

AGENT ORANGE AND THE VIETNAM WAR: MAGNITUDE AND CONSEQUENCES

BACKGROUND

- ✦ In 1961, as part of America's escalating war of counter-insurgency in Vietnam, President Kennedy approved military plans to use toxic herbicides in Vietnam. Planes and helicopters from the U.S. military sprayed toxic chemicals throughout southern Vietnam. The spraying was intended to kill foliage to deny cover to the guerillas and to destroy crops which could be used to supply the insurgency. The spraying was also intended to make whole areas unlivable so that villagers would be driven into "pacified" areas and "strategic hamlets."
- ✦ The main victims were civilians in the villages who were repeatedly contaminated when they ate crops and drank ground water that had been sprayed.
- ✦ The most commonly used spray was dubbed "Agent Orange" because it was shipped in barrels with an Orange stripe.
- ✦ The 2,4,5 -T herbicide is contaminated with trace amounts of TCDD dioxin, the most toxic chemical known to science. Lab animals exposed to minute quantities of dioxin (in parts per billion) have suffered increased rates of birth defects. The FDA withdrew approval for the use of 2,4,5-T in the United States in 1970. Dioxin has a half-life of about 10 years (i.e., after 10 years 50% of dioxin is still present in the soil).
- ✦ The chemicals used during the Vietnam War were produced by Dow, Monsanto, Diamond Shamrock, Hercules, Uniroyal, Thomson Chemicals, etc. In March 1965, Dow Chemical called all the manufacturers to a secret meeting at Dow Headquarters in Midland, MI. Dow's scientists complained that producers were making very "dirty" 2,4,5-T, containing as much as 50 parts per million of TCDD dioxin. They warned that if the offenders didn't "clean up their act" by improving product quality, it could eventually bring the entire herbicide program down. The chemical companies ignored this warning and kept the deadly dioxin in Agent Orange.

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- ✦ The Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court prohibits the use of "weapons ... or methods of warfare which are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering."
- ✦ In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed an Executive Order, which renounced "first use" of herbicides in warfare. At almost the same time, the U.S. Senate formally ratified the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which banned chemical weapons.

**THE PRESENT SITUATION:
WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT NOW?**

WHAT DID THE US MILITARY KNOW?

✂ Dr. James R. Clary, a former senior scientist at the Chemical Weapons Branch (Air Force Armament Development Lab in Florida) writes: "When we initiated the herbicide program in the 1960s, we were aware of the potential for damage due to dioxin contamination in the herbicide. We were even aware that the military formulation had a higher dioxin concentration than the civilian version due to the lower cost and speed of manufacture. However, because the material was to be used on the enemy, none of us were overly concerned."

The racism inherent in this quote characterizes the continuing use of Agent Orange against the Vietnamese people and the failure to compensate them.

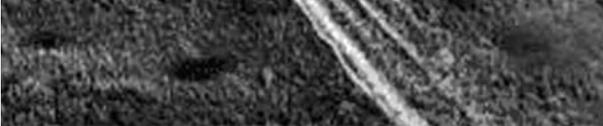
MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

✂ After visiting Vietnam in 1969, two U.S. zoologists wrote: "The chemical weapons of a technologically advanced society are being used massively for the first time in a guerilla war... (Our) military efforts are aimed at increasing the toll of fatalities, denying food to the enemy, and depriving him of the concealment provided by natural growth. This type of warfare is, therefore, enormously destructive, both of human life and the environment."

✂ Between 1962 and 1971 the United States sprayed an estimated twenty million gallons of herbicide (of which thirteen million gallons were Agent Orange) over a tenth of the total land area of southern Vietnam. The Agent Orange used is estimated to have contained over 500 pounds of TCDD dioxin!

✂ Over 5.6 million acres of southern Vietnam were eventually sprayed, with over 90% of the sprayed areas being hit at least twice. An estimated 11% of the areas were hit as many as ten times. Further, records show that the Air Force used 2,4,5-T herbicide in concentrations that were as much as thirteen times higher than that recommended by the manufacturers for domestic use in the U.S.

Vietnamese scientists have estimated that as many as 4.8 million Vietnamese citizens were directly exposed to these herbicides.



EFFECTS ON PEOPLE'S HEALTH

- ✂ An estimated 50,000 deformed children have been born to parents who were directly sprayed or were exposed through the consumption of food and/or water.
- ✂ The risk of death from cancer among men and women exposed to dioxin increased by 30%.
- ✂ Parents exposed to Agent Orange were 2.2 times more likely to have a deformed child than non exposed parents.
- ✂ The Veterans Administration now automatically awards service-connected disability to Vietnam veterans for thirteen different health conditions. Conditions include soft tissue cancer, Non Hodgkin's lymphoma, Hodgkins Disease, chronic lymphocytic leukemia, cancer of the prostate, larynx, and trachea, multiple myeloma, acute and subacute transient peripheral neuropathy, Type II diabetes, and chloracne.
- ✂ Exposure to Agent Orange or dioxin is also associated with disorders of the endocrine system (e.g., decreased sexual desire, gynecomastia), cardiovascular system (e.g. increased blood pressure, blood deficiency), gastrointestinal system (e.g., nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, gastric ulcer, constipation, yellowing of eyes, abdominal pain), metabolic system (e.g. fatigue, rapid weight loss, spontaneous fever, chills), neurological system (e.g. numbness, dizziness, headaches, tingling), respiratory system (e.g. shortness of breath), and skin disorders such as rash, loss of hair, brittle nails, altered skin color.

IS IT A WAR CRIME?

The chemical campaign mounted by the US military is arguably in violation of the following international treaties:

- ✂ The 1907 Hague Convention (IV) which prohibits the use of poison or poisoned weapons or the use of materials calculated to cause unnecessary suffering.
- ✂ The Geneva Protocol of 1925 banned the use of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, usually referred to as chemical weapons.

✂ In 1973, the U.S. government signed the Paris Peace Accords with Vietnam. One article contains an explicit American promise to help heal the wounds of war in Vietnam. The U.S. initially committed \$3.25 billion to be provided over a five year period. It later promised to provide an additional \$1.5 billion in other forms of aid. None of these commitments have ever been honored.

✂ A federal class action lawsuit filed on behalf of U.S. Vietnam veterans against the chemical manufacturers was settled in 1984 for \$180 million. Unfortunately since there were ten times more claims against this fund than had been predicted, veterans received only token amounts of compensation.

✂ In 1991, following years of organizing and lobbying by Vietnam veterans, Congress ordered the Veterans Administration to provide disability benefits to Vietnam veterans who suffered from certain illnesses determined to be causally linked to Agent Orange exposure by a federal scientific panel.

✂ In 2004, Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange filed a lawsuit against the herbicide manufacturers in federal court in New York. Just two weeks before this lawsuit was dismissed on March 10, 2005, the federal National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences unilaterally cancelled its contract to conduct an epidemiological study of Agent Orange health effects in Vietnam.

In his opinion dismissing the Vietnamese lawsuit, Judge Weinstein wrote: "Proof of causal connection depends primarily upon substantial epidemiological and other scientific data... Availability of ... scientific information from Vietnamese studies needed for epidemiological analysis has not been furnished to the court."

✂ Since Vietnam, the American military has continued to use toxic weapons. For example, the Pentagon is making heavy use of radioactive "depleted uranium" shells, napalm and phosphorus bombs in its struggle to occupy Iraq. To date, it has refused to acknowledge that these weapons present health hazard to either civilians or soldiers.

To date, not a single Vietnamese victim of Agent Orange has ever received a penny in compensation for the injuries they have suffered.

THE CALL

Wars do not end when the bombs stop falling and the fighting ceases. The devastation continues long after, in the land and in the minds and bodies of the affected population.

Today, three million Vietnamese suffer the effects of chemical defoliants used by the United States during the Vietnam War. In order to deny food and protection to those deemed to be "the enemy," the U.S. defoliated the forests of Vietnam with the deadly chemicals Agent Orange, White, Blue, Pink, Green and Purple. Agent Orange, which was contaminated with trace amounts of TCDD Dioxin - the most toxic chemical known to science - disabled and sickened soldiers, civilians and several generations of their offspring on two continents.

In addition to the millions of Vietnamese still affected by this deadly poison, tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers are also affected. It has caused birth defects in hundreds of thousands of children in Vietnam and the U.S. - that is, the second and third generations of those who were exposed to Agent Orange decades ago. Medical evidence indicates that certain cancers (for example, soft tissue non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma), diabetes (type II), and in children spina bifida and other birth defects, are attributable to the exposure.

The deadly mark left by Agent Orange on the natural environment of Vietnam includes the destruction of mangrove forests and the long-term poisoning of soil and crops.

Surviving Vietnam veterans in the U.S., after many years of organized action, have finally achieved limited compensation from our government for some illnesses they suffer due to Agent Orange poisoning. While this struggle continues, the three million surviving Vietnamese victims received no such compensation, nor any humanitarian aid from the U.S. government.

Our government has a moral and legal obligation, under international law, to compensate the people of Vietnam for the devastating impact of Agent Orange, and to assist in alleviating its effects. Indeed, the U.S. government recognized this responsibility: In the Peace

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Accords signed in Paris in 1973 the administration of Richard Nixon promised to contribute \$3 billion dollars toward healing the wounds of war, and to post-war reconstruction of Vietnam.

Nonetheless, 30 years after the end of the Vietnam War, our government has yet to make good on its formal commitment and moral obligation to assist the Vietnamese people's recovery from the chemical warfare waged against them and their land. Neither has it met its responsibility to the peoples of Laos and Cambodia, whose lands were also poisoned by the same chemical weapons.

Our focus is achieving justice for the Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange. We are also mindful of the fact that our government has continued to use chemical weapons, including depleted uranium and napalm, in Iraq and other places. Our actions therefore are part of an on-going international campaign to end the use of toxic weapons and to achieve justice and accountability for all victims.

The Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign is an initiative of U.S. veterans, Vietnamese Americans and all concerned about peace and justice. Vietnamese citizens have filed a lawsuit to hold the chemical companies responsible for the crimes against humanity of which their products were a part. Now it's

our turn to act: With this campaign, we seek to fulfill our responsibility by insisting that our government honor its moral and legal responsibility to compensate the Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange.

We invite you to join us in:

1. **Signing the petition for justice for Agent Orange victims.** Our goal is one million signatures in this country. The petition will be presented to Congress and the President.
2. **Educating our friends, co-workers and neighbors about the suffering caused by Agent Orange in Vietnam** and in other wars our government has waged. Organize an event at your home, school, community center or place of worship. Contact us for films and educational materials. In the months ahead, we will bring Vietnamese Agent Orange victims to tour communities throughout the nation with disabled U.S. veterans. Contact us if you would like to host a visit by this group to your area.
3. **Public donations for Vietnamese Agent Orange victims.** Collected funds will go to the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin and to our educational work within the U.S. to achieve the goals of this campaign. Tax deductible contributions may be sent to **Veterans for Peace/AO campaign.**

Achieving real justice for Vietnamese Agent Orange victims will be an important step toward our government's taking full responsibility for the long-term devastation that its chemical weaponry caused the Vietnamese people and all Vietnam War veterans. This tragic chapter in our nation's history will not be satisfactorily closed until WE THE PEOPLE of the United States compel our government to do the right thing. Thirty years late is better than never!

Thank you for your participation and support. Together, we can make **The Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign** a resounding success!

Sign the petition at:

<http://www.petitiononline.com/AOVN/petition-sign.html>

Contribute online at:

<http://www.vn-agentorange.org>

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(in formation, organizations listed for identification only; * indicates Core Group Members)

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- ✉ Enclosed is my contribution to the VNAORR Campaign in the amount of _____
- ✉ I would like more information on the Agent Orange campaign
- ✉ I would like to organize a local event
- ✉ My organization _____ would like to endorse the Agent Orange campaign

Name

Street Address

City

State

Zip

Phone number

Email

Contribution by check are tax deductible made payable to Veterans for Peace/Agent Orange Campaign, and sent to:

VIETNAM AGENT ORANGE RELIEF & RESPONSIBILITY CAMPAIGN

P. O. BOX 303, PRINCE STATION
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10012-0006

Email: info@vn-agentorange.org

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