Bob Shaplen phoned me and informed me that you had never received my communication in response to your inquiry concerning the desired visit to Viet Nam of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey. I am deeply distressed that this letter, which I sent via international airmail, did not reach you. I wish at this time, therefore, to repeat to you the gist of that message. Immediately on receipt of the cabled message from Mr. Shaplen, who was then in Hong Kong, I spoke with the White House concerning this matter. I was told (and this is "unofficially and informally") that some thought had already been given to the desirability of such an official visit. However, the Vice President is still deeply involved in President Johnson's domestic legislative programs, and it was therefore considered unlikely that he could be spared for a trip to Asia at that particular moment or before late spring or early summer. In addition, there is also the complicating fact that at least three other Asian governments have already formally invited Mr. Humphrey to make such visits, and though it is true that Viet Nam ranks at the top of the priority, it would be diplomatically and politically impossible to visit Viet Nam without also visiting these other states. Ergo, they could try to find time late in May or June when the Vice President could take two or three weeks away from Washington to accomplish these visits in a proper fashion. I would suggest that you issue, through the American ambassador, or through the ambassador in Washington an invitation, but that this be done through confidential channels and that it not be published lest it cause embarrassment. I would further suggest that in issuing this invitation, which the White House is prepared to receive (though it may not immediately schedule the trip), you phrase it in terms of extreme urgency from a standpoint of Viet Nam's domestic political situation, the urgent need to offer clear American support of a civilian regime, etc. (It is true that the people in Washington, while very well intentioned, still tend to assess situations from the
standpoint of the American position and needs, rather than from a thorough understanding of the Vietnamese position and needs.)

I understand that we can expect new ambassadorial appointments by your government. I cannot emphasize too strongly the necessity of making these changes soon. Viet Nam truly has no Vietnamese voice in this country. It has been up to Americans to explain the situation in Viet Nam, and the Embassy in Washington as been of no assistance whatsoever in this effort. In addition to an ambassador who can speak authoritatively, deliver public addresses of quality, and bring a measure of respected representation for your government in the United States, there is also an intense need at this time for a large-scale public relations program on behalf of Viet Nam in this country. It seems to me that proposals which many of us discussed with you and Bui Diem last year should be acted upon with all possible dispatch, if your government's case is to be presented forcefully and effectively.

As you know, the American Friends of Vietnam consists of many facets of opinion, and even the members of the Board of Directors do not agree with one another on all issues. Some of us are Democrats, some are Republicans, and so on. I, who am the Chairman, am a Democrat; our Honorary Chairman, Henry Cabot Lodge, is a Republican. Some members of the Board belong to neither political persuasion. We are united, however, in our belief in the worth of the Vietnamese people and our desire that Viet Nam remain free and independent. While many of us speak to large public audiences, and engage frequently in radio and television debates and discussions, your government needs the services of an expert, professional public relations representative. I hope you will be able to move in this direction very quickly, since the need is great and time is of the utmost importance.

I shall be writing you within a few days concerning your recent letter to me. In the meantime, be assured that you have our full cooperation and support, and that we shall do everything in our power to assist you in your efforts to build a free and viable Republic of Viet Nam.

Very sincerely yours,

Wesley R. Fishel
Chairman

WHF/baw