

Greetings from Rainer Eppelmann, Chairman of the Board of the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) Dictatorship

For the 45th Commemoration of Black April held on April 30, 2020, by the Federal Association of Vietnamese Refugees in Germany

Dear members and friends of the Federal Association of Vietnamese Refugees in Germany,

In 2020, we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of Germany's unification. Germany was divided for more than four decades, which ended on October 3, 1990. This date also marked an unprecedented, peaceful end to the communist-led German Democratic Republic (GDR). Everything happened very quickly. During the autumn months of 1989, people in the GDR used mass demonstrations to overcome the authoritarian rule of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) with mass demonstrations, brought down the Berlin Wall, and finally spoke out in free elections for a German reunification. No one could have foreseen these tremendous, earth-shattering changes happening a year before; whoever claimed it would have been called a dreamer. After all, the SED regime had ruled over the citizens of the GDR with an iron fist for more than 40 years, incapacitated and indoctrinated the people, had them under surveillance by the Stasi, and locked behind concrete and barbed wire in their dictatorship. And yet this system of oppression was ultimately not permanent.

As a GDR civil rights activist who helped overthrow the communist dictatorship, and shape democratic change toward German unity, I would like to share with you today one of the most important experiences I have made in my political career: dictatorships fundamentally contradict the freedom-loving nature of human beings. They're unnatural, we're reluctant towards them, and we will never submit to them for good. That's why dictatorships don't last forever even if, after decades of existence, it seems like that to us. But one day they will fall! The history of opposition to the communist dictatorship in Germany shows us in an exemplary way that the ruling classes, despite all their efforts, can never completely suppress free thought and the pursuit of democracy and human rights. These forces will eventually pursue their course as soon as internal and external political conditions develop.

30 years have passed since the Peaceful Revolution and German unity. Our country has developed tremendously and opened up to the world. We, therefore, celebrate our unity together with the millions of people who have emigrated to Germany -- like the "boat people" from Vietnam -- long ago or only recently from different parts of the world, in order to live in our country for very different reasons. Many of these people have been displaced from their homes due to violence and political oppression, and are now seeking new and fair opportunities in our democracy for themselves and their families.

Currently, the younger generation in Germany naturally grow up with freedom and democracy. They can hardly imagine the plight of refugees, or the conditions and circumstances of authoritarian rule. It is our social responsibility, to remind those of what life under dictatorship means and that our democracy is nothing to be taken for granted. It is

important to remember that even today in many countries there are dictatorships and authoritarian regimes that suppress democracy and people's aspirations for freedom.

Unfortunately, this is the case in Vietnam, a country that is geographically far away from Germany, but close with so many Vietnamese people rooted in our country. One thing is certain: the kaleidoscope of historical observation becomes more colourful in the immigration society. This also applies, of course, with regard to historical anniversaries and the days of remembrance associated with it. Many people in Germany are unaware that 45 years ago, South Vietnam was invaded by North Vietnamese armed forces and has since established a dictatorial communist regime. I would like to send you, the people of the Federal Association of Vietnamese Refugees, my warmest greetings and best wishes for the future. I also ask and encourage you to share your experiences with oppression and dictatorship to the people in Germany, no matter where they come from, how precious and worthy protecting our democracy is!