

## 2. First Appeal to the United States (June 18, 1919)\*

By Ho Chi Minh

*During the Versailles Peace Conference in Paris, where a treaty was signed on June 28, 1919 between the Allies and Germany to end World War I, Ho Chi Minh wrote this polite appeal to the principles of Wilsonian self-determination. He avoids insisting on immediate independence for Vietnam but instead claims legal and political rights for which France presumably stands. At the same time, he is careful to hold full independence as the ultimate goal ("While waiting for the principle of national self-determination to pass from ideal to reality"). From the end of World War I through World War II and its aftermath, Ho Chi Minh would repeatedly call upon the Western democracies to live up to their announced principles. Reading 9 presents one of his appeals to President Truman in the fall of 1945.*

\*Translations of the French originals in the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

### A. Letter of Nguyen Ai Quoc to the American Secretary of State

Paris, 18 June, 1919

To his Excellency, the Secretary of State of the Republic of the United States,  
Delegate to the Peace Conference<sup>1</sup>

Excellency,

We take the liberty of submitting to you the accompanying memorandum setting forth the claims of the Annamite people on the occasion of the Allied victory.

We count on your great kindness to honor our appeal by your support whenever the opportunity arises.

We beg your Excellency graciously to accept the expression of our profound respect.

FOR THE GROUP OF ANNAMITE PATRIOTS

[signed] *Nguyen Ai Quoc*<sup>2</sup>

56, rue Monsieur le Prince—Paris

### B. Revendications du Peuple Annamite [Claims of the Annamite People]

Since the victory of the Allies, all the subject peoples are frantic with hope at the prospect of an era of right and justice which should begin for them by virtue of the formal and solemn engagements, made before the whole world by the various powers of the *entente*<sup>3</sup> in the struggle of civilization against barbarism.

While waiting for the principle of national self-determination to pass from ideal to reality through the effective recognition of the sacred right of all peoples to decide their own destiny, the inhabitants of the ancient Empire of Annam, at the present time French Indochina, present to the noble Governments of the *entente* in general and in particular to the honorable French Government the following humble claims:

(1) General amnesty for all the native people who have been condemned for political activity.

1. The U.S. Secretary of State at the time was Robert Lansing.—eds.

2. Ho Chi Minh's pseudonym at the time.

3. The *entente*, or Allied powers during World War I, included France, England, and after 1917, the United States.—eds.

(2) Reform of Indochinese justice by granting to the native population the same judicial guarantees as the Europeans have, and the total suppression of the special courts which are the instruments of terrorization and oppression against the most responsible elements of the Annamite people.

(3) Freedom of press and speech.

(4) Freedom of association and assembly.

(5) Freedom to emigrate and to travel abroad.

(6) Freedom of education, and creation in every province of technical and professional schools for the native population.

(7) Replacement of the regime of arbitrary decrees by a regime of law.

(8) A permanent delegation of native people elected to attend the French parliament in order to keep the latter informed of their needs.

The Annamite people, in presenting these claims, count on the worldwide justice of all the Powers, and rely in particular on the goodwill of the noble French people who hold our destiny in their hands and who, as France is a republic, have taken us under their protection. In requesting the protection of the French people, the people of Annam, far from feeling humiliated, on the contrary consider themselves honored, because they know that the French people stand for liberty and justice and will never renounce their sublime ideal of universal brotherhood. Consequently, in giving heed to the voice of the oppressed, the French people will be doing their duty to France and to humanity.

IN THE NAME OF THE GROUP OF ANNAMITE PATRIOTS:

*Nguyen Ai Quoc*

## 1919 - THE FIRST PAN AFRICAN CONGRESS

Racist treatment reinforced a sense of solidarity within the Diaspora. This found expression in a series of Pan-African meetings. In 1909 the first Pan African Conference was held. In 1919 the first of five Pan-African Congresses was held. This was organised by the African American thinker and journalist, W.E.B. DuBois. Fifty seven delegates attended representing fifteen countries. Its principal task was petitioning the Versailles Peace Conference, then meeting in Paris. Among its demands were:

- a) The Allies administer the former German territories in Africa as a condominium on behalf of the Africans who lived there.
- b) Africans should take part in governing their countries "as fast as their development permits" until, at some unspecified time in the future, Africa is granted home rule.

The Second Pan-African Congress adopted eleven resolutions and submitted them to the Peace Conference, then meeting at Versailles. The first two resolutions applied only to Africans, calling for a Code of Laws for the international protection of Africans and for the establishment of a permanent bureau to oversee the application of that code to their political, social and economic welfare. The remaining resolutions applied to Africans and people of African descent living in countries outside the African continent. The question of the slave trade had been raised by the British at the Congress of Vienna and the specific question of the Belgian Congo had been raised on the international level, but the Second Congress marked the first time that the Africans and people of African descent themselves had raised the international issue of their condition. Referring to this Congress, Dr. DuBois said:

I went (to Paris) with the idea of calling a "Pan-African Congress" and trying to impress upon the members of the Peace Congress meeting at Versailles the importance of Africa in the future world. I was without credentials or influence, but the idea took on. I tried to get a conference with President Wilson, but only got as far as Colonel House, who was sympathetic but noncommittal.

The Pan-African Congress of 1921 adopted resolutions similar to those of the 1919 Congress, but was more specific in the proposals they presented to the new League of Nations. They called for the establishment, under the League, of an international institution for the study of African problems and asked that an international section be set up under the jurisdiction of the Labor Bureau of the League to protect African labor.