

Vietnamese Women and Agent Orange

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Although the Vietnamese people are striving to overcome the aftermath of war, presently hundreds of thousands of people are victims of the chemical "Agent Orange." This fact reminds us everyday of the terrible consequences of war. And from this disaster, women and children have suffered the most.

Scientists working at Columbia University (USA) have recognized that: 'From 1961 to 1971, in South Vietnam, the 100 million litres of chemical toxins used included 366 kilograms of dioxide. Among those toxins, the amount of Agent Orange used was 45,677,937 litres. ' Three thousand, one hundred and eighty-one villages and hamlets were directly affected by those chemical toxins and at least 2.1 million people were directly affected (A number of scientists evaluate this number as 4.8 million). In addition, 1,430 other villages were directly affected, but data has yet to be collected. In total, about 16 million have lived, struggled, and worked in the areas where US chemical toxins were sprayed.

A majority of people affected by Agent Orange now live in poverty, have lost their working capacity, and suffer from serious diseases caused by the chemical. In many families, victims include three generations--the parents, their children and their grandchildren. Many women cannot experience the happiness of motherhood; some give birth to deformed babies or their children cannot stand. We cite some cases below:

In the central part of Quang Binh province, 5,000 people have been affected by Agent Orange. Among them, 2,441 people are first-generation (exposed during their participation in the resistance war), 2,903 people are second-generation (the children of the above combatants), and 105 people are third-generation (their grandchildren).

Do Duc Diu, a man native to Vu Ninh commune, Quang Binh province, returned to the commune after participating in the army during the resistance war. He got married. However, he could not have a normal child since he had been affected by Agent Orange. His wife gave birth 15 times to

deformed babies. Among them, 13 died and the remaining 2 suffer from diseases with frequent violent convulsions.

Diu said: "Agent Orange is killing my family."

In Dong Nai province (southern Vietnam), 9,000 people have been affected by U.S. chemical toxins. In many families, three or four members are affected, suffering from dangerous diseases, such as cancer and deformities. We meet children with extremely big heads or bodies similar to a quarter of meat, standing on scrawny twisted or swollen ulcerated legs. Many people affected by Agent Orange dare not marry and resign themselves to celibacy. In some cases, victims of Agent Orange feel despair or kill themselves after giving birth to monstrous babies.

In Can Tho province, Nguyen Hong Manh, a former soldier of Thanh My commune, returned to his native village and got married. However, affected by Agent Orange, he can only sit down to sleep. Each time he lies on the bed, he feels a tightness across his chest and has difficulty in breathing. His wife gave birth to eight children. All are alive but because of the effects of Agent Orange are slow-witted.

In Hung Yen province (northern Vietnam), Mrs. Tuu of An Vien commune married a soldier. Four days after their wedding, he went to the battlefield, returning after the war with diseases caused by Agent Orange. The first child born by his wife had two faces and died after three months. The second child had the face of a pig and the third had the face of a mouse. Both died immediately after birth.

Her fourth child with a normal appearance died eight months after birth because of a "red face" crisis. At last Mrs Tuu gave birth to a fifth child with a normal appearance but who had mental deficiencies. The latter often screams and tears every object he finds to pieces. He even bites his own body in fits of madness. He is now 23 years old. For Mrs. Tuu, his mother, it has meant 23 years of continuous efforts and difficult hard labour in caring for him. "My life is full of tears," confided Mrs Tuu.

In the mountainous area of Thua Thien Hue province, the district of A Luoi has 20 communes and towns. Agent Orange was sprayed on all 20 localities. In Hong Trung commune for example, where there are 313 households, we find 350 cases of patients struck by mental deficiencies, paralysis, dumbness, deafness, blindness, deformity and other diseases caused by Agent Orange.

The victims of U.S. chemical toxins in Vietnam have not received any indemnity from the U.S. They have to bring a suit against the U.S. companies that produced chemical toxins for the U.S. army to use during the Vietnam war. The companies received exorbitant profits by spreading pain and suffering on millions of people, especially, women and children.

On January 31, 2004, the Association of Agent Orange victims and a number of victims stood up against 37 American companies that have produced the chemical toxics used in Vietnam. The complaint was sent to the Brooklyn Tribunal, in New York State (U.S.). On June 25, 2004, the Vietnamese Motherland Front decided to organize a national day of action for the Agent Orange victims in Vietnam every year on August 10 (the first day that U.S. chemical toxins were sprayed in Vietnam). In this way, they are mobilizing the masses for their complaint now being handled in tribunals in the U.S.