

AMNESTY FOR MEN RESISTING THE  
WAR IN VIETNAM

**HON. SHIRLEY CHISHOLM**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, June 16, 1969*

Mrs. CHISHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I have recently received a petition from the **Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam** demanding amnesty for men resisting the war in Vietnam.

The question of amnesty for those men who are in jail, who are in self-imposed exile, and who have deserted the military, because of their conscientious opposition to the Vietnam war, has become critical. In terms of numbers, we speak of an estimated 700 jailed men, hundreds more awaiting sentencing, close to 5,000 emigrees, and untold numbers forced by conscience to hide in their own country. They have committed the crime of acting on individual moral commitment.

The law that makes this commitment illegal, that has sent thousands of men to prison, is the draft. By the draft, literally millions of young men, chosen inequitably, have been forced to fight, to kill, to die in a senseless war which we as a Nation hardly understand, let alone want. This is an unjust and oppressive law which has punished and is punishing these thousands. It is time to repeal the draft and to extend amnesty to the men who have suffered.

Even if one believes that the draft law is legitimate, there are several reasons why amnesty should be granted to Vietnam war resisters.

Over the last 5 years since the war became Americanized, there has grown an intense dissatisfaction with our Vietnam policy. There now appears to be widespread national agreement that our war effort, for moral, legal, and practical reasons, is bankrupt.

We owe this national awareness in large degree to the war resisters. They were the first to speak the truth about Vietnam, for which we rewarded them with disgrace and cries of treason. They were the prophets whose words have proven accurate. They must be allowed to come home to a place of respect in a country which has finally recognized their truth.

Amnesty will also serve to partially repudiate our participation in the war. Of course, it must be accompanied by an immediate end of violence and political settlement. But while the negotiations will end the war, amnesty will symbolize our national repentance. It will repudiate our barbaric destruction in Vietnam, which cannot be dismissed or easily forgotten when it is ended.

The men who have been punished for resisting the war are political prisoners. Incarceration for political beliefs is abhorrent wherever it occurs; it is in total contradiction with the ideals of a free democracy. It must end in America.

Finally, even those who endorse our war policy must admit that the resisters are acting out of most deeply agonized consciences. They are among the most sensitive of American youth. When a nation imprisons its finest young men for daring to act on conscience, it is clear that that nation has gone badly astray. We have confused conscience with criminality, just as we have confused senseless brutality with protecting the South Vietnamese from outside aggression.

The war resisters who have given years of their lives to oppose governmental criminality in Vietnam, which they were drafted to participate in against their consciences, have suffered unjustly for too long. We would prove that we are a nation worthy of them by granting amnesty. . . .

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