

SPEECH OF NAM DINH RED CROSS ASSOCIATION

Nam Dinh Red Cross Association

Nam Dinh is a plain province in the Red River Delta with a population of two million, 80 % of them are involved in farming. A large number of people in the province were exposed to and affected by Agent Orange. Of the more than 17,000 victims, 9,424 have been partly subsided. The Nam Dinh provincial Party Committee and People's Committee have paid much attention and created favourable conditions for Agent Orange victims to receive subsidy as defined by the State. However, their lives remain very difficult in terms of physical conditions, health, rehabilitation, livelihood and means of production.

The Nam Dinh Red Cross Association is a social organization playing a key role in humanitarian activities in the province. In recent years, guided by the provincial Party Committee, People's Council and People's Committee, the Red Cross has launched campaigns to help the poor, people with disabilities, helpless elderly and orphans. Particularly, it has taken the lead in launching and organizing "For Agent Orange victims" activities. Proceeding from Decision No. 105/1998/QD-TTg issued by the Prime Minister on June 9, 1998 on the establishment of a fund for Agent Orange victims in Vietnam, the provincial People's Committee signed a decision to establish a steering committee for the establishment of the provincial Agent Orange Fund. The Committee comprises 15 members, who are leaders of relevant departments, agencies and mass organizations. The provincial Red Cross is its standing agency. The province has named April 30 as the "For Nam Dinh Agent Orange Victims Day". Red Cross chapters at all levels in the province have disseminated information on activities to support Agent Orange victims carried out by agencies, social organizations and individuals and examples of victims who overcome their own difficulties to build their lives. The information was carried out by the provincial mass media agencies, particularly the provincial radio and TV station through news, stories, interviews and letters of appeal.

The provincial Red Cross has promoted the role and functions of the Steering Committee members in implementing the "for Agent Orange victims" action plan. The member agencies have launched a campaign among their staff to encourage them to contribute to the fund. The provincial department of Education and Training and the provincial Confederation of Labour are the most active in the campaign.

The Chapter has held workshops on implementation of the People's Committee's directives, official letters and circulars, and review annual and periodic activities in support of Agent Orange victims. It has successfully carried out activities such as "Tet (Lunar New Year Festival) for the poor and Agent Orange victims", and "Action month for people with disabilities and Agent Orange victims" launched by the Vietnam Red Cross Association.

During its operation, the provincial Red Cross Chapter has coordinated actions with other members of the Steering Committee to monitor and encourage activities in support of Agent Orange victims. Organizations and individuals who are actively and effectively participated in these activities have timely been commended over mass media agencies from provincial to commune levels.

"For Agent Orange victims" activities are diverse such as visiting the victims, encouraging them, mobilizing people's contribution, helping the victims in their study and job training, awarding study grants, providing mobility and working means, and encouraging agencies, social and mass organizations and benefactors to sponsor and support the victims. The Chapter has joined efforts with other agencies, organizations and the Agape Charity Hospital to provide free health checks for the victims, and free orthopedic surgery for those with mobility disabilities. It has effectively held activities for Agent Orange victims during annual festivals and anniversaries such as Children's Day, June 1, War Martyrs and Invalids Day, July 27 and the Mid-Autum and Lunar New year festivals.

With these activities, the Steering Committee for the establishment of the provincial Agent Orange Fund has successfully agitated agencies, sectors, social and mass organizations, businesses, armed forces, religious dignitaries, benefactors, fellow-villager association and people in the province to contribute to the Fund and participate in activities to support Agent Orange victims. Since 1998, nearly VND 4 billion have been contributed to the Fund at all levels. The provincial fund alone has raised VND 400 million. The money has been used for visiting, giving presents, providing regular and sudden subsidies for an accumulated number of 17,917 victims; giving them 192 wheelchairs and bicycles and 06 production means; awarding study grants, sponsoring and supporting the community-based care of these victims; providing free health checks, free medicines and 146 voluntary health insurance cards; providing money to the victims to repair 22 houses, and help 149 households breed cows, 68 others breed pigs with a total amount of VND 3 billion. The provincial fund alone provided more than VND 200 million for an accumulated number of 1,500 victims.

In addition to this, Agent Orange victims also received support from the Vietnam Red Cross and benefactors from the whole country. Since 2004, the Agent

Orange website, the National Agent Orange Fund and the “Contribution to easing the pain of Agent Orange victims” programme launched by the “Youth of Ho Chi Minh City” newspaper have provided VND 388.5 million to build 8 charity houses, buy 45 calves for 53 families of poor Agent Orange victims in Y Yen and Vu Ban districts, award 50 grants to children of Agent Orange victims who overcome their difficulties in study, give presents to 5 families of victims who met with financial difficulties, teach tailoring to 12 children of the victims, buy rehabilitation equipment for the Duc Anh Orphanage in Bui Chu parish and provide free orthopedic surgery for 6 victims with mobility disabilities.

In respond to the movement “Tet for the poor and Agent Orange victims” held during the Binh Tuat (2006) Lunar New Year Festival, Red Cross chapters at all levels encouraged agencies, sectors, organizations and people in the province to contribute while extracting from the Agent Orange Fund nearly VND 300 million to organize visits and gave presents to 1,270 victims.

Since 2004, activities to support Agent Orange victims have focused to meet their specific needs and wishes. These activities have helped the victims overcome their physical and spiritual pains to integrate in the community, and contributed to poverty reduction and economic development in the province. They also show Vietnam’s tradition of “eating fruits remember growers”, and “drinking water remember its source.”

However, assistance and support provided by the Red Cross remains minor comparing with severe losses and pains that Agent Orange victims have been endured. They are permanently sick and need daily care and treatment.

In order to give further assistance to Agent Orange victims to help them overcome their difficulties, be able to take care of themselves and integrate in the community, the Nam Dinh Red Cross at all levels will coordinate with all sectors, agencies and socio-mass organizations to investigate and classify victims to work out suitable and effective activities. In the immediate future, they will carry out activities to meet the victims’ major needs including **regular assistance to their medical treatment, house repair and household economic development.**

The Nam Dinh Red Cross Association wishes very much to receive the sympathy, concern, assistance and care from the Vietnam Red Cross Association, other organizations and individuals to Agent Orange victims in the province.