

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Office of the White House Press Secretary

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THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

With all Americans, I welcome the news that Mr. Emmet Kay has been released as part of the prisoner exchange in Laos. This release marks a major positive step in carrying out the Vientiane Accords which ended the war in that country last year. We are encouraged by this development and hope it will be followed by other positive steps to achieve peace and reconciliation in Laos.

At the same time, I remain concerned about the many Americans still unaccounted for in Southeast Asia. As Vice President, and during my time in the Congress, I had the opportunity to meet with the families of a number of our missing men. I have the highest regard for the strength and courage these families have shown in the long period since their loved ones were lost.

It has now been more than 18 months since the Paris Agreement on Vietnam was signed in January 1973. In addition to the return of prisoners, that Agreement contained specific provisions on accounting for the missing and the return of the remains of the dead. The record shows that there has been almost no compliance with these humanitarian provisions. Although the government of North Vietnam returned the remains of 23 American servicemen who died in captivity, there has been no progress on accounting for the missing and no further arrangements for the return of the remains of the dead.

The communist side has refused to permit searches in areas under their control for crash sites, graves and other information on the MIA's. We are prepared to carry out such searches by unarmed American teams, and we stand ready to discuss arrangements for the conduct of such searches by teams from neutral countries, the International Red Cross, other humanitarian organizations, or by local authorities. The important thing is that we get on with this job now.

The families of our men have waited too long already and I am sure that families of those of other nationalities who remain unaccounted for have a similar desire to know the fate of their loved ones. There should be no political or military controversy about this humanitarian problem, and I call for renewed efforts to resolve it.

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