

SPEECH OF ASSOCIATION OF VICTIMS OF AGENT ORANGE/DIOXIN IN KON TUM

Pham Truong An, Pharmacist

President of Kon Tum Red Cross Association

President of Association of Victims Agent Orange/Dioxin in Kon Tum Province

I. Geographical, population, socio-economic characteristics of kon tum province

Kon Tum is a mountainous province in the northernmost part of the Central Highlands. The province has a complicated and divided topography and is 700 - 800 m above sea level. Its Ngoc Linh peak is 2998 m high and it is the highest peak in the Central Highlands. Kon Tum is a multinational and multi-religious province with seven ethnic groups living together _ Sedang, Gie-Trieng, Jrai, Bannah, R'ngao, Brau, Kinh and some other ethnic minority groups who have migrated from Northern provinces such as Tay, Muong and Thai under the New Economic Zone Program after the liberation.

Kon Tum has a population of nearly 400,000 (of which the ethnic minority population accounts for 54 %). The province has 8 districts and a provincial town and an area of nearly 10,000 km².

Kon Tum has a border line of 280 km (with 9 border communes), 125 km with Atopeu province (of the Lao People's Democratic Republic) and 155km with Ratanakiri province (of Cambodia).

The province has 96 communes and wards, including 56 communes in specially-difficult conditions. The province's economy is under-developed and the local people's life is difficult. Its GDP growth rate is low. However, in the past several years, it has been much improved thanks to the Government's national programs.

Kon Tum has two main rivers – the Po Ko and the Dak Po Si Rivers flowing to the Sesan River with the great Yali Waterfall where the Yali Hydro-electric power plant – the Century Project was built and Kon Tum is in the upstream.

Kon Tum is a province having rich revolutionary tradition during the anti-French and the anti-US wars of resistance. It is also a province with typical and rich cultures imbued with national identity.

II. Overview on Victims of Agent Orange and Practical activities of the Association of Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin and Kon Tum Red Cross Association in support of the victims

During the US war of aggression against Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, the US sprayed toxic chemicals (called by the US army as defoliants) in South Vietnam including Kon Tum province.

The war has ended for 30 years, but the US toxic chemical sprayings have left great consequences such as destroying the environment and damaging human health, causing great sufferings to the Vietnamese people. These disasters can be very difficult to overcome.

Kon Tum was one of the first provinces the US aggressors had sprayed toxic chemicals. On August 10, 1961, US cargo aircraft C 130 sprayed toxic chemicals on the western side of Highway 14 (in the two districts of Sa Thay and Ngoc Hoi). Forty Five years have elapsed, its disasters left on the people of all ethnic groups in Kon Tum Province remain painful.

With conscience and sense of responsibility, the Red Cross and the Association of Agent Orange Victims of the province have in coordination with the Department of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs and the health sector have conducted a general survey on victims and disasters and vestiges left by the war in the province.

According to incomplete statistics, 9700 people in the province are victims of Agent Orange/dioxin, most of them are children and are in the districts of Sa Thay, Ngoc Hoi, Dak Ha and Kon Tum provincial town. In particular, many families have 2 or 3 children affected by Agent Orange.

Stemming from conscience, sentiments and responsibility, over the past years, the Red Cross and the Association of Agent Orange Victims have organized meetings, calling for support and assistance from benefactors, international and domestic organizations – both material and spiritual – to help victims of Agent Orange to reintegrate into community.

Over the past more than 4 years, we have raised VND 2.5 billion to help victims of Agent Orange, concentrating on the areas such as orthopedic operations and functional rehabilitation, support the building of charity houses, job training, credit for production development and construction of water wells to help relieve their pain.

- Orthopedic operations and functional rehabilitation have been given to 500 patients, most of them are in school age (this program will continue until 2010).

- Support in building charity houses: 45 houses have been built, worth VND50 millions.
- Support in building water wells: More than 100 water wells have been sunk, worth VND100 millions.
- Credit support to households in raising cows: about VND 150 millions.
- Scholarships given to children affected by Agent Orange: more than VND70 millions.
- Visits and gifts presented during Tet traditional Lunar New Year under the theme “Tet for the poor and victims of Agent Orange”, worth billions of Dong over the past four years.
- In coordination with the Province Job Training School: 25 persons have been trained in dress making

III. EXPECTATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When visiting families of victims of Agent Orange, we could not see tears running down their cheeks but heard voices choked with emotion: “Looking at the children who neither know crying nor laughing, dressing up nor eating. They do not even know whether they exist on earth. There is no other pain and losses like what we are suffering. We need kind hearts.”

Each Vietnamese and each person in the world with conscience and sense of responsibility as a human being cannot, but learn more about the origin of Agent Orange, its production and formation and the scheme of using its by the US army in the war in Vietnam.

The pain and sufferings caused by Agent Orange are immeasurable. We earnestly call on the Party and State to adopt suitable policies and take measures to help victims of Agent Orange improve their living standards, and first of all to win the court case against US chemical companies by victims of Agent Orange/dioxin.

Dropping tears to share with the victims, we should act in the spirit: ***Let’s support and help Vietnamese Agent Orange/ dioxin victims – the poorest of the poor, the deepest sufferers among suffering people./.***