

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515**

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA
CHAIRMAN**

**before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC, AND THE
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**

“Agent Orange in Vietnam: Recent Developments in Remediation”

July 15, 2010

On July 11, 2010 of this year, we celebrated 15 years of U.S.-Vietnam diplomatic relations. Last evening, I joined former President Bill Clinton, Senator John Kerry and Senator John McCain in offering remarks at an event hosted by Ambassador of Vietnam Le Cong Phung and Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell in honor of this occasion.

While this is a hallmark moment in U.S.-Vietnam relations, full normalization will not be achieved until the Agent Orange issue is addressed. Between 1961 and 1971, the U.S. military sprayed an estimated 11-12 million gallons of Agent Orange over approximately 10% of Vietnam. Some 30 years later, we have not cleaned up the mess we left behind.

Because it is my sincere hope that we will come together and agree on a way to make this matter right, this hearing is the third in a series of hearings I have held since becoming the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment.

As a Vietnam veteran and also as an Asian Pacific American, I am deeply committed to doing all I can to help victims of Agent Orange because, like the people of Vietnam, Pacific Islanders still suffer the lingering effects of genetic abnormalities that have resulted from legacies of war. Specifically, from 1946-1958, the United States conducted 67 nuclear tests with an equivalent yield of more than 7,000 Hiroshima bombs. Put another way, the equivalent of 1.6 Hiroshima bombs was dropped on the Marshall Islands every day of the 12-year test period.

In fact, the nuclear test code-named BRAVO, a 15 megaton hydrogen bomb detonated on March 1, 1954, was itself equivalent to 1,000 Hiroshima-sized bombs. Acknowledged as the greatest nuclear explosion ever detonated, the Bravo test vaporized 6 islands and created a mushroom cloud 25 miles in diameter.

Because people were living in these South Pacific islands during the time of the U.S. nuclear testing program, the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands were exposed to severe radiation poisoning. Even today, 64 years after the U.S. nuclear testing program began, the people of the Rongelap Atoll are still exiled from their own land due to the radioactive fallout and many women still give birth to what some label “jelly babies” or deformed babies born with no bones, eyes, heads or limbs.

While Vietnam’s situation is different, in some ways it is also the same. During the Vietnam War, innocent civilians were exposed to dioxin, a toxic contaminant known to be one of the deadliest chemicals made by man. Dioxin was an unwanted byproduct and is thought to be responsible for most of the medical problems associated with exposure to Agent Orange.

Just as the U.S. government questioned the Marshall Islands’ assertion about the extent of environmental and health problems associated with nuclear radiation, the U.S. has denied any legal liability and questions Vietnam’s assertion about the problems associated with Agent Orange. But if you visit Tu Du Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City and review the scientific evidence of the international community as well as the testimony of Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong, the Head of the Women’s Health Department at the Ho Chi City Medical University, you will come to know that we can and should do more to help the victims of Agent Orange, in general and in Vietnam.

So far, the U.S. appropriated \$3 million in 2007, \$6 million in 2009, and a \$12 million request has been put forward for 2010. But this is a pittance. Moreover, the greater portion of these appropriated funds has been used for environmental remediation, not to help the victims.

Today, for the first time in the history of the U.S. Congress, a Vietnamese Agent Orange victim will testify and share with us her story. Her story is like the story of many of our own U.S. veterans who were also exposed yet had to fight, and continue to fight, for the assistance they deserve.

As I have said many times before, after every war, America has always helped countries rebuild. According to the Congressional Research Service, after Japan attacked the U.S., U.S. assistance to Japan for 1946-1952 was about \$15.2 billion in 2005 dollars. To Germany, for 1946-1952, the United States provided a total of \$29.3 billion in constant 2005 dollars. From 2003 to 2006, the U.S. appropriated \$35.7 billion for Iraq reconstruction.

Why aren’t we helping Vietnam? Perhaps Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary Matthew Palmer of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the U.S. Department of State and Mr. John Wilson, Director of the Office of Technical Support for the Bureaus for Asia and the Middle East of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), will shed some light on recent developments in remediation.

At this time, I would like to offer my deepest condolences to the families of those USAID workers who were recently killed in Afghanistan. These individuals worked tirelessly in a

dangerous situation in order to improve the lives of the Afghan people and it is shameful that terrorists took their lives. In this life or the next, justice will be served.

Before we receive other opening statements, I want to welcome Dr. Phuong, former Vice Speaker of the Vietnamese National Assembly and presently a member of the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group and also Ms. Tran Thi Hoan, a victim of Agent Orange, who have traveled from Vietnam to testify at this hearing. What you may not know is that the U.S. government does not pay for witnesses to travel or testify before Congress. Witnesses must pay their own travel expenses and this has not been easy for our Vietnamese witnesses. They have traveled at considerable expense and sacrifice, and I thank them for being here. Their presence highlights the importance of this issue to the people and government of Vietnam and, as a result of this hearing, I hope their calls for help will be heard and met.

Again, I pledge to do all I can to find ways forward, and I now recognize our Ranking Member, the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Manzullo, for his opening statement.