

SPEECH OF CAN THO RED CROSS ASSOCIATION

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Can Tho City was the centre of the Fourth Tactical Zone of the former US-Puppet Administration. It was also the centre of many nerve organs of the Saigon puppet army and administration with a military airport in Can Tho. It was the key province in the Delta with many free-raided places such as Vi Thanh, Long My, Phung Hiep... The US and puppet army often conducted mopping up operations, 'burn all and kill all' operations and defoliant sprayings to defoliate leaves and destroy all trees and plants in the province with an aim to cutting off supplies and wiping out hiding places of the people and liberation army. They did not think of the consequences of defoliant sprayings, except defoliation. The people living in this zone have burdened over their heads tones of bombs and toxic chemicals that left great consequences not only on themselves, but also on their children and grandchildren.

More than 30 years since peace has been restored, the consequences and vestiges of war remain. It was thought that when the war ended, everyone would have lived in freedom and happiness and their families reunited. But it is not so to families whose members sacrificed their lives in the war and killed by bombs and shells. Many mothers lost their dearest children and wives lost their husbands. Not all, the war consequences have been left on many families having children with disabilities. Many people have been affected by Agent Orange/dioxin, resulting in cancer, cerebral palsy and deformities and live in lasting pain, making their family economy exhausted.

In Can Tho City now, there are more than 1000 people who are affected by Agent Orange/dioxin, half of them are children. Although the State has enforced a policy in support of the victims of Orange/dioxin, it cannot meet all the needs of their difficult material life and their spiritual life.

The Can Tho City Red Cross Association, with its function as a humanitarian organization, made a proposal and recommendation to the Can Tho City People's Committee and agencies concerned to set up the Fund in Support of Victims of Orange/dioxin on October 21, 1998. Over the past years, we have raised VND300 millions and undertaken many activities such as providing regular allowances, health check ups and medicines, wheelchairs and charity houses and making house visits during holidays and traditional Lunar New Year Festival to an integrated number of 3400 of victims.

I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce to you some cases such as the family of Mrs. Tran Thi Linh Phuong (a member of the Can Tho City Association of Photographers). During the war, she gave birth to three children. When peace was restored, her family had not yet enjoyed full happiness when her husband died because of Agent Orange/dioxin and then her children took turn to pass away, leaving her alone with lasting pain and sufferings. Mr. and Mrs. Nguyen Thanh Phuong have three grandchildren affected by Agent Orange/dioxin. We could not hold back our tears

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whenever visiting victims of Agent Orange/dioxin and seeing girl children who, at the age of over 20, could only eat and sleep at the same place and cry and laugh from time to time or lie with rolled up limbs, knowing nothing. Some families have 3, 4 children with disability and deformity. Some married couples gave birth 7 times but only four are alive and all of their children are living with disabilities.

There are numerous disasters and sufferings caused by Agent Orange/dioxin sprayed by the US army. Many victims told us that they are leading a miserable life, shortage of food and clothing, but their deepest pain is in their heart, although the State and many organizations and individuals have empathized and shared with them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Agent Orange/dioxin has not only destroyed the living environment but also damaged many human generations. This is clearly known by both producers and users of Agent Orange/dioxin. But they have ruthlessly destroyed a country and a nation which has been patriotic, peaceful, friendly and hospitable.

At this workshop, on behalf of the victims, we'd like to express their feelings and call for more support and assistance to the victims of Agent Orange/dioxin.

First of all, we would like to thank organizations, individuals and benefactors at home and abroad for giving support and assistance – both spiritual and material – to victims of Agent Orange/dioxin in the past. We hope that such support and assistance will be expanded because at present, families of the victims are in great need of support and assistance, including:

- Free health check ups, medical treatment, orthopedic operations at State-run clinics.
- Education and jobs suitable to their health
- A centre to care for children with disabilities to reduce difficulties for their families, so that their families can concentrate on production to improve their family economic conditions.
- Provision of necessities in service of their daily life and movement
- Spiritual and material support and assistance.

We wish that social and humanity scientists continue research studies on the consequences of Agent Orange/dioxin so as to urge chemical companies to hold responsible for the victims who are affected by their products and call for more humanitarian activities of the Vietnamese and international community to provide them with material and spiritual support and assistance.

Finally, I wish the conference a success and all of you the best of health.

Thank you for your attention!