

The Future of Agent Orange

Speech by Charles R. Bailey
at the

Book Event for the Vietnamese edition of *From Enemies to Partners*
2:30 pm Thursday, October 4, 2018
Foreign Service Center, 472 Hoang Dieu, Hai Chau, Da Nang

Many thanks to the Da Nang departments of Culture & Information and Foreign Affairs for organizing this event here at the Foreign Service Center. And thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for coming this afternoon to the launch of the Vietnamese edition of our book, *From Enemies to Partners- Vietnam, the U.S. and Agent Orange*.

I first came to your city in October 1990—28 years ago. My wife and I were in Vietnam on a ten day tour but it was when we got to Da Nang that the country really began to come alive for us. Our tour guide was from Da Nang—Mr. Vu. Anh Vu was great, and through him we quickly developed an appreciation of your country—the people, the food, the mountains coming down to the sea. We left with wonderful memories. Seven years later, in 1997, the Ford Foundation asked me to become its representative in Vietnam, based in Hanoi. My wife and I took less than a minute to agree and I immediately accepted. Thank you, Anh Vu!

I came to Hanoi thinking I would be in Vietnam three years. It turned out to be ten years—from 1997 to 2007. In the fall of 1998, I visited an agricultural project south of Da Lat. I saw hillsides which once had been covered with deep, ecologically rich forests, but now held just scrub vegetation. I was stunned. I was even more surprised when I returned to Hanoi and found no one here who was willing to talk about Agent Orange. The State Department had in fact instructed our embassy's diplomats not even to use the phrase "Agent Orange."

But as you know, during the American War in Vietnam the U.S. used Agent Orange and other herbicides to defoliate forests and destroy food crops. The spraying went on for nine years. Today, fifty years later, the Vietnamese are still feeling the harmful effects. Dioxin is the heart of the problem; it was a contaminant in the Agent Orange. Dioxin is associated with massive health problems for many of those who were exposed and it's linked to birth defects among their children, grandchildren and now their great grandchildren.

So in 1998, and continuing well into the 2000s, there were different understandings and underlying antagonisms. There was no common ground—no common ground on which the two countries could join forces to move forward on this issue.

Ultimately though two ideas emerged which led to a breakthrough on Agent Orange between the U.S. and Vietnam. Although you may not know it, both these breakthrough ideas originated in Da Nang.

We found two breakthrough concepts.

--The first breakthrough idea was let's focus on the dioxin hotspots. Dioxin is at levels dangerous to human health, it turns out, at just a few 'dioxin hot spots' at former American military bases. So we

focused in on the three seriously contaminated airbases— at Phu Cat, Da Nang and Bien Hoa, beginning with Da Nang.

--The second breakthrough idea was let's focus on the severely disabled: Research we report in the book—research done in Da Nang with the indispensable help of Ms. Hien and the Da Nang Association of Victims of Agent Orange-- shows that people with severe deformation of their arms and legs, developmental delay and/or cognitive disability are very likely to be victims of Agent Orange.

So you in Da Nang have really been leaders in the response to the Agent Orange legacy of the war.

I'm pleased that my program at Ford Foundation was your partner in this progress.

A Ford Foundation grant to the Vietnam Public Health Association allowed the Association to advise people living around the Da Nang airport on how to ensure their food was safe and free of dioxin.

And over seven years, Ford grants to the district peoples committees in Hai Chau, Ngu Hanh Son and Cam Le used grants from the Ford Foundation to improve social services targeted to families with disabled children. I'm pleased to see Luong Thi Huong here today. Chi Huong is the country director of Children of Vietnam, an American NGO which partnered with the district governments on these programs.

And finally, Ford grants to Committee 33 in MONRE, led by Dr. Le Ke Son, enabled Committee 33 and the Ministry of Defense to isolate the dioxin at the airport and stop it getting into the food chain. I'm as delighted as you must be with the completion of the dioxin clean up at the Da Nang Airport last year.

Now, the spotlight has shifted to Bien Hoa airbase and to six provinces that were heavily sprayed and which have high incidences of people living with severe and very severe disabilities. These provinces are Tay Ninh, Binh Phuoc, and Dong Nai and further north, Binh Dinh, Quang Nam and Thua-Tien Hue, with more to come.

Ladies and gentlemen.

The U.S. and Vietnam have come a long way over the last ten years. It's for this reason we titled our book "From Enemies to Partners." Since 2007 the Congress has appropriated \$230 million for Agent Orange in Vietnam. The end of the disaster of Agent Orange is within the reach of people of goodwill on both sides—those in government, the two militaries and those in civilian life. Given the positive record of collaboration and partnership since 2007, it would be foolish, and indeed disgraceful, not to carry through to the completion of the task. Both Vietnam and the United States want to move forward on this together.

Dr. Le Ke Son and I believe our book will be useful in ensuring that progress today continues to be progress tomorrow. Thank you.