

# **THE FORD FOUNDATION**

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Prepared for

The House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment

Hearing to Examine  
"Agent Orange: What Efforts Are Being Made to Address the Continuing Impact  
of Dioxin in Vietnam?"

June 4, 2009

Chairman Faleomavaega and members of the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Charles Bailey, Director of the Special Initiative on Agent Orange/Dioxin, a program of the Ford Foundation, an independent, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization. Prior to that I led the foundation's office in Hanoi, serving as representative in Vietnam for 10 years, from 1997 to 2007. Ford's mission is to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation and advance human achievement.

Over the years the Ford Foundation in Vietnam has supported institutions and individuals with grants totaling \$100 million over the past 12 years. Ford also provided funding for over 550 Vietnamese to complete graduate degree studies overseas in a range of disciplines. We have:

- Provided long term support for Vietnam's process of international integration through diplomacy;

- Supported sustainable development in areas of the country where the benefits of such growth have been felt more slowly;

- Encouraged Vietnamese scholars and artists in their quest to interpret and understand the impact of global integration on their society and culture;

- Promoted innovation by health practitioners and social activists in the field of sexuality and reproductive health; and

- Contributed to addressing the sensitive international and humanitarian issues of the Agent Orange/dioxin legacy, the subject of today's hearing.

How environmental concerns impact people's lives and health are an important part of our work around the world. Since 2000, the Ford Foundation has been committed to addressing the impact of dioxin on post-war Vietnam. As a result, the foundation has made grants totaling \$9.3 million to dioxin-related projects. This work has supported efforts to develop treatment and support centers, to assess and contain environmental dioxin, restore the landscape, and educate the public about these matters.

The promising news is that these problems can be addressed and considerable progress has been made over the last three years.

## Background

From 1961 to 1971, U.S. military forces sprayed more than 20 million gallons of Agent Orange and other herbicides on forests and crops in southern and central Vietnam. The campaign had both human and environmental consequences. The immediate effect was to defoliate and destroy vegetation over wide areas. The delayed impact came from dioxin, a highly toxic chemical in Agent Orange that is critically harmful to humans.

More than 35 years later, dioxin continues to pose significant health and safety concerns. It remains at dangerously high levels in and around former U.S. air bases where planes carrying the toxic spray were based, in some instances contaminating local food chains. A disturbingly high number of birth defects, cancers, and other diseases have struck Vietnamese veterans, civilians, their offspring and those now living in affected regions of Vietnam. Many American veterans of the campaign and their families have experienced health crises too. For decades, the after-effects of dioxin remained an unresolved matter between the United States and Vietnam. The United States sought to avoid what appeared to be an open-ended liability; the Vietnamese were concerned that pushing too hard to address the matter might jeopardize their export-led growth strategy and entry into the World Trade Organization.

## Promising Developments and the Role of the Ford Foundation

Today, promising initiatives and efforts from diverse constituencies have fostered a new environment of cooperation between the United States and Vietnam. Government agencies, nongovernmental organizations and nonprofit donors are responding to the challenging legacy of Agent Orange.

The Ford Foundation has taken a leadership role in the philanthropic community, working to address the impact of dioxin on post-war Vietnam by seeking to increase awareness and resources around a humanitarian agenda.

Our role has been that of a neutral party working with both sides—the government of Vietnam and the government of the United States. We have brought people together who might not otherwise engage with each other, we have funded confidence building projects for which there was no other donor, and we seek to raise the level of awareness and understanding on this issue in the United States and more broadly.

Our first Agent Orange-related grant was in 2000—a donation of \$150,000 to the Vietnam Red Cross Agent Orange Victims Fund which they used for operations and prosthetic devices for about 1,700 people in three southern provinces. Shortly thereafter the American Red Cross followed up with a donation of \$1.5 million to its counterpart, the Vietnam Red Cross, to extend this program.

From this initial grant we learned two things: First, that the needs in this area were far greater than the foundation's own resources and sizeable funds would need to be mobilized from other sources. However, other donors were reluctant to become involved in a subject they regarded both as deeply controversial and as an issue strictly between the governments of the United States and Vietnam. And second, when the American Red Cross grant was not renewed, we realized again that this was, indeed, not an easy issue and that a deeper public understanding of the Agent Orange issue was required in the United States.

Before we could move ahead on either front however, the actual nature and extent of at least the environmental nature of the problem needed to be brought into greater focus. In 2002 we made a second grant, this one to the 10-80 Division of Vietnam's Ministry of Health. They used the funds to work with a Canadian environmental firm, Hatfield Consultants of West Vancouver, British Columbia, to identify which of the estimated 2,735 U.S. military bases in the former South Vietnam might still be contaminated with dioxin from the use of Agent Orange. This study took three years to complete and narrowed down the problem to a handful of dioxin "hotspots." In short, the years from 2000 to 2005 were a period of searching for a constructive way forward.

The year 2006 proved to be a turning point. Overall relations between the United States and Vietnam were improving as the U.S. facilitated Vietnam's entry into the World Trade Organization. As for Agent Orange, in January 2006, the 10-80 Division and Hatfield announced the results of their study: Three former U.S. airbases contained areas still highly contaminated with dioxin which was endangering nearby communities—Bien Hoa, Phu Cat and Da Nang. This added international confirmation to studies the Vietnamese had recently completed. Later that month, in a major breakthrough, President Bush and President Triet of Vietnam announced the intent to clean up dioxin contaminated areas remaining from the war. Finally, in December 2006, with Ford Foundation support, a group of prominent Vietnamese citizens agreed with American counterparts to found a

bi-national committee for a two-way channel for frank discussions and to chart a way forward. This became the US-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin.

The third period, from 2007 to the present, has been one of growing opportunities for increasingly diverse groups to engage with the Agent Orange issue. They have transformed it from a “hot topic” too sensitive to talk about, into a subject for humanitarian discourse and common search for solutions.

### Grant Making

Mr. Chairman, the Ford Foundation has applied two kinds of resources to the Agent Orange issue: that of neutral convener and broker and that of grant maker. The neutral brokering, convening and open sharing of information—necessarily preceded substantial grant making. Indeed, it took seven years of such work—1998 to 2005—to create sufficiently favorable conditions for forward movement. The foundation’s resources brought the problem of dioxin into sharper focus. It became defined by facts which gave it a more definite size and scope so that solutions became possible to envision. Major grant making began in 2006 and has accelerated in the years since. As of May 2009 the Ford Foundation has approved grants totaling more than \$9.3 million to organizations in Vietnam and to US organizations working with the Vietnamese on solutions. These grants and convenings have produced several immediate results.

First, Vietnamese agencies and their partners are **delivering enhanced services** in health, education and employment to children and young adults with disabilities, particularly disabilities linked to exposure to dioxin. More than two-thirds of the \$9.3 million have gone to this purpose, as shown in the chart below. The projects stretch from Thai Binh province in the Red River Delta to Can Tho in the Mekong Delta, with particular emphasis in central Vietnam—including the provinces of Binh Dinh, Quang Ngai, Quang Nam, Kon Tum, Thua Thien Hue, Quang Tri, and Da Nang.

Second, the threat to **public health has been sharply reduced** in neighborhoods near the airport in Da Nang from a dioxin hotspot at the north end of the runway. Health authorities in Bien Hoa have educated citizens on simple measures they can take to ensure food safety.

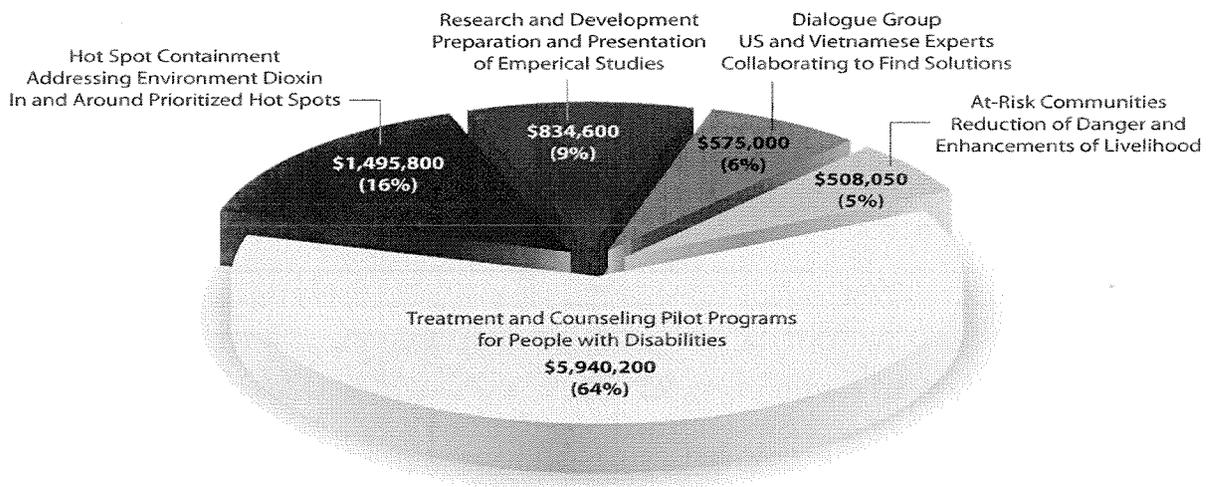
Third, rural development officials in Quang Tri province have devised ways to **reforest Agent Orange-denuded mountainsides** with help from Vietnam National University-Hanoi.

Fourth, three Vietnamese have completed graduate degrees in social work at United States universities and are back in Vietnam **strengthening the**

**organizational competencies** and improving the services local NGOs provide to self-help and advocacy groups of young adults with disabilities.

Fifth, on May 18, 2009, the Government of Vietnam launched a three year, \$6.75 million project to create Southeast Asia’s **first analytical laboratory** capable of detecting dioxin and other persistent organic pollutants at the extremely low concentrations in which it still is poisonous to human beings. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies are providing \$5.4 million towards the project. The Ford Foundation brokered the initial discussions.

Ford Foundation Special Initiative on Agent Orange/Dioxin  
**ADDRESSING THE EFFECTS OF AGENT ORANGE/DIOXIN IN VIETNAM**  
**Grants Made Through May 2009**  
**\$9,353,650**



And sixth, we have funded, or otherwise contributed to, a set of **key studies**; a list of these is appended.<sup>1</sup>

The US-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin

The US-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin, which I mentioned a moment ago, met for the first time in January 2007. The members spent a week together in Vietnam traveling to the most affected areas, meeting with officials, viewing existing social service programs and most importantly, visiting families whose children were suffering from disabilities and ill health attributed to dioxin

<sup>1</sup> The Ford Foundation Web site contains a short video about Agent Orange/dioxin and a complete list of all grants we have made to date can also be found there: [www.fordfound.org/programs/signature/agentorange/issue](http://www.fordfound.org/programs/signature/agentorange/issue)

exposure. At the end of the week they drew several conclusions. Yes, there was space and a role for civil society to help resolve this very serious problem, a problem where more formal government structures had not succeeded in finding common ground, much less agreement. The members agreed to meet further, alternating between Vietnam and the United States for a two-year period. The Dialogue Group set as its goals the two essential elements which were missing in the period from 2000 to 2005: to mobilize greater resources and to raise awareness and understanding of the Agent Orange/dioxin issue in the United States. They also identified five priorities around which to rally support:

- *Expanded services to people with disabilities in Vietnam*
- *Dioxin remediation at Da Nang*
- *Landscape restoration*
- *High resolution Dioxin Laboratory*
- *Public education in the United States*

The Dialogue Group held its second meeting at the Ford Foundation in New York in June 2007. At this gathering, members discussed the need for additional resources with representatives of UNDP, UNICEF, the US Fund for UNICEF, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies. This was also an opportunity to bring environmental officials from the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense together with counterparts from the US Environmental Protection Agency to discuss some technical disagreements over interim containment of dioxin at the Da Nang airport. In January 2008, the Dialogue Group met again in Vietnam where they assessed progress on the five priorities and recommended a focusing of resources on Da Nang to show what a comprehensive solution—environmental clean-up, healthcare and other social services—might look like in one location. They also met with American Ambassador Michael Michalak and Vietnamese Vice Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh and held a press conference. The Dialogue Group just convened for the fourth time on June 1 and 2 here in Washington, D.C. I have appended a list of its current membership.

### Bilateral Collaboration

U.S. government collaboration with Vietnam on dioxin remediation has unfolded over several years led by the State Department and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA arranged for the transfer of laboratory equipment to the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology, along with technical assistance. When the Vietnamese directed U.S. attention to the Da Nang airport, in early 2007, the EPA and the State Department provided \$400,000 for EPA and other U.S. contractors to provide technical advice on the interim containment of dioxin at the north end of the runway.

The Ford Foundation worked with both parties and through grants to the Government of Vietnam's Office of Committee 33,<sup>2</sup> the Foundation funded measurement of dioxin levels in soil, sediments, foodstuffs and biosamples in and around the airport. These data led to the design and construction of a large cement cap, sediment channeling and filtering structures, and a secure fence to close the dioxin exposure pathways into the community. These interim containment measures were completed in January 2008. Plans are now being evaluated on ways to remediate, or essentially destroy, the dioxin. The U.S. EPA, Committee 33, the Ministry of Defense and the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology last week began field testing, with Ford Foundation assistance, a promising bioremediation technology developed by the Vietnamese. Foundation support for the above measures totals \$1.4 million.

Bilateral cooperation to remediate the Da Nang dioxin hotspot has produced results—most importantly, greater mutual understanding and a common focus on practical and feasible solutions. This mutual confidence is underwriting further collaboration on the dioxin-associated human needs of people in Da Nang.

#### Expanding the Donor Circle

Adding to budget allocations from the Government of Vietnam, other donors have joined us as shown in the graph appended to my statement. The Czech Republic contributions are for dioxin assessment and interventions in Thua Tien Hue and Binh Dinh provinces, while UNDP has conducted dioxin assessments at the Bien Hoa and Phu Cat hotspots. The Atlantic Philanthropies and the Gates Foundation are funding the Government of Vietnam's high resolution dioxin laboratory as noted earlier. The US Fund for UNICEF has matched a Ford Foundation grant to fund a new program for children with disabilities centered on Da Nang and Bien Hoa. IrishAid supports orthopedic surgery and physical rehabilitation for people living with disabilities in Da Nang. Four other US foundations have also provided grant support: The Wallace A. Gerbode and the Chino Cienega foundations support information outreach to the American public and the Spencer Shaw Fund and Leavey Foundation are backing Catholic Relief Services for an inclusive education project in Binh Dinh province, site of the Phu Cat dioxin hotspot. The Korean Disabled Veterans Organization is providing resources for a center in Quang Ngai province which will provide medical and rehabilitation services and job training for Agent Orange victims.

Individuals and organizations in Vietnam and elsewhere are also increasing their charitable giving for direct assistance to Agent Orange victims. These donations flow through channels set up by the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange, the Vietnam Red Cross and the Vietnam News Agency. In the United

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<sup>2</sup> Office of the National Steering Committee on Overcoming Toxic Chemicals Used by the US During the War in Vietnam, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

States, funds have flowed to the Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign, and the War Legacies Project and through Vietnam bilateral friendship societies in Britain, Denmark, France and Italy.

A problem that a short time ago was too sensitive to broach is now the focus of multiple and diverse donors. Nevertheless, much more needs to be done. Despite progress relative to the pre-2006 period, donor funding commitments remain short term and fragile.

The Government of Vietnam has allocated funds to both environmental cleanup and direct assistance to those with disabilities associated with exposure to dioxin. On the environmental side, for many years the government did not realize the danger to the public from dioxin hotspots at former US air bases. Ministry of Defense measurements of dioxin at these air bases only began in the early 2000s and did not extend beyond the base perimeters. Indeed it was not until late 2005 that research emerged revealing that dioxin was moving into surrounding communities and up the food chain. Since then, the Government of Vietnam has spent \$6.25 million for research and initial remediation at Bien Hoa and has pledged \$1.25 million as its share of the dioxin lab project, which is also supported by the Gates Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies. As for disability, the government is currently paying an estimated \$115 million a year in income supplements to people with disabilities from all causes.<sup>3</sup>

The major components of any solution will require the continued and deepening engagement of the US Government with funds and technical assistance. The two governments have formed a bilateral scientific and technical body, the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). The JAC co-chairs are a senior official from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and his counterpart from the Office of Committee 33 of the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment. The JAC held its first extended, substantive meeting in September 2008 in Hanoi. They resolved to form two task forces—one for environmental remediation and the other for health—to quicken the pace of action. In May 2007 the U.S. Congress appropriated \$3 million towards dioxin clean-up and health programs in surrounding communities. On October 29, 2008 the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam announced the award of \$1 million of the total to three American NGOs for the first year of an integrated set of social service projects in Da Nang. In March 2009 the U.S. Congress allocated a second \$3 million for dioxin clean-up and health programs in surrounding communities.

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<sup>3</sup> This amount is in addition to the amounts shown in the appended graph.

## The Way Forward

Mr. Chairman, environmental remediation has proved to be the most feasible starting point for the two governments to work together on the legacy of Agent Orange. I was recently in Da Nang and I am pleased to report that by the end of this year we will have enough information on soil volumes, required clean up standards, preferred technologies, unit costs and required time to project accurately what it will take to destroy the dioxin at Da Nang, and by extension, the dioxin at the other two highly toxic hotspots in Bien Hoa and Phu Cat. The cost estimates to remediate these three hotspots are expected to be approximately \$50 to \$60 million. We can thus see the beginning of the end of this part of the overall problem.

On the health side, however, the issue is more complex. The solutions here will require a larger imagination, a longer-term vision and an even stronger partnership between the United States and Vietnam. I would like to suggest that there are three essential characteristics of any solution to the human impact of the Agent Orange legacy. Any solution should be:

- Broad-based and involve larger numbers of Americans than are currently engaged to capture their interest and views and encourage them to voice their concern about why resolving the Agent Orange issue is important for both Vietnam and the United States.
- Long-term, involving younger generations of Americans and Vietnamese who will devise and carry out the solutions that will be required and who will make careers in new professions, for example, social work and in new kinds of organizations, especially civic organizations in Vietnam.
- Finally, we need to start now to build on recent successes. This is because the need to relieve suffering is immediate and urgent.

One should never underestimate the destructive power of physical and mental disability, not only on the individual, but on her or his family. It places a heavy and often life-long burden on families who struggle to cope. When a family member becomes chronically ill or disabled or is born with disabilities, family expenses go up, family income drops and the family finds itself on a fast descent to the bottom of the society where they join families still stuck below the poverty line. Disability leaves people more vulnerable, especially women and children.

In addition, the needs of the person with a disability change as they grow and develop into young adults; and these needs vary from person to person and family to family. As a consequence, programs of assistance need to be flexible,

responding to each family's situation; comprehensive, offering a range of high quality services; and inclusive, reaching everyone in need.

So, the challenge of the Agent Orange legacy of the Vietnam War is to focus resources—funds and expertise—to ensure healthy families, and more particularly, to ensure opportunities for people with disabilities in Vietnam to maximize their capabilities and live with self-confidence and self-respect.

This challenge is also an opportunity to transform systems, not only through new facilities, new equipment and new training curricula, but also through concepts such as early detection and intervention, the case management system and inclusive education.

### Recommendations

The funds which the U.S. government has allocated so far have been essential to addressing the real needs of the Agent Orange legacy. We have an opportunity now to create a path for a longer-term strategy with multi-year funding to support it. That strategy would need to keep three objectives in mind:

#### **Healthy Families**

- ✓ Counseling, diagnosis and where feasible, surgery and rehabilitation for people with disabilities, beginning in Agent Orange high-impact areas.
- ✓ Case management-based assistance to families with members living with disabilities and support for participating fully in the life of their community.
- ✓ For intending couples, genetic and reproductive counseling.
- ✓ For children and young adults with disabilities, inclusive education, preparation for the workforce and job placement.

#### **A Clean and Safe Environment**

- ✓ Identify and assess all hotspots that exceed a government-set standard for dioxin contamination.
- ✓ Break exposure pathways and implement public health measures to guarantee the safety of people living near the identified hotspots.
- ✓ Remediate the dioxin-contaminated areas.
- ✓ Reforest Agent Orange-denuded landscapes with species of economic value to local people, possibly through a tie-in to carbon trading schemes designed to retard climate change.

#### **Institutional Development**

- ✓ Renovate and expand community-based rehabilitation centers as well as Peace and Friendship villages
- ✓ Create a national birth defects registry

- ✓ Expand capacities for research and technology assessment in the areas of healthcare, environmental remediation and restoration of productive ecosystems.

Mr. Chairman, we have seen much progress in the last several years.

NGOs and a wide diversity of donors were able to create momentum from 2007 to 2009, but now the scale and scope of the revealed needs are such that only governments can address them comprehensively. Foundations and NGOs can continue to pilot new approaches, support new voices, measure and call attention to results, but the main tasks—reaching every citizen in need and sustaining programs over time—will require the reach and scale of government.

For the first time in decades, there is an opportunity for a productive partnership between the United States and Vietnam that provides health and social services to affected populations. This partnership could plan and build better and more inclusive systems to provide for the long term healthcare needs and other social services these populations, including of people of all ages with disabilities, require. We have the chance now to shorten the long human shadow of war and address the needs of both American and Vietnamese families and communities.

Thank you.

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### US-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin

**Susan Berresford**, Convener, Former President, Ford Foundation

#### **Dialogue Group- Vietnam Members**

**Ambassador Ngo Quang Xuan**, Vice Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee, National Assembly of Vietnam

**Prof. Vo Quy**, Vietnam National University, Hanoi

**Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong**, Chief of Obstetrics & Gynecology of the Medical University of Ho Chi Minh City

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#### **Dialogue Group- US Members**

**Walter Isaacson**, President and CEO, The Aspen Institute

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**William Mayer**, President and CEO, Park Avenue Equity

**Mary Dolan-Hogrefe**, Vice President, National Organization on Disability

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Ford Foundation Special Initiative on Agent Orange/Dioxin

**Government of Vietnam and Donor Support  
for Agent Orange/Dioxin/Programs  
2005 - 2009**

