

Hanoi, June 3rd 2014



Letter from Madam Nguyen Thi Binh

Dear Friends,

Many people abroad have asked me: What's happening in Vietnam? After so many years of war with so much sacrifice and suffering, are the Vietnamese having to fight again? Why could China encroach upon Vietnam's sovereignty – the China that had given active support to Vietnam's struggle against American aggression? The China that is a "socialist country" led by a Communist Party? How come?

Such are also questions we Vietnamese have posed to ourselves.

You supported us during our resistance to the French then Americans, throughout thirty long years. You understand certainly the high price we have had to pay for peace, independence and national reunification. More than three million deaths, a devastated land and tremendous consequences, including hundreds of thousands of incurable Agent Orange victims.

In 1974, while Vietnam was still at war, China occupied by armed force the Hoàng Sa (Paracel) Islands belonging to us. Hardly had the war ended that Vietnam fell victim to twenty years of American embargo. In such circumstances and after years of provocations along our Northern frontier, China sent over two hundred thousand soldiers across the border to "teach Vietnam a lesson". What's the lesson about, one didn't know. But, how could one explain why a big "socialist country" had attacked a small one just coming out of war? Yet, this was a reality. In 1988, China again occupied by armed force several islands of Vietnam's Trường Sa (Spratly) Archipelago.

Today, the Vietnamese are striving to reconstruct and develop the country step by step in the face of countless difficulties and challenges. For all our efforts, we remain a very poor country. We, therefore, are doing our utmost for an environment of peace and stability, ready to cooperate with other countries for the sake of development.

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Even with regard to the USA, which had caused us so much suffering, our stand has been to shelve the past and look forward into the future. Regarding China, a big neighbor, despite the ups and downs in the history of bilateral relations and disputes to be solved between the two countries, we have been thinking much about the close bonds uniting the two nations during the national liberation struggle. We therefore always wish for good relations with China and settlement of all disputes by peaceful means on the basis of mutual trust. Such has been our behavior in practice, with modesty and self-restraint.

But, as you have known, on May 2nd last, China placed a giant oil drilling rig deep in Vietnam's continental shelf and exclusive economic zone, coupled with over 100 escort vessels including military ships and aircraft. This constitutes an extremely serious act, an encroachment upon Vietnam's sovereignty and a violation of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. On the Vietnamese side, we have made use of diplomatic and other channels, while law enforcement ships have asked the Chinese side to respect Vietnam's sovereignty and pull out the rig. So far, China has failed to respond to Vietnam's goodwill, and acted even more aggressively instead. It's really heart-rending to look at scenes of Chinese vessels, numerous and big, ramming on smaller Vietnamese Fisheries Control and Maritime Police ships. What could happen next? Mass media across the world have expressed profound concern over the Chinese moves, which jeopardize safety and freedom of maritime navigation and threaten regional peace and security. The Chinese side has thrown the blame on Vietnam's "provocations". Whoever could believe that Vietnam had provoked China, a Vietnam whose population is merely one-fifteenth and GDP one-fiftieth or one-sixtieth of China's, and which is still wrestling to free itself from poverty and underdevelopment? Chinese leaders have said that China opted for a "peaceful rise", and that in the blood of the Chinese nation there was no "gene for aggression and hegemony". Then, how would China explain its "U-Shaped Line" claim covering most of the East Sea (South China Sea) regardless of international

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law, notably the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and world-wide opposition?

Independence, freedom and sovereignty are sacred to every nation. The Vietnamese people will struggle till the end to defend these objectives. At the same time, they do need peace and friendship to enable development, to ensure for Vietnamese, especially women and children, an ever better life.

We eagerly need peace, a just, real and durable peace for the Vietnamese and all other nations in the region and the world. We eagerly need friendship with China and other countries, but a real and sincere friendship based on mutual respect. In your position, you also think the same, I believe.

So, we wish to have your support, now as in the past. For the immediate future, to ask that China pull the rig out of Vietnam's continental shelf and respect Vietnam's sovereignty in keeping with international law.

We are convinced that, with solidarity and strong action, justice and the law will prevail.

May I convey to you my warm greetings, and my profound thanks for what you have done and will do for Vietnam.”

Nguyen Thi Binh