

Report at the conference on
“Supporting Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in Vietnam”
(Ho Chi Minh City, 25 July 2004)

LET’S REACH VICTIMS OF AGENT ORANGE
THE CALL OF CONSCIENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY

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Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Friends and children, victims of Agent Orange

During the war in Vietnam, the U.S armed forces not only resorted to conventional weapons, designed to clear in broad areas of our forests and mountainous regions; to destroy rice fields and crops; but also to poison water sources and to deteriorate ecology. On 10 August 1961, an H. 34 helicopter of the U.S Air force exercised the first spraying of herbicides along Highway No 14, stretching from Kon Tum to Dae To, thus beginning the defoliation campaign under the code name “Ranch Hand”. From 1965 to 1971, the chemical spraying was carried out over South Vietnam, the U.S forces used the giant C-123 aircrafts, each of which can carry more than 45 tons of these substances to be sprayed deep into the bases each aircraft, before landing, would release the remaining chemical from its tank. After reaching on the ground, the craft was carefully washed would seep into the soil and spread over the airbase surface. As a result, the chemicals had been not only sprayed on the strategic transportation lines connecting the Great Northern Rear with the Great Southern Frontier, and not only over the concentration and camping centers of troops, areas of storages or rice fields in the Rear, but also right over the landing zones of aircrafts and airbases themselves. The consequence of dropped chemical has been devastating poisoning human beings, crops and destroying plants.

For 10 years, from 1961 - 1971, 80 million liters of chemicals, most of which were Agent Orange, containing nearly 400 kilograms of dioxin had been dropped by the American forces.

Dioxin is the most noxious chemical ever discovered by mankind. With just 01 nanogram (1/a billion gram) can cause cancer, deformity of all types and can be inherited by two or three generations. Several doses of nanograms can kill

a human being. Although the war has long been over, the some of wound of war has been healed the mental and physical pain has never been eased for millions of Vietnamese families, who are victims of Agent Orange/dioxin. The majority of affected people are veterans, young volunteers and people living in contaminated areas, and some people from the former Sai Gon administration. Tens of thousands of victims of Agent Orange/dioxin suffering from cancers and incurable diseases, have died. At the same time, victims' off-springs (F1) and later generation (F2) are born with deformities and other illnesses. Many families have two or three such children making their life extremely difficult one.

Mr. Tu and Mrs. Muoi in Phu Tuc commune, Chau Thanh district, Ben Tre province have delivered ten children with intellectual impairment. While the second daughter was still being breastfed, the first son suddenly became seriously affected, laughing with distortion, and head on one shoulder. Another child was affected like her brother, both laughing one after one. The seventh boy died, 8 of the remaining nine children remain the same today. The parents' pain can never be released. The fifth daughter was well and married. However, her child is affected like her aunts and uncles, Mr. Tu served in the resistance and was affected by Agent Orange.

In the house of Mrs. Nguyen Thi Tan (Y Tang village, Bac Phu commune, Soc Son district, Hanoi), the three-wing fan hanging over the mosquito net is the most valuable property. On the altar is a picture of her husband, Tich, who, she recalled returned home from the South battle field. We had three children, two sons and a daughter who were born in good health, but when they were 5 and 6 years old, they became ill and weak. In 1992, when our youngest was 10, my husband died because of lung cancer.

In Tan Hoa village, Cam Tuyen commune, Cam Lo district of Quang Tri province, the couple Tran Van Tram and Tran Thi Dan have four children, born in 1979, 1981, 1983 and 1984 with deformities and the same diseases.

Mr. Nguyen Vung, residing in 4 Chi Lang street, Hue city, was lieutenant of regiment No 3, infantry No1 of the former Sai Gon army, and took part in many operations in A So - A Luoi area, he was severely affected by Agent Orange/dioxin and now contracted bowel infection, following surgery he now has an artificial anus.

The once so called iron land of Cu Chi where fierce battles were found, heavy bombardment and chemical dropping took place, is now recovering. Bomb craters have been turned to thriving gardens and rice fields. However, in the empty house of R. Tran Van Loi, an 4/4 grad invalid veteran in Phu Binh village,

An Phu commune, his son, Mr. Tran Anh Kiet, 21, lies his body shrunken body, and limp just like a dried piece of wood. His face has no expression and looks at visitors with glazed eyes. The two daughters of Mr. To Van Mo in Trung Lap Thuong commune, To Thi Hue (born in 1974) and To Thi Chi (born in 1979), are mentally disturbed, even cleaning the house is difficult for them.

More and more painful cases can be recast in this speech as victims of Agent Orange and dioxin.

In its responsibility, the Government of Vietnam established the Committer 10-80 to investigate the consequences of the chemical war and established the Steering Committee 33 to try and surmount the war legacies. In January 2002, the Government adopted a policy to support victims of agent orange/dioxin. Recently, the Government provided more funding, Vietnam Red Cross Society in supporting prosthetic operations for children with disabilities; regular support to veteran victims, youth volunteers and their deformed children. The Vietnam Red Cross Society established the Fund for Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin on 24 July 1998, aiming to mobilize resources from external and internal sources, organizations and individuals to help victims of Agent Orange. To date, the Fund has branches in almost all provinces and cities throughout the country. Over 6 years of operation, more than 23 billion VND have been mobilized by the Central fund and over 50 billion VND have been raised at local levels. Nearly 300,000 victims were examined, operated and provided with rehabilitation services, vocational training provision of working facilities of income generation activities, provision of thousands of wheel chairs, scholarships, compassion house in the last 5 years. The Fund in Ho Chi Minh City mobilized 2.4 billion VND, providing regular support to 156 victim families with a monthly subsidy of 150,000 to 200,000 VND, more support to over 200 households having difficulties, providing fund for more than 120 households and supporting medical treatment for 120 persons. The Fund for Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin has also received support from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, Red Cross Societies of Norway, Germany, USA, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, the Ford Foundation, Norad and other Lion Clubs in Japan.

However, the support from community is far too small to meet the need of the victims. Most of the victims' families live in poverty. Many veterans are suffering from severe wounds on the bodies, but they still have to move heaven and earth with their ailing wives to earn a living to take care of children who have severe malformation. Yet, many have not been recognized as victims and have received no subsidy due to the fact that they lose their documents that certify their being in the fighting and exposed areas. Consequently, their

children who have suffered from congenital malformation have not received the State's subsidy yet.

Given such circumstance, some victims of Agent Orange, veterans, scientists, social activists who share a joint determination of overcoming consequences of Agent Orange to work together actively to form the Preparation Committee for the establishment of the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin headed by Madame Binh - former Vice President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The Association came into being on 10 January 2004. The Association is a social organization for victims of Agent Orange and individuals, organizations and people who donate their effort and intelligence and money to help victims of Agent Orange overcome the consequences of toxic chemicals used by the U.S during the war in Vietnam. The Association's function is to protect the right of the victims, and is the legal representative for the victims in the relations with domestic and foreign organizations and individuals.

One of the Associations' first activities is to develop a proposal on supporting victims of Agent Orange as well as collection of files and documents, evidence to sue American companies for producing Agent Orange/dioxin which were then used by the U.S army in Vietnam.

On the January 2004, the Association along with some victims of Agent Orange brought the suit against 37 American companies which produced toxic chemicals, to the U.S court in Brooklyn New York.

On the February 2004, the Association issued a Declaration appealing all citizens in and out the country to express their stronger sympathies and support for the Association's activities and the victims' lawsuit in the U.S. The Association hopes and highly appreciates the sentiments, warm responses of organizations, and individuals striving for right to life for people all over the world, especially in the U.S. The Association appreciates the Declaration of Stockholm Conference in Sweden (July-2002) supporting Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to overcome the aftermaths of the war. The Association also calls upon Governments, NGOs and peoples round the world to actively support humanitarian activities, and help Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange to overcome the severe war consequences in Vietnam.

Since the Association and certain Agent Orange victims submitted their complaint and publicized the lawsuit, on 3rd February 2004 Vietnam news agency and foreign press in Vietnam that have broadcasted this news. Public opinion has become more aware of Agent Orange victims flight and has expressed its interest in the lawsuit. One of the Central Committee of Vietnam

Fatherland Front Committee issued the Declaration calling upon people of all segments in the country and Vietnamese oversea to have take actions to help victims of Agent Orange. The Presidium also warmly welcomes the Vietnam Association for Victim of Agent Orange/dioxin along with representatives of victims who brought the collective civil sue in U.S court against groups which produced toxic chemical for the US invasion in Vietnam from 1961-1971. The Declarations, NGOs, scientists, prestigious lawyer and people around the world clearly understand the truth and the nature of the chemical war, it is aftermath of generations on Vietnamese people caused by American forces. On behalf of 10 million members and nearly 60 millions of inhabitants are living in rural areas. Vietnam Veterans Association and Vietnam Lawyers Association, Vietnam Farmers Association issued the Declaration supporting Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange for the suit against the American chemical companies. On 1st May 2004, many overseas Vietnamese youth and students marched on streets in Paris, distributing 10.000 leaflets attracting attention of French people to Vietnam victims of Agent Orange.

On 25th June 2004, representatives from 32 member organizations of Vietnam Fatherland Front joined the Conference Supporting Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in Vietnam. The participants unanimously chose the 10th August every year (the first day that the American forces dropped chemicals over Vietnam in 1961) as the national action day for Victims of Agent Orange in Vietnam, and collecting signatures to support the victims, especially to support the civil lawsuit that is being handled in the US.

On this occasion, the Fund for the Poor of the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and the Vietnam Development Assistance Fund, donated 100 million VND each for poor victims to build houses and improve their lives. In Ho Chi Minh City, on this occasion, many agencies, unions, organizations, companies, enterprises and benefactors enthusiastically supported Victims of Agent Orange.

The Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin and the victims have received compassion and assistance from friends all over the world. The Association has received support from the Britain-Vietnam Friendship Society, the France-Vietnam Friendship Association, the Switzerland-Vietnam Association, Swedish Committee for solidarity with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the Vietnam Veteran Association of the US, the International Democratic Lawyers' Association, The artist Kumiko Yokoi (Japanese). Ms Anjuska Weil (The Switzerland-Vietnam Association) during her visit to Vietnam directly transferred money to the victims of Agent Orange under the

help of the Switzerland-Vietnam Association and promised to come back to Vietnam for support and assistance to the victims. Particularly, from March 2004, Mr. Len Aldis, the Secretary General of the Britain-Vietnam Friendship Society appealed in an internet petition to collect signatures from people around the world to support victims of Agent Orange and Dioxin Vietnam. Up to now, there have been tens of thousands of signatures in which many are from the US. By the end of May 2004, Professor Kenneth J. Herrmann, who served the US Army in Vietnam from May 1968 to May 1969 and currently is the Director of the SUNY Brockport Vietnam Program sent a letter to the office of the Vietnam News Agency in Washington appealing for support for Vietnam's Agent Orange and Dioxin Victims calling for the world to acknowledgement the losses and victims' hurts are being suffered. Professor Kenneth J. Herrmann proposed that victims and their dear and nears one to send letters to him with an aim to mobilize support and subscribe in the US in September 2004.

On the occasion of the Conference today, on half of the Vietnam Association for victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin and the Victims, I would like to express our sincere thanks for the support and assistance of the Party and the Government and the people in all regions and areas nationwide and overseas to victims of Agent Orange that ease their physical and spiritual pain, lessen their difficulties in lives, help the believe in lives which still remain many difficulties.

I would like to express sincere thank to the organizations and friends in the world, for the call of humanity and justice, have had noble behavior supporting Victims of Agent Orange and Dioxin Vietnam.

I would like to thank the Vietnamese and foreign mass media and news agencies for their regular attention and report on the situation of Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in Vietnam.

The Conference Supporting Victims of Agent Orange and Dioxin Victims in Vietnam once again appeals to all people of Vietnam in and outside the country for more support and assistance to Victims of Agent Orange and Dioxin.

The Conference hopes that friends all over the world, including American people, will continue to support Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in Vietnam in the fight for the conscience and responsibility, for the humanity and justice, for the responsibility of the US chemicals corporations of the US to compensate Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in Vietnam as well as those in the US and many other countries.

Let's reach Victims of Agent Orange and Dioxin, to the poorest of the poor, to the most miserable of the miserable. Among them, many have died and many are suffering with severe disease due to the cruel consequences of Agent

Orange. Many youth both girls and boys are unable to stand on their own legs, many woman have no chance to enjoy the motherhood, some can only bring forth a child with birth defects.

Approaching Victims of Agent Orange and Dioxin and understanding their deepest pain therein the noble humanity of the people of Vietnam is clearly expressed: Love others as yourself. Even the red cloth would cover the mirror, why not the fellows of one nation should love one another and therein, the humanity and mutual love of people with conscience and responsibility are greatly honored.

Thank you for your attention./.