U.S. Officials Talk about Agent Orange: 2010-2011

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Senator Tom Harkin - Tuoi Tre Interview, July 6, 2010

*Tuoi Tre*: Are you going to visit Da Nang because it’s a dioxin hot-spot?

**Harkin**: That’s my concern. We Americans conducted a chemical war which perhaps didn’t directly aim to humans but it turned out spraying Agent Orange defoliant can cause prolonged effects on people. My colleagues in the Senate have agreed to allocate funds each year to clean up hot-spots in Da Nang, Bien Hoa and Hue. We’re trying to increase that amount.

*Tuoi Tre*: But besides dioxin hot-spots, we still have 3-4 million AO victims!

**Harkin**: I know. That will be the next step. I think we will have to do something for victims. We know dioxin persists in the food chain and affects humans. It is a fact that in the US, the Department of Veterans has compensated AO victims who suffer from cancers, blood cancer, Parkinsons, etc., around 15 diseases believed related to their exposure to AO, but not for any cases of disability.

The thing I want to do is to help victims in Vietnam who suffer from AO-related diseases (those recognized in the US) obtain compensation as American victims. The fund for Vietnamese AO victims is now around $3 million a year. We are trying to raise it to $20-30 million a year. The Ford Foundation is working well in this area.


“I am proud of these efforts, and am pleased that we continue to work together to address outstanding war issues, including beginning to explore ways to help Vietnam account for its own MIA, which by far exceeded our own. Today, the debate continues over the human impact of exposure to dioxin, a contaminant found in Agent Orange, and I know the U.S. government is working closely with its Vietnamese counterpart to address associated environmental and potential health concerns. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse and I are trying to do our part by seeking funds for the remediation of a contaminated area at the Danang International Airport once used by U.S. forces.”
Senator John Kerry-  “Progress and promise 15 years later” Op Ed, Orange County Register, July 14, 2010

“And as we partner with Vietnam to maintain future peace and stability, we should not lose sight of lingering concerns, like Vietnam’s own Missing-in-Action (MIA) from the war. Today, the debate continues over the human impact of exposure to the war-era contaminant dioxin found in Agent Orange. I and others are trying to do our part by seeking funds to clean up a contaminated airport once used by U.S. forces.”

Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary Matthew Palmer- Testimony before the House Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, July 15, 2010

“Both the United States and Vietnam agree that the health of the Vietnamese people and the safety of its environment will be vital for Vietnam’s future. In the spirit of humanitarian concern, we have provided more than $46 million in assistance for all Vietnamese living with disabilities, without regard to cause, including nearly $25 million from the Leahy War Victims Fund. We have also expanded disability assistance in the communities surrounding the Danang airport….

“In addition, with Ford Foundation support, several experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention just completed a workshop with their Vietnamese counterparts to facilitate the early identification of children at risk for developmental disabilities and to improve birth defect and chronic disease surveillance systems. These projects aim to expand the scope of health assistance beyond support for people with disabilities toward the goal of reducing the overall disability burden in Vietnam.”

Secretary Hilary Clinton- Press Conference, Government Guesthouse, July 22, 2010

Vietnam Television: My question goes to Madam Secretary. What is the specific plan for the U.S. in cooperation with Vietnam to deal with the consequences of the wars in Vietnam?

Clinton: 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. As you know, we have been working with Vietnam for about nine years to try to remedy the effects of Agent Orange and I told the minister that I would work to increase our cooperation and make even greater progress together.
Afghanistan Emergency Spending Bill- FY 2010 additional appropriation

“Vietnam—The Committee recommends $12,000,000 for assistance for Vietnam to support the remediation of dioxin contamination at the Da Nang Airport, which poses extreme risks to human health and welfare, and related health activities.”

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State-Foreign Operations- FY 2011

The bill passed out of committee on July 29, 2010. The report language reads as follows:

“Vietnam—The Committee provides $15,000,000 for continued environmental remediation of dioxin-contamination at Da Nang Airport and related health/disability activities, including through Vietnamese institutions and organizations. The Committee directs USAID, in consultation with the Department of State, the Government of Vietnam, and other interested parties, to develop, within 180 days after enactment of this act, a multi-year plan for Agent Orange activities in Vietnam and urges the administration to include funding in future budget requests to support it. USAID is to consult with the Committee prior to the obligation of funds.”


“…We also need to look forward. In Senate Report 111-237 accompanying S. 3676, the Appropriations Committee directs USAID, in consultation with the Department of State, the Government of Vietnam, and other interested parties, to develop a multiyear plan for Agent Orange activities in Vietnam.

“This plan, which should reflect input from interested parties with a history of working on this issue such as the Ford Foundation and the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin, should identify the key activities for the environmental remediation and health/disability components of this effort, indicate how U.S. funding will be coordinated with and complimentary to the contributions of other donors and how nongovernmental organizations, including nonprofits and businesses, can play constructive roles. It should set clear goals, benchmarks for measuring progress, and estimated costs associated with these activities. In doing so, we will not only chart our way forward, we will demonstrate to the Government of Vietnam and its people that we intend to continue to play a central role in this effort.

“To that end, I want to emphasize the importance of the health component. While the soil and sediment remediation is critical and has received the most attention, it would be hard to overstate the importance the Vietnamese give to addressing the needs of people who have been harmed. While it may not be possible to definitively diagnose Agent Orange as the cause of a person's disability, the plan
should include surveys or other steps to locate people who suffer from disabilities that may have been caused by dioxin, so they can be helped. An expanded involvement by nonprofit organizations, businesses, and philanthropies remains key to this humanitarian effort, and there is no longer any reason for hesitancy on the part of U.S. companies in Vietnam in supporting such work.

“After a tragic war that left deep scars in both Vietnam and the United States, we have become partners on a wide range of issues. We still have our differences, particularly concerning human rights, but we want to make progress in whatever ways we can. The legacy of Agent Orange, for years an issue that divided us, is now one that is bringing us together.

**USAID Director Frank Donovan**- Press release, 2011 Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) New York, September 22, 201. The CGI commitment includes $3 million from USAID.

“In Vietnam, the U.S. Government has provided over $48 million in assistance since 1989 to people with disabilities. USAID’s assistance addresses the health, education, livelihood and social needs and promotes equal opportunities for and social integration of people with disabilities to enable them to contribute to Vietnam’s growing economy.”

**Ambassador David Shear**- Remarks Opening the 6th meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), Hanoi, September 22-23, 2011

“Your presence here reflects the multilateral, multi-sector partnership that has formed to respond to environmental and health issues related to Agent Orange in Vietnam. The five JAC meetings before this one helped catalyze this partnership and crystallize the common goals shared by the United States, Vietnam, and all of you: remediating the three dioxin-contaminated hotspots in Vietnam; reducing the number and severity of birth defects and disabilities, regardless of cause; and improving the quality of life and providing livelihood opportunities for people with disabilities.

“I am honored to open this year’s JAC meeting because of what the JAC represents: open and honest dialogue, and a commitment to science-based decision-making regarding dioxin remediation and possible health effects of dioxin exposure…

“Cooperation to promote public health and strengthen health systems in Vietnam is one of my highest priorities as Ambassador…

“Agent Orange is a sensitive and complicated issue—both for our Vietnamese friends and for us ourselves—but we have worked together to find constructive solutions and have achieved a level of cooperation that would have been unimaginable when we started this dialogue five years ago.
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State-Foreign Operations- FY 2012
The bill passed out of committee on September 25, 2011. The report language reads as follows:

“Vietnam- The Committee recommends $15,000,000 under this heading for environmental remediation of dioxin-containment at the Da Nang, Bien Hoa airports and other severely contaminated sites and $5,000,000 under the DA heading for health/disabilities activities in areas that were targeted with Agent Orange, for a total of $20,000,000 in this act for these activities. The Committee directs USAID, in consultation with the Committee, the Department of State, the Government of Vietnam and other interested parties, to develop, within 180 days after enactment of this act, a comprehensive, multi-year plan for Agent Orange-related activities in Vietnam and urges the administration to include funding in future budget requests to support it. USAID is to consult with the Committee prior to the obligation of funds.”