

ADDRESSING THE LEGACY OF AGENT ORANGE IN VIETNAM

DECLARATION  
AND  
PLAN OF ACTION

U.S. – VIETNAM DIALOGUE GROUP ON AGENT ORANGE/DIOXIN  
2010 - 2019

FIRST YEAR REPORT

WASHINGTON AND HANOI • JULY 2011

# **First Year Report**

**from the**

## **U.S. – Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin**

**Washington and Hanoi  
July 2011**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin is a bi-national advocacy committee of private citizens, scientists and policy-makers working to draw greater attention to the Agent Orange issue and to mobilize resources. At its first meeting in February 2007 the Group adopted a forward-looking approach to solving the Agent Orange legacy through a series of humanitarian responses undertaken cooperatively between Vietnam and the United States. We have been working together both in Vietnam and the U.S. to review the evidence and seek additional expertise.

In the first three years, 2007 to 2010, our joint assessment and common understanding of the situation contributed to raising \$32 million for assessment and containment of dioxin hotspots and \$19 million for services for people with disabilities. These funds came from foundations, civic groups, businesses, individuals, UN agencies and the governments of several countries including the U.S.

To further focus these efforts, on June 16, 2010 the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin released a ten year Plan of Action with these words:

“In the 35 years since the end of the war, the United States and Vietnam have made great progress toward friendly relations. But the war reverberates today in the lives of millions of Americans and Vietnamese. These include people affected then and now, directly and indirectly, by the U.S. spraying of Agent Orange and other herbicides over rural South Vietnam.

“This grim legacy hinders improved U.S. relations with Vietnam. Questions of responsibility, awareness and data reliability have for too long generated bitter controversy and stalled research and remedial action. A majority of Americans who have been polled to date agree that it is time to lay those issues aside.

“We therefore call upon the United States to join with the Vietnamese to fund a comprehensive and humanitarian effort to resolve the legacy of Agent Orange/dioxin in Vietnam.

The Plan of Action aims to achieve two goals over the next ten years:

- Clean dioxin-contaminated soils and restore damaged ecosystems; and
- Expand services to people with disabilities linked to dioxin, and to people with other forms of disability, and to their families.

The components of the Plan offer a significant part of the long-term solution to the Agent Orange/dioxin legacy in Vietnam. The Plan projects them to cost \$300 million over the next ten years or \$30 million per year. The U.S. government should play a key role in meeting these costs, along with other public and private donors, supplementing an appropriate continuing investment from the government and the people of Vietnam. These funds are not yet in hand; they will need to be raised through continuing representations to donors.

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This report of the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin describes activities and accomplishments in the first year since the Plan was released and future challenges and opportunities.

### Activities and Accomplishments

Over the last 12 months the Dialogue Group has attracted high level attention to the opportunity the Plan presents for a humanitarian response to the Agent Orange legacy in Vietnam, communicated the urgency of this work to key groups across the United States, and supported the case for significantly larger funding from the U.S. and other sources. These are the principal activities to which we have contributed.

**June 16, 2010-** The U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin releases its Declaration and Plan of Action simultaneously in Hanoi and Washington.

**July 2010- U.S. Congress.** Senators Tom Harkin and Bernie Sanders visited Da Nang on July 6, 2010, the first ever on the ground investigation of the environmental and human consequences of Agent Orange by voting members of Congress. The Dialogue Group's Vietnamese Co-chair, Ambassador Ngo Quang Xuan, hosted a dinner for the two senators and Senator Al Franken in Hanoi.

**July 2010- U.S. State Department.** In Hanoi on July 22, 2010, Secretary of State Clinton noted the consequences of Agent Orange for the Vietnamese and American people. In a press conference she said, "The minister and I discussed the concern that both Vietnam and the United States have about Agent Orange and the consequences that it produced in the people here... I told the minister that I would work to increase our cooperation and make even greater progress together."

**September 2010- U.S. Congress.** In September 2010 Senator Patrick Leahy issued a statement on Agent Orange, writing that "...it would be hard to overstate the importance the Vietnamese give to addressing the needs of people who have been harmed."

**September 2010- The American Media.** The Dialogue Group has encouraged fresh international reporting on the Agent Orange legacy. In September 2010 Thuy Vu, a newscaster at KPIX Channel 5 in San Francisco reported on Agent Orange from Vietnam for CBS News <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkbnFfldsOc> . Her report has received several journalism awards.

**October 2010- U.S. State Department.** Secretary Clinton returned to Hanoi in October and announced major U.S. government support for a project to completely clean up the dioxin-contaminated soil at the Da Nang airport, the first of the three major dioxin hotspots. The project is expected to take three years.

**January 2011- Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment.** Among the priorities set by the Dialogue Group at its first meeting in February 2007 was the establishment of Vietnam's

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first high resolution dioxin testing laboratory. In January the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment opened the Vietnam Persistent Organic Pollutants Laboratory, a \$6.75 million state-of-the-art facility funded by the Vietnam government and The Atlantic Philanthropies and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This will be a cornerstone of Vietnam's environmental management and a resource for Southeast Asia and will benefit future generations of Vietnamese as well as those currently affected.

**January 2011- The American media.** As another example of fresh international reporting, on January 30, 2011, the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* published an eight page special report on Agent Orange reported by two Pulitzer Prize winners, Connie Schultz and Nick Ut. <http://bit.ly/fP59JT> .

**March 2011- Common Cause Agent Orange Delegation.** The American advocacy NGO, Common Cause, visited Vietnam in March 2011 with a delegation of persons prominent in the fields of public policy, public health, the environment and disabilities movements and religion. The delegation met with people whose lives have been affected by Agent Orange/dioxin, Vietnamese officials, health and environmental experts, Dialogue Group members and U.S. embassy staff. The participants are bringing the Agent Orange legacy before key American publics.

**April 2011- Dialogue Group Gala in Ho Chi Minh City- "For the Bright Future".** On April 7, 2011 President Triet led a gala fund-raiser organized by the Dialogue Group at the Hoa Binh Theater in Ho Chi Minh City. The 90 minute program was broadcast nationally and featured leading celebrity singers and interviews with Dialogue Group Co-chair Ambassador Ngo Quang Xuan and members Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong and Prof. Vo Quy. The Gala raised \$150,000 which the Dialogue Group members allocated to projects in Ho Chi Minh City and other provinces.

**April 2011- Dialogue Group Agent Orange Seminar in Bien Hoa.** On April 8, 2011 the Dialogue Group organized a successful stakeholder conference at the second of three dioxin hotspots, located in Bien Hoa. Highlights included the presentation of findings from a recent scientific assessment of dioxin levels in soils, sediments, foodstuffs and people in Bien Hoa, a visit to the Bien Hoa airbase and a focus on the current public health risks from fish production in several local lakes.

**April 2011- Congressional Appropriation.** The FY2011 budget, passed by both houses of Congress on April 14, 2011, contained \$18.5 million in new funding to continue Agent Orange activities in Vietnam. Of this amount, \$15.5 million will underwrite the decontamination of the Da Nang dioxin hotspot. But significantly, \$3 million is specifically reserved for 'related health activities.' The appropriations are on a rising trend: FY2007, \$3million; FY2009, \$3 million; FY2010, \$15 million; and FY2011, \$18.5 million.

**May 2011- The Aspen Institute.** The Institute announced that its Agent Orange in Vietnam Program would continue to focus on broadening support in the United States, including communications and delegation travel to and from Vietnam for Dialogue Group members and other opinion leaders. The Program aims to achieve a long term, sustainable commitment among a wide array of public and private sources to address the Agent Orange legacy at a scale

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consistent with the Plan of Action. Charles Bailey has become the director of this program ([www.AspenInstitute.org/policy-work/Agent-Orange/](http://www.AspenInstitute.org/policy-work/Agent-Orange/)).

**May 2011 Vietnam Dialogue Group.** The Vietnamese members of the Dialogue Group met in Da Nang to review the year's activities and discuss specific projects to receive the funds raised at the Gala in April. Priority projects have been identified in Bien Hoa, Ho Chi Minh City, Thai Binh, and Quang Tri. Following the meeting Group members visited A Luoi district, Thua Thien-Hue Province and decided to offer \$50,000 from the Gala to Dong Son commune to build a piped water system for the people.

**2010 and 2011 Government of Vietnam.** Finally, the Dialogue Group is pleased to note that independently the Government of Vietnam has committed to investing VND 28 billion (US\$1.3 million) in a project at the Friendship Village to take care of people with disabilities linked with Agent Orange/dioxin. NGOs and individuals have visited the village and donated a further VND 500 million (US\$25,000) to this project. This project has also attracted a lot of attention from high-ranking officials in Vietnam as well as foreign donors.

**Throughout the year- Disseminating Information in the U.S.** A set of American NGOs worked with the Dialogue Group to advance the Plan of Action and mainstream the Agent Orange issue with the American public. The Communications Consortium Media Center (CCMC) and the Aspen Institute focused on policy development. The Institute also provided a secretariat for the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group. The Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA) facilitated activities of the Dialogue Group in Vietnam including the April Gala and Bien Hoa conferences and assisted visiting American journalists. The Renaissance Journalism Center at San Francisco State University developed fresh reporting on the impact of Agent Orange in Vietnam ([www.VietnamReportingProject.org](http://www.VietnamReportingProject.org)) by sending small teams of journalists to Vietnam skilled in multi-media reporting of complex issues. Active Voice created an on-line hub for learning and action in support of Agent Orange solutions and spearheaded social media activity to spark positive online dialogue([www.MakeAgentOrangeHistory.org](http://www.MakeAgentOrangeHistory.org)). The War Legacies Project provided resources to journalists, scholars and researchers seeking in-depth information on Agent Orange([www.AgentOrangeRecord.org](http://www.AgentOrangeRecord.org)). The East Meets West Foundation pioneered on-line giving from the Vietnamese diaspora worldwide for young Vietnamese with disabilities. Asian American Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy provided fellowships for young Vietnamese-Americans to work for several weeks or months with organizations in Vietnam providing services to people with disabilities. ([www.viet2010.org](http://www.viet2010.org)). OneVietnam created the first Vietnamese-American online social network ([www.OneVietnam.org](http://www.OneVietnam.org)) which they are using to introduce younger Vietnamese-Americans to Agent Orange and other social and cultural issues in Vietnam.

The following table shows data from available sources on funds that have been raised for dioxin clean up and services for people with disabilities in Vietnam from the establishment of the Dialogue Group in 2007 through May 2010 and since the Dialogue Group's Plan of Action was released a year ago.

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Funds Raised for Dioxin Clean up and Services for People with Disabilities in Vietnam 2000-2010 & Last 12 Months							
	From June 2007 to May 2010			12 months since DG Plan Release June 2010 to May 2011			
	Clean-up	Services	Sub-Total	Clean-up	Services	Sub-Total	Grand Total
<b>Donated by:</b>							
<u>Civic Groups, Businesses &amp; Individuals</u>							
through US-Vietnam Dialogue Group					\$150,000	\$150,000	\$150,000
through INGOs		\$3,075,251	\$3,075,251		\$1,327,263	\$1,327,263	
<u>Foundations</u>							
Ford Foundation	\$2,680,300	\$7,278,539	\$9,958,839		\$106,800	\$106,800	\$10,065,639
Atlantic Philanthropies	\$1,375,000	\$1,375,000	\$2,750,000				\$2,750,000
Gates Foundation	\$1,375,000	\$1,375,000	\$2,750,000				\$2,750,000
Other foundations		\$45,000	\$45,000				
<u>United Nations</u>							
UNDP/GEF	\$5,450,000		\$5,450,000				\$5,450,000
UNICEF		\$2,090,119	\$2,090,119				\$2,090,119
<u>Governments</u>							
United States	\$18,208,811	\$3,423,155	\$21,631,966	\$15,500,000	\$3,000,000	\$18,500,000	\$40,131,966
Canada	\$1,835,000		\$1,835,000				\$1,835,000
Czech Republic	\$1,400,000		\$1,400,000		\$32,000	\$32,000	\$1,432,000
Ireland		\$787,660	\$787,660		\$528,445	\$528,445	\$1,316,105
Netherlands		\$236,000	\$236,000				\$236,000
Greece		\$125,500	\$125,500				\$125,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$32,324,111</b>	<b>\$19,811,224</b>	<b>\$52,135,335</b>	<b>\$15,500,000</b>	<b>\$5,144,508</b>	<b>\$20,644,508</b>	<b>\$72,779,843</b>

During the year the U.S. Congress appropriated an additional \$15.5 million which with other U.S. government funds will cover the costs of the project to completely clean up the dioxin at the Da Nang airport. Clean-up of the other two major dioxin hotspots can now be expected and the public health risk they represent can be brought to an end. This is good news and worth celebrating. The Dialogue Group will now focus on the principal remaining challenge-- bringing services and opportunities to people with disabilities linked to dioxin, and to people with other forms of disability.

To address the needs of people with disabilities, the U.S. Congress has also appropriated \$3.0 million in new funds this year. Other donors, responding to the framework provided by the Dialogue Group's Plan of Action, have provided a further \$1.6 million in new funds for such programs. These new funds for services and clean-up total \$20 million. By contrast, funds raised for Agent Orange work averaged \$17 million in each of the three preceding years. This increase is good news. On the other hand, the \$20 million is just two-thirds of the amount called for in the first year of the Plan of Action.

Fund raising in the coming year will continue to focus on the U.S., the UN, foundations and civic organizations, and increasingly, the international business community in Vietnam. In January U.S. Ambassador Michael Michalak noted that the Embassy is "...actively exploring PPP [public-private partnership] opportunities to build Vietnam's capacity to remediate dioxin and other environmental contamination, to reduce the number and severity of birth defects regardless of

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cause, and to mainstream the disabled in economic life, all of which are essential to sustaining Vietnam's growth." The Dialogue Group seeks to encourage such public-private partnerships.

The Dialogue Group also plans to expand cooperation and call for technical and financial support from 'third parties' which are interested in assisting Vietnam to resolve the Agent Orange/dioxin issue. The Ambassador of Australia in Vietnam has encouraged and welcomed the Dialogue Group to organize an exploratory visit to Australia.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES- FROM DIALOGUE TO PARTNERSHIP

In the year ahead, the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group calls on all stakeholders to continue and expand the work they have already begun to provide services in all parts of the country to people with disabilities linked to dioxin, to people with other forms of disability, and to their families. Similarly, agroforestry and afforestation projects should be spread from Quang Tri and Thua Thien Hue provinces for sustainable reuse of damaged landscapes in other areas.

The Dialogue Group also recognizes the growing partnership between the United States and Vietnam which is now delivering real measures to address the legacy of Agent Orange. On the first anniversary of the Dialogue Group's Plan of Action, it now appears possible for the U.S. and Vietnamese governments to work together along with other stakeholders to address comprehensively the needs at the three former U.S. airbases where dioxin levels are particularly high –Da Nang, Bien Hoa and Phu Cat –and in the communities surrounding these airbases. Other stakeholders include the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group, the UN system, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), U.S. and Vietnamese businesses, and U.S. civic and religious leaders.

Work in Da Nang has established a tradition of cooperation that can now be further expanded and deepened in Da Nang and applied to the two other sites. The work would focus high-quality and comprehensive attention to all aspects of the Agent Orange legacy at these locations, reduce bilateral tensions surrounding Agent Orange, and further build Vietnam's technical and scientific capabilities and scientific cooperation between our two nations. The work at the three sites is planned to be completed by 2015 and would represent a significant accomplishment.

In broad outline the "3-hotspots" program would have these components. Please see the Plan of Action for further details.

**1. Clean up the Dioxin Hotspot:** Measure the incidence of dioxin, identify exposure pathways leading to local populations, build temporary containment structures and fully remediate dioxin at all three sites to Vietnamese environmental standards.

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### 2. Stop further exposure of people to dioxin:

- Continue a public health campaign to promote safe food habits among people living near known and suspected hot spots so they avoid foodstuffs such as fish, ducks and mollusks possibly contaminated by dioxin.
- Halt all further production and sale of foodstuffs from food systems contaminated by dioxin, and prevent entry of unauthorized personnel to the airbases.

### 3. Support people living near dioxin hotspots:

- Organize health checks and treatment for people with elevated dioxin levels.
- Sponsor projects to help remove dioxin from the human body as medically verified treatments become available.
- Support health care and prenatal care information and services.
- Develop a system for maternal surveillance and screening, monitoring of child development and early-childhood intervention.
- Training and technical guidance on alternative livelihoods for people who have to give up raising food in contaminated areas.

### 4. Upgrade disability services: Upgrade existing services and opportunities for people with disabilities, especially for children and young adults, and for their families.

- Carry out a survey of people with disabilities and create a birth defects registry for local authorities to use to improve medical, educational, and social relief programs for people with disabilities.
- Adapt and expand a case management approach and integrated services and respite centers for people with disabilities.
- Support the development of the community of Vietnamese with disabilities so they can partner with local and national authorities to ensure lives of dignity and opportunity for people with disabilities and implement Vietnam's Law on Disabilities and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.
- Create systems for job training and leadership development for young adults with disabilities.

**5. Conduct Long-term research studies:** The Government of Vietnam has a new high-resolution dioxin laboratory and has sharply increased its five-year research budget. Studies will seek answers to such questions as the impact of dioxin in the natural environment and how to make better use of land affected by herbicides, treatment protocols for reducing dioxin in the body, and intergenerational impacts of dioxin exposure. Such research on these and similar topics would build scientific cooperation among the United States, Vietnam and other nations working to reduce the risks of dioxin within their borders.

We look forward to working with all stakeholders to make even greater progress in the coming year.

## U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin

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Former President, The Ford Foundation

**Walter Isaacson**, American Co-Chair;  
President & CEO, The Aspen Institute

**Ambassador Ngo Quang Xuan**,  
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**Christine Todd Whitman**, President,  
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