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SPEECHES AND STATEMENTS

Statement on Campus Violence and the Indochina War 5 May 1970

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ON CAMPUS VIOLENCE AND THE INDOCHINA WAR
MAY 5, 1970

I take this opportunity to speak to the Michigan State University community, to share with you my very deep concern over the recent events on this campus and in our nation.

The vicious and deliberate destruction by a tiny group on the campus last Friday night was appalling and senseless. Certainly, the more tragic events on other campuses are even more shocking.

On the MSU campus last weekend, more than 37,000 students conducted themselves with common sense and restraint, by taking no part in the wanton acts of the few. It would be a mistake, however, to characterize this good judgment as apathy or unconcern over the present world situation in which their country is very deeply involved.

The sense of frustration and apprehension over the expansion of the Indochina war by the United States -- frustration used by some on and off campus as an excuse for their destructive acts -- is of grave concern to many of us -- faculty and students, mothers and fathers.

I understand and share this frustration and anxiety, and perhaps I feel them even more acutely than many of you, since I have been personally involved with Asians and Asia for many years.

Throughout my work there, my two greatest concerns were those of finding solutions to the grave problems of poverty which afflict the masses of poor farm people, and of sustained economic development as the mainstay of a stable peace.

While I personally have sought to promote these goals, military actions unfortunately have been viewed as more important than land reform; counter-insurgency as more strategic than a fair price for farm products.

Now, once again, a President has unilaterally taken the step of expanding the war without prior consultation with our foreign friends or without the approval of the United States Congress.

Based upon my experience in Asia, I am firmly convinced that the new expansion of the war is a serious error and miscalculation. But I am only one individual and cannot speak for the entire university community. I can speak only in my personal capacity, but as President of a great university, I feel I also must seek to articulate the general views of this community -- the views of those who favor and those who oppose our current policy.

Therefore, I would like to be able to do so -- not through massive confrontations or reckless violence which breed countermeasures and retaliation -- but in the seats of power where foreign policy is made -- in Washington, D.C.

One way to achieve this goal would be for the MSU community -- both those who favor the present Indochina policy and those who oppose it -- to make known their views in a systematic way. This could be done through petitions. These petitions could then be presented to the Michigan delegation in Congress as clear-cut and indisputable evidence of the sentiments of MSU people.

On Wednesday, I already am scheduled to meet with Michigan Congressmen and Senators on other matters. At that time, it will be possible for me to express my personal views. But I think it would be much more positive and effective if, a week hence, the views of the total MSU community on this serious matter could be taken to Washington and presented to our Congressional delegation.

This step is suggested as a positive, constructive attempt to place the opinions of an interested segment of our society before the very group which can influence our foreign policy. This would be responsible citizenship.

Violence only deflects attention from the real issues and provides a ready excuse for some who seek to polarize the people on this manifestation, rather than engage in rational debate on the underlying problems which affect the entire nation very deeply.

I sincerely hope that organizations within the university will set up a simple petition mechanism so that we truly can speak with authority when we say: "This is what the people of MSU believe."

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