

Forum III: 60 years of damage from Agent Orange and solidarity with the AO victims

TESTIMONY OF PHAM THE MINH, VICTIM OF AGENT ORANGE

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen!

My name is Pham The Minh, born in 1975, a 2nd generation Agent Orange/dioxin victim, currently living at Nam Binh hamlet, An Hung commune, An Duong district, Hai Phong city. My parents were formerly the soldiers. Once participated in combat service in 1972 in the battlefield of Dong Ha - Quang Tri, where the US military sprayed many toxic chemicals. Enlisting in the army in 1964, my father was serving a fighting unit, while my mother served in the same unit and joined the art troupe of the army to serve the soldiers directly fighting in the battlefield.

In 1975 my parents got married. When I was born, I was born with a deformity but for unknown reasons. In fact, it wasn't until 2000 when we were given a health check to receive allowance from the government that we knew it was due to dioxin poison.

Returning to normal life, my family's life faced many difficulties due to low income and expensive annual medical expenses. My family has 4 people. My younger sister was born prematurely and I was born with a birth defect. Every day, my parents and I still suffer from dull pain due to the release of toxins in our bodies. I myself have many diseases in my body since childhood, so my health is weak. I had many difficulties in serving myself and studying. Thanks to the active support of my father and my own will, I have overcome many challenges in life to study, to overcome illness and become a useful person for society. I studied and graduated from the University of Foreign Languages. Then I found a source of joy for myself through teaching English to young people in my locality, seeing them grow up and be successful gave me more positive energy. When my health is in good condition, I actively participate in charity and humanitarian activities of local associations and receive the attention and assistance from these ones again. The Association of Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin in Hai Phong City is one of the associations that has cared and helped me a lot in life. Joining the association, I learned more about the plight of many other Agent Orange victims.

Understanding their lives, knowing their difficulties, I sympathize and wish to contribute my efforts to share their difficulties. With my ability, I can only give free education to the children and grandchildren of Agent Orange victims to help them find ways to improve their quality of life, or contribute a little to the association's funds to help victims of Agent Orange in its annual activities in Hai Phong.

Following Mr Nguyen Van Quy, a first generation victim, who participated in the lawsuit of Vietnamese Agent Orange victims against American chemical companies, I was chosen by the Association of Agent Orange Victims/dioxin Hai Phong and the Central Association to participate in as a witness at the International People's Court of Conscience held in Paris, France on May 15 and 16, 2009. At the court, I and 2 other witnesses spoke honestly about the effects of Agent Orange on our bodies, the diseases we were carrying and the difficulties in our daily lives to contribute more evidence to the legal fight against American chemical companies to compel them to compensate for the damage they indirectly caused to Vietnamese people and Vietnam country during the American war in Vietnam from 1961 to 1971.

In 2010 I, who again represented Vietnam's Agent Orange victims, and a representative of Vietnam Association of Agent Orange/Dioxin Victims, Ms. Nguyen Thi Hien (Chairman of Da Nang City Association), made a public opinion tour in the US for more than a month to propagate about the serious consequences of Agent Orange/dioxin on the environment and directly affected people in Vietnam. The trip was very difficult due to the time difference and my weak health, but we completed the mission and received a lot of good love as well as valuable assistance from American people and Vietnamese people living in America.

By the way, I would like to share more with you that I am currently receiving a monthly state allowance of more than 1 million VND. With this money, I have an extra cost for my monthly medical treatment. Currently, I have many diseases that need regular treatment, such as: hepatitis, heart failure, insomnia due to depression, gastritis, headache, high blood pressure, etc... . Fortunately, I still have a family with 2 normally developing children. Looking around, I see that there are many other victims living in extremely difficult conditions, with low income, without work, in poor health with many diseases, and their children cannot even take care of themselves or can't control themselves. Thanks to the

activities of the Vietnam Association of Agent Orange/Dioxin Victims at all levels in the localities in advocating state policies, mobilizing material support from benevolent individuals and organizations, domestic and foreign businesses..., the lives of Agent Orange victims have also been partly improved to alleviate the Agent Orange pain that still exists in each individual victim. I hope that in the coming time, all Agent Orange victims will continue to receive more attention and assistance from the government, organizations, businesses, and benefactors domestically and abroad to encourage and help them step by step remove difficulties in life, heal diseases so that they can integrate into the community. Let's join hands for a peaceful and tearless world.

Thank you for your attentive listening!