

International Conference on Agent Orange/Dioxin victim

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THE CHEMICAL WAR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN VIETNAM

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The patriotic war carried out by the Vietnamese people for independence and freedom ended for more 30 years and our country is in recovery and development. However, Vietnam and its people are still suffering from severe war wounds left behind by the largest chemical warfare in the mankind's history.

It has been well known that the US armed forces resorted to the most modern weapons in the Vietnam War. However the most cruel one was the use of toxic chemicals under the names of defoliants or herbicides. According to the latest data provided by the scientists of the Columbia University, New York (Nature, April 2003), during a decade from 1961 to 1971, the US forces sprayed about 80 million liters of defoliants and herbicides (haft of which was Agent Orange) containing about 336 kg of Dioxin (some others scientists estimated about 500-600 kg). This is a huge amount as Dioxin is the most dangerous toxic that has been found by human. It has been well known that only 80 grams of Dioxin dissolved in the water supply systems may eliminate the entire city with 8 million inhabitants.

This toxic chemical has destroyed the environment of several areas of South Vietnam and the life of millions of Vietnamese people.

According to our Forest Planning and Survey Institute, more than 3 million hectares of forest (including mangroves) were under toxic chemical sprays. Many jungles were seriously damaged leading to ecological imbalance and great losses to our wood resources (90 million m³ at a value of approximately 1 billion US dollars), jungle animals and jungle specialties were disappeared. Consequently, flood, soil erosion and droughts have affected seriously our agriculture, which provides main source of subsistence to the majority of Vietnamese.

At this conference we would like to emphasize the harmful effects caused by Dioxin on human health. Various research studies conducted by scientists of many countries have proved that due to Dioxin, the Vietnamese Agent Orange's victims are suffered from many fatal diseases such as cancer of lung, skin, prostate, liver, Hodgkin lymphoma, diabetes, metabolism disorder, immune deficiency, ect... The list of Dioxin-related diseases is longer than the list announced by American Academy of Science and American Medical Institute in 1994 and 1996. It is easy to understand because American army sprayed Agent Orange directly on Vietnamese and we have to live longtime in our dioxin-contaminated fatherland.

The level of Dioxin in blood and in fat tissue of Vietnamese victims is higher than normal population. For instance, in 1999 an American scientist, Prof A. Schecter and his Vietnamese counterpart, Prof Le Cao Dai found one person who had lived near the former American military zone having 271 ppt of Dioxin in his blood (135 times higher than normal).

Dioxin amount in fat tissue of Vietnamese agent's orange's victims is 19.24 ppt (part per trillion). The number is 1.38, 6, 7, 7.2ppt respectively in non-inflicted people in Vietnam, Japan, Canada, and United State.

In Vietnamese women-victims, many productive complications were discovered:

COMPLICATIONS OF OBSTETRIC	NORMAL PERSON	AO's VICTIM
Abortion, premature birth	3 - 7 %	8 - 16.7 %
Interrupted Pregnancy	0.35 %	3.04 %
Molia Pregnancy	0.6 - 0.9 %	7 - 37 %
Congenital malformation	0.22 %	2.28 %

Those productive complications have deprived many Vietnamese women of their right of being a mother. American researchers from Harvard University (Baughmann, Messelson) already found:

- In 1970: a very high level Dioxin in Vietnamese mothers' milk (average 484 ppt /gram of milk, highest figure is 1450 ppt).
- In 1973: the level of Dioxin in mother's milk had declined (131 ppt and 270 ppt respectively).

In February 1988, the World Health Organization announced the results of its research on Dioxin level in mothers' milk as follows:

*Hanoi	2.2ppt	*India	1ppt	*United States	3.1-3.5ppt
*Song Be	17ppt	*Japan	1.8-2.4ppt	*Canada	2.2-2.8ppt
*Can Gio	9ppt	*Thailand	<1ppt	*Great Britain	1.4ppt

Accordingly the level of Dioxin in mothers' milk in Vietnam is higher in contaminated areas.

However, the most painful and dangerous is that Dioxin inflicts not only one generation, but also several. Despite the war already ended for more than 30 years, we have witnessed severe congenital malformation not only in the children (2.95% in the victim's population in comparing with 0.74 % in the non-affected one) but also grandchildren generation (2.69 % in the victim's population in comparing with 0.82% in the non-affected one). Scientific researches showed that the mutation on P53, gene Cyp 1A1, gene AhR and chromosome in exposed people can lead to congenital malformations (bone and muscles: 22.31%; nerve system: 16.85%; face and senses: 16%; multi-disorders: 16.14%) and monster. It is *

worth to note that in the years of 1990s, the studies done by certain US scientists found the presence of Dioxin in the sperm of the Vietnam-American veterans. This explains that the toxicities of the male productive cell deformities.

During pregnancy and after birth, Dioxin in blood and milk continues to harm fetus and newborn.

Due to the infliction of Dioxin, the ratio of birth defects in Vietnam is higher than that in many other countries. For example, in Song Be and Dong Thap provinces, two Japanese scientists (M.Harada and M.Kida) identified 69 cases of anencephaly out of 10,000 births (Japan 8; North Ireland 20), 103 cases of harelip (cleft lip) and upper-jaw-openness (cleft palate) out of 10,000 births (Japan 10; Malaysia 15; North Ireland 12).

The significant features of birth deformities related to Dioxin are following:

- A family risks giving birth to many children with birth deformities.
- An individual may be identified with several forms of deformity that lead to higher proportion of disability.
- These deformities are usually related to nervous system, senses and the perversion on limbs.

Consequently, families of Agent Orange victims are among the poorest ones with exhausted economic conditions due to absence of working capacity.

The State of Vietnam has made great efforts to overcome these war consequences in general and to provide assistance to the victims of Agent Orange / Dioxin in particular. However, the capacity of a country suffering from decades of war and natural disasters is limited and has not been able to meet all the needs of the victims.

Also to solve the severe consequences caused by the chemical warfare, many times, Vietnam has suggested the US to assist Vietnamese victims. Regrettably, this goodwill has not been answered.

Before this ignorance of responsibility of the United States, the Vietnamese AO/Dioxin victims have no choice than is to pursue a lawsuit against American chemical companies who have earned enormous profit by providing such mass destructive weapons to American armed forces to use in Vietnam.

The Vietnamese victims proceeded with the lawsuit on January 30th 2004 not only for their own lives but also for the legitimate interests of all other victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in other countries including the US. This legal action is not only for one generation but many generations who were and have been suffering from agony and diseases. This legal action is conducted for the sake of solemn right-to-life of human beings, and with strong faith that conscience and justice still exist and are respected in the world.

At the Stockholm Conference in Sweden (July 2002) and Paris Conference in France (March 2005) the world's progressive forces have raised their voices to ask the US to take the responsibility of healing the wounds that they have caused in Vietnam.

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We are sincerely thankful for the understanding and sympathy extended by our friends from all five continents. At this International Conference of Agent Orange/Dioxin victim, we hope you will stronger support this fight for the respect of justice and conscience. Our struggle to day is for the peaceful life of the future generation on this planet.

Note: Many data are extracted from the researches of Military-Medical Institute, Hanoi Medical University, HoChiMinh's city Medical and Pharmaceutical University, Institute of Biological Technology, Vietnam Institute of Science and Technology.