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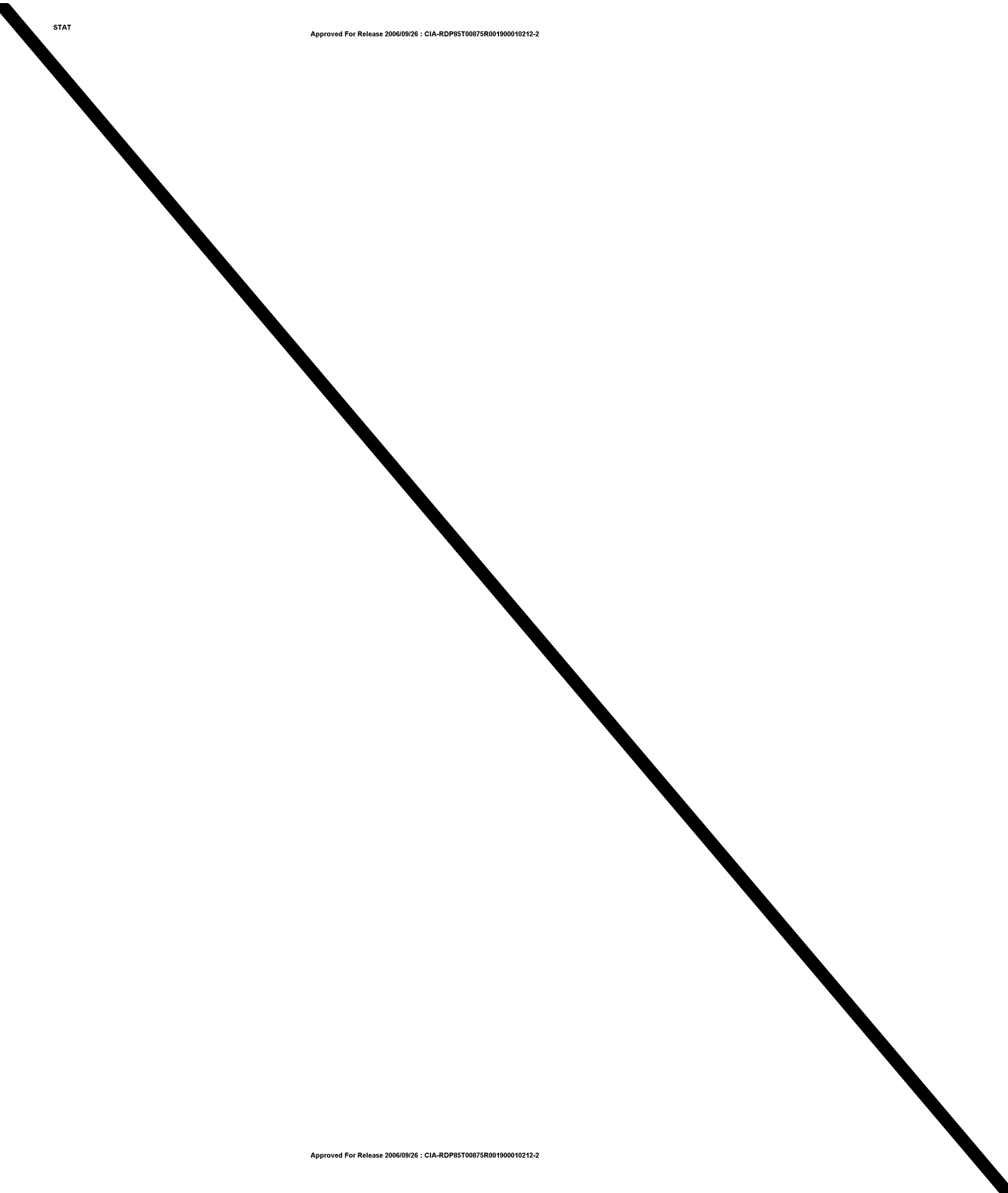

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STAT [redacted]

1 March 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Southeast Asia Division

SUBJECT : North Vietnam Population Growth

As you requested, we have reviewed the series of statements by DRV leaders in recent weeks suggesting that the country has an overpopulation problem and indicating the need for improved birth control measures. As the attached memo points out, we think Hanoi's leadership really is just beginning to grope with resources problems it does not fully understand and has probably overstated both population size and growth rate. STAT

STAT [redacted]

/Chief
Economic Branch

[redacted]

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North Vietnam Population Growth

Several recent reports and press articles suggest that Hanoi's leaders are showing increasing concern for an overpopulation problem in North Vietnam. Among the items related to this topic during the past month were:

. . . Party leader Le Duan, in a speech to the National Trade Union Congress on 11 February, said the population had gone up more than ten million from 1960 to 1973. This would result in a total population of 26 million and would imply a sustained growth rate of 3.8%.

. . . Vice-premier Le Thanh Nghi, in the economic report to the National Assembly on 7 February, called for a renewed birth control movement, the first such call by a Politburo member since 1965.

. . . A Conference of the Central Commission for the Protection of Mothers and Children on 16 February called for improved birth control methods to bring population growth rate down to 2.3% by the end of 1975 and 1.7% by the end of 1980.

It seems likely that the regime does not have an accurate assessment of total population figures, but is expressing

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its concern to stimulate the populace to greater efforts in economic development. Le Duan's figure seems to be little more than an extrapolation of the 16 million counted in the 1960 census at an average annual growth rate even higher than the 3.5% officially shown in North Vietnamese statistics for 1955-63. Civilian and military manpower losses since 1965 almost certainly slowed this growth rate somewhat, especially considering the losses of prime-age males to the military conflict. Over the past several years, there have been tenuous indications that the regime believed the population growth rate to be about 3% or less. This would more readily fit the objective of dampening the growth rate to 2.3% by the end of 1975.

By comparison, our estimate of North Vietnam's current population is 20.1 million, based on US Census Bureau projections using a trend growth rate of 2.25% that is then reduced for wartime casualties. The Census Bureau rejects North Vietnam's published growth rate of 3.5% because demographic analysts believe that the North Vietnamese understated the death rate by a wide margin in its last census of 1960. On the other hand, the Census Bureau recognizes the possibility that the census may have significantly undercounted the population, thus causing our current estimates to fall short by as much as 15%.

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We are simply not sure of the reasons for Hanoi's current stress on birth control, although there are several possibilities. The prominence of population as a subject may relate to a new census scheduled to be undertaken in April. Another current pressure lending front-page prominence to population questions is the need to deal with resource problems that have remained suppressed during the war as a result of mobilization priorities and ample foreign commodity aid. In this line, it could be that the regime sees US detente policies ultimately working to its disadvantage and wishes to strive for self-sufficiency. At the least, North Vietnam's chronic food deficit and the strain on economic resources caused by unconstrained population pressures would be sufficient to cause alarm.

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