

**After 30 years of cease-fire, several
Vietnamese are still dying due to and being
killed by Agent Orange; and their living
environments are still at stake**

(Speech by Mr. Bui Tho Tan)

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Ladies and Gentlemen!

Allowing me to extend our many thanks and on behalf of the victims of Agent Orange/ dioxin of Thai Binh province to all of you, gentlemen and ladies and all of those who have managed to organize this conference and offer us this opportunity to speak out what we have so long desired to do so. We are harboring also ambition that through you our message would be transferred to many people not being here and to the future generations that: After 30 years of cease-fire, there still are many Vietnamese who are dying due to the effects of toxic chemicals sprayed by the U.S forces in Vietnam. Many areas, living surroundings of which, are still not safe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am not a combatant, I am a professional reporter. In 1966, I graduated from the Languages Department of the Hanoi University. In spring of 1968, I went

into South of Vietnam as a reporter for a median-waved radio station called "the Thua Thien-Hue Liberation Radio", directed by ex-musician Ho Thuan Anh (Tran Hoan). Our radio station was located in ALuoi Valley, in the west of Thua Thien province. We had stayed there for almost 2 years (1968, 1969). The valley areas where Ho Chi Minh trails went through were constantly subject to U.S attacks. For Americans, it was never difficult to identify a median-waved radio location . This was the reason why we were under their regular bombings. However, thanks to our underground tunnels deep into the mountains, we were possible to live and work in safety. In order to identify our storages, vehicles and artilleries and liberation forces and then to prevent the sources of food supply for us, the U.S forces many times sprayed indiscriminately their toxic chemicals over hamlets, rice fields and jungles in this area.

I still remember well that on 29th June, 1968, while lowering their altitudes for spraying toxic chemicals, American air-crafts were met with strong counter attacks from the liberation air defense forces, consequently, they had to dump the entire amount of toxic chemicals in a few second over a narrow area and run away.

At that time, we were not aware of anything related to the capacity of Agent Orange/ dioxin to kill us. The only thing we knew is that it was American tactic to force us into the open air, convenient for their firing. Yet, we were still alive. The deep under-ground covered us. We were able to enjoy washing, showering and retrieving fish killed by bombs from nearby streams, we never knew that death was watching us very closely, that the jungle rains carried away dioxin from mountains down and infiltrate into our body and made many people sick and their health gradually disintegrated.

After the war, we were very happy that we were still intact though sometimes fell sick. I had to be transferred to work right in my home province (where my family was and now is living). Hopefully I can enjoy my relatives' help.

By 2001, a tumor at the throat appeared and prevented me from easily taking food, speaking and breathing. The local physicians advised me to take medical check at the K Hospital in Hanoi. After taking necessary tests. I was allowed to stay in the hospital for treatment by chemical therapy. My medical record was named 05302001. After 6 months of treatment, the tumor was leveled down, I

received a surveying form coming from K Hospital in which they asked me about my time and place in South of Vietnam during the war.

After feeding back this form, I heard that people from VAVA was surveying facts in Thai Binh and wanting to visit me.

They asked me about papers and documents related to my activities in the war.

In receiving my papers, especially certificate of treatment issued by K Hospital; they assured me my ailment was among 13 diseases related to dioxin listed by the U.S National Academy of Sciences.

From then on, I began recognizing that probably my ailment was due to my exposure to dioxin in ALuoi Valley from 1968 - 1969: Also, I was able to identify that certain people who were with me in ALuoi during the war, soon died after getting to the North, not because of bombings and bullets but exposure to dioxin. The only thing that we regretted is that upon our death, many still knew nothing about Agent Orange/ dioxin which was sprayed directly on our head by the U.S forces.

Those surveys attracted my attention at many issues , such as: dioxin and victims; and I realized that more substantial assistance should be needed.

After months and years of my reporting work in Thai Binh, I know that about 440,000 Thai Binh men and women were sent to the war and 51,000 of them forever staying back in the battle fields; 32,000 coming back with diseases and disabilities. The remainder is not outwardly disabled but in fact harboring various lethal diseases, especially women who served in the Volunteer Corps to do the transportation and first aid jobs. The human health of these people gradually declines and they find ever harder to earn their living. Certain medium-aged women could not get married. And those getting married found it difficult to give birth.

Realizing their difficult conditions, the grassroots of the Vietnam Red Cross Society tried to send report to higher administration levels, asking for their assistance. The Provincial Red Cross Society Charter collected donations and provided these to the poorest households having prolonged sick-parents and congenially-deformed children. Realizing that so many children born with defects and early morbidity after the war, the Thai

Binh Red Cross Society asked the 10-80 Committee to conduct a survey and later allowed Prof. Le Cao Dai and his colleagues in 10-80 Committee, such as: Dr. Dan Khuong Kiet and many other physicians working for Sweden Pediatrics Hospital to physically check about 530 deformed children in Thai Binh.

Their situation was so much difficult, many people had to bring their children in bamboo baskets hung on the back of bicycles or to walk on foot a long way from their home to the checking points in city for medical examinations taken by doctors from Hanoi; 530 children were examined, those seemed to be effected gravely by dioxin would be selected out and sent to Hanoi for treatment or surgery.

Years later, for several times, the medical branch, the chains of Committee for Pioneers and Children, of Red Cross Society and of Association for Protection of Orphans and Disabled Children have arranged humanitarian assistance and aid, free medical checks and plastic surgeries in many local areas. After activities of conducting studies, treatments and/or provision of aid, the knowledge on Agent Orange/ dioxin issue become gradually better.

In October 12th 1998, the Provincial Fund for Protection of Victims of Agent Orange/ dioxin came into being. In August 10th, 2004, the Provincial VAVA also came into being. Since then, health-care of our victims have been given with more systematic attention.

According to data supplied by Thai Binh VAVA Charter, at the present time about 50,000 dioxin - contaminated suspects are living in this province. Out of them, about 31,000 were directly exposed to Agent Orange sprayings during the war until April 30th, 1975 (parents) and 15,000 were indirectly exposed (children). The third generation (grand children) consists of about 1,000.

The statistics collected by the Labour - Social Disability branch shows that 1942 persons were dead due to Agent Orange exposure. There are about 100 households having all family members, (parent, children, grandchildren) getting effected, 303 are completely paralyzed.

Most of the first generation of victims of Agent Orange/ dioxin are regconized as personalities of merits in the struggle for national liberation. Our Party and Government, social organizations and

population communities constantly stand side by side with them. In Thai Binh there are more than 10,000 victims of Agent Orange who enjoy social welfare benefits provided by our Governmental (the remainder is continuing to be medically examined). The Government and mass organizations have encouraged people to contribute their part in building more than over 100 "houses-of-love" for the hard-pressed victims. The Provincial VAVA, Red Cross Society, Association Protection for Disabled Children and Orphans have collected and allocated billions of VND donated by organizations and kind-hearted individuals to them.

The above-said assistance from inside and outside of the country is substantial but still limited and therefore not meeting the urgent need and even not possible to cover the immediately necessary solution. There are still a lot of long-standing unsolved problems, such as those are related to the elimination of toxicants form human body and environments, the health-care of insane mental patients, paralyzed patients, persons without ability to earn own living, the functional rehabilitation, the vocational training and the employment for those patients who may work, the psychological prejudices and wrong beliefs in

superstitious fate, in immoral cause-effect like proverb say: "a salty father would give birth to a thirsty son". We wish to solve these problems so that our victims may live a more comfortable life. This is not to speak about the environmental remediation. Once, while being on a trip to revisit her former battle field, my wife met one of her old friends, Mrs. Pham Thi Hoa (of An Vu Commune, Quynh Phu District, Thai Binh Province). After the war, this woman has lived with her husband (of Pho Yen, Bac Thai province) and two children in ALuoi. Jus a few years of settlement there, her husband died of liver cancer, and her daughter, now 22 years old, began to identify unusual signs on her skill. She told my wife that there was a school that was built up for a few years but nobody learnt there and this school had to be deserted. Children dared not to go for schooling and teacher refused to do the teaching. It is because of high Agent Orange/dioxin contamination.

After the war, responding to the call of our fatherland, many Thai Binh peasants volunteered to take part in the land-clearing campaign for the deserted areas in High plateau. Song Be, Kien Giang and Minh Hai. Many of them could not stand with the new places and had to come back. It was not only

because of hardships but also of strange diseases. These places should be cleaned up, otherwise nobody may live there.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dioxin is the worst toxic substance ever produced by mankind. The use of dioxin in the war has not only killed soldiers but also caused mass destruction again civilians, not only killed people but also damaged our living environment. Our greatest desire is for all nations and peoples, social and humanitarian associations, religions organizations and individuals to be united and to help us in remediating dioxin consequences left behind by the Vietnam War, and to prevent all the use of Agent Orange and other mass destruction weapons wherever on this planet.

Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen,