

# Agent Orange: A token gesture by Washington

Thursday 8 March 2007, by [CHENG Eva](#) (Date first published: 1 March 2007).

Through its Vietnam ambassador, the Bush administration announced on February 9 that it will fund 40% of a US\$1 million plan to study how to clean up a former US military base in Vietnam that is contaminated by dioxin, a class-one human carcinogen. Dioxin was a key ingredient in Agent Orange, a defoliant that Washington used extensively in the Vietnam War from 1961 to 1971.

According to a February 9 Associated Press report, Vietnam's government and the Ford Foundation will provide the remaining \$600,000. The study's scope is confined only to the former base in Da Nang. It doesn't involve an actual clean-up, nor does it cover at least two other similarly contaminated former US bases — in Bien Hoa (in Dong Nai province) and Phu Cat (Binh Dinh province) — nor 50 or so other dioxin "hot spots".

A letter published in Michigan's Midland Daily News on February 17 by Len Aldis, the Britain-Vietnam Friendship Society's secretary, asked, "what of the people on whom the chemicals were sprayed? Today in Vietnam there are over three million living victims including new-born babies, suffering from illnesses, many with severe disabilities caused through Agent Orange. Of what benefit to them will the \$400,000 or the \$1 million [be]."

During the negotiation of the 1973 Paris Peace Accords between the revolutionary Vietnamese government, Washington and the puppet regime in Saigon, which ended direct US military involvement in the war, the Nixon administration agreed to provide \$3.5 billion in aid over five years. Not one cent of this has been paid.

US funding for the Da Nang study does not indicate that Washington has agreed to take responsibility for the victims of Agent Orange. In a February 13 interview published on Vietnamnet.vn, Michael Marine, Washington's ambassador to Vietnam, claimed that "we still lack accurate research on the causes of many disability cases in Vietnam. It doesn't mean that I believe and am sure that the people I met aren't dioxin victims. It only means that there hasn't been any scientific basis to ascertain the truth."

Marine continued: "There are two things I want to bring up, which is deformed newborns and malformation. There are many factors that cause these such as nutrition, heredity, disorders caused by engaging in particular professions, or even [their] parents' age."

Because Washington is still evading responsibility for its crimes in Vietnam, more than 30 major chemical companies that the US government employed to spray Agent Orange are being targeted by their Vietnamese victims in a US court case initiated in January 2004. A US judge dismissed the case in early 2005, but it is currently under appeal. The case expected to be heard over the next few months.

VietNam News reported on January 30 that Bob Feldman, a US Vietnam War veteran who suffered from exposure to Agent Orange, donated \$50,000 to aid dioxin victims in Vietnam. Feldman had received a \$30,000 pay out from the US government before his death last May.

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