other like brothers. Bringing optimism and confidence in a faithful and honest government. Bringing clear and firm guarantees to private property and business rights. Determination to eliminate corruption and social evils that are destroying our national body. All these things we can do, and we can do right away. Then we will see this country changing skin and flesh, then we will see this nation rising up to conquer the future. We will discover the miracle of very simple values like freedom, democracy, national concord. We will see that a democracy with the rule of law succeeds even in difficult technical, cultural, social and human conditions because of its capacity for self-regulation and improvement. The country will stand up, move forward and rise strongly.

## IX. Sharing the Vietnamese Dream

Our country has the potential to become a big, rich and strong country if we can mobilize all hearts, all brains, all hands in the cause of building a common future. Yet, the sad reality is that today we are still struggling to get what most nations already have: democracy.

The struggle has been longer than we expected, because in addition to the identified difficulties, there is another reason: this is a completely new struggle in our country's history. So far, we have only had civil wars between dominant forces fighting for power, or wars against foreign aggression whose purpose, after all, is just to change a foreign slavery yoke by a domestic one. We have never been a free people. This time, we fight to open up a whole new era, the second era of our country's history, the era of free Vietnamese and of a democratic Vietnam.

It is a struggle to bring the Vietnamese people and the Vietnamese nation from the darkness of slavery and poverty into the light of freedom and prosperity. For the first time, we have a real fight worth fighting. Thus, the Vietnamese of today must be aware that they are facing the opportunity to create the greatest and most glorious historical event, an opportunity that the future generations will not have.

The challenge facing us is big, but the hope impelling us is even bigger because this struggle is not only worthy and glorious, it will be surely victorious. We are transported and motivated by a global democratic wave and by the common aspiration of a nation that has gradually recovered from injuries. We are receiving reinforcements from a new generation that has liberated itself and is determined to be free. Behind the obstacles is a bright future.

We are bound to succeed. The Vietnamese people have awakened after having to pay a heavy price for hatred and division, monopoly of righteousness, fanaticism and worship of violence. We have understood with blood and tears and have accepted in our skin and flesh the simple but miraculous values, such as freedom, democracy, peace, justice, tolerance, effort. We are impregnated with national love and feeling of compatriots in our common humiliation of inferiority. We have realized that all Vietnamese are bound together in a common destiny. We have the biggest national consensus since the days our fathers founded the country. That consensus will be an invincible weapon that will help us overcome all obstacles.

The greatest lesson of world history is that a nation wanting to rise only needs three elements: a free society, diligent people and national consensus. We are a diligent people who have national consensus and are about to have freedom. We will rise. We have the right to be optimistic on our journey to the future.

We are optimistic and proud because our struggle is transparent. It does not aim to destroy or humiliate anyone, it is a struggle to honor people, to honor the right to be human and the right to happiness as a great people that our people deserve.

This dictatorship will be the last dictatorship in Vietnam. After removing it, we will forever enter a new era, the era of freedom, democracy, tolerance, protection, the glorious era of common efforts and common success.

Let us hold hands and shout aloud our common oath:

*Vietnam will be a great country.*

*Being Vietnamese has been a misfortune so far, being Vietnamese in the near future will have to be a joy, a blessing and a source of pride.*

*The world has known Vietnam as a victim of hatred, division and monopoly of righteousness, then the world will have to know the future Vietnam as the land of tolerance, a successful model of recovered brotherhood and of revival from ruin and destruction.*

That is the ideal of our time. That is the legacy that we will leave for future generations. It is the Vietnamese dream that all fellows of the Rally for Democracy and Pluralism are pursuing together and want to share with all Vietnamese, inside and outside the country, today and tomorrow.

***Rally for Democracy and Pluralism***

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