

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
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**STATEMENT OF  
THE HONORABLE ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA  
CHAIRMAN**

**before the  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC, AND THE  
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**

**Our Forgotten Responsibility: What Can We Do to Help Victims of Agent Orange?"**

**May 15, 2008**

In 1967, I joined the Army and was deployed to Vietnam. Last year, for the first time in nearly 40 years, I returned to Vietnam after having served in Nha Trang as a young soldier at the height of the Tet Offensive. Although my younger brother, Taulauniu, had since moved on to a better place, I wore his yellow aloha shirt so he could return with me since he, too, served in Vietnam.

When we were young and at war, neither of us knew if we would come back from Vietnam in a body bag, or if we would live to see our loved ones again. Unlike so many, we made it home. In brotherhood, we honored the sacrifices of those who did not.

Forty years later, the world is a different place. Tau is gone. I am here. And, the United States and Vietnam are no longer at war. Today, it is the policy of the United States to normalize relations with Vietnam.

In part, normalizing relations means coming to terms with our past. My time in Vietnam last November was a clear reminder that good people everywhere want the same things in life. At a closing dinner hosted by the National Assembly of Ho Chi Minh City, I had long discussions with members of their Foreign Affairs Committee who had also served in the Vietnam War. Although we were once enemies, we embraced each other as friends who share the same hopes and dreams for our families and countries.

I was also honored to meet with Vice President Ms. Nguyen Thi Doan who is a remarkable and inspirational woman, having, as a minority, risen to the top levels of the Vietnamese government. In Hanoi, I met with Deputy National Assembly Chairperson Ms. Tong Thi Phong who is also to be commended and recognized for her accomplishments as one of Vietnam's top national leaders. I also had the privilege of

meeting with Vice Foreign Minister Mr. Le Van Bang who I knew while he previously served in Washington, DC as Vietnam's Ambassador to the United States.

Of our generation, I don't think any of us expected that the day would come when we would meet under favorable circumstances. But that day has come, and the day has also come for us to talk openly, as friends, about our forgotten responsibility to the victims of Agent Orange.

Some have tried to discourage this hearing from moving forward on the premise that this is a subject we should not publicly broach but should only privately discuss. I am a firm believer that any business worth doing is worth doing in the light of day.

This is why I commend the Aspen Institute and the Ford Foundation for establishing a U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange, and I am pleased that members of the Dialogue Group are courageous enough to be with us today to discuss ways in which Congress can help.

To my knowledge, this is the first time in the history of the U.S. Congress that a hearing has been held on Agent Orange which includes the views of our Vietnamese counterparts. It is important for us to hear their concerns as several studies estimate that from 1961 to 1971 the U.S. military sprayed more than 11 million gallons of Agent Orange in Vietnam.

Agent Orange was manufactured under Department of Defense (DOD) contracts by several companies including Dow Chemical and Monsanto. Dioxin, a toxic contaminant known to be one of the deadliest chemicals made by man, was an unwanted byproduct and is thought to be responsible for most of the medical problems associated with exposure to Agent Orange.

At the time, the U.S. military claimed the use of Agent Orange was necessary to defoliate Vietnam's dense jungle in order to deprive the Viet Cong of hiding places. However, declassified documents uncovered in the U.S. National Archives indicate that as early as 1967, the U.S. knew that although "defoliation itself was successful," the use of Agent Orange had "little effect on military operations."

According to Hatfield Consultants, the documents also suggest that the chemical companies and DOD knew as early as 1967 of the potential long-term health risks, and sought to "censor" relevant news reports, "fearing a negative backlash from government and the public." For the record, I am submitting Hatfield Consultants' overview on Agent Orange.

I am also including a 1983 *NY Times* article by David Burnham entitled, "1965 Memo Show Dow's Anxiety on Dioxin." Mr. Burnham reports that in 1965, "scientists from four rival chemical companies attended a closed meeting at the Dow Chemical Company's headquarters. The subject was the health hazards of dioxin. According to the

report, Dow did not want its findings about dioxin to be made known fearing a “Congressional investigation.”

More than 30 years later, while research clearly shows that Agent Orange was much more hazardous than anyone would admit, U.S. and Vietnamese victims have not been adequately compensated, and Vietnam has not been cleaned-up. Ironically, Dow is now doing business in Vietnam but refuses to help the victims of Agent Orange.

While war is ugly, so are cover-ups. In my opinion, Dow and every other chemical company involved ought to step up and do right by the victims of Agent Orange just as tobacco manufactures have begun to settle lawsuits brought on as a result of their false claims.

The U.S. should also help clean up the environment. To this day, Agent Orange dioxin remains in the ecosystem. Studies conducted in Vietnam by Hatfield Consultants from 1994-2000 show that “nearly 30 years after cessation of hostilities, dioxin remains at alarmingly high concentrations in soils, foods, human blood and human breast milk in adults and children inhabiting areas in close proximity to a former US military installation.”

Despite these findings, the U.S., according to our State Department, has only provided \$2 million for technical and scientific activities to help clean up Vietnam. While last year P.L. 110-28 set aside \$3 million for environmental remediation and to support health programs in communities near those sites, as of March 2008, the U.S. State Department had not released those funds, or determined how they would be spent.

In contrast, from 2003 to 2006, the U.S. appropriated \$35.7 billion for Iraq reconstruction. For Germany, according to the Congressional Research Service, “in constant 2005 dollars, the United States provided a total of \$29.3 billion in assistance from 1946-1952 with 60% in economic grants and nearly 30% in economic loans, and the remainder in military aid.” Total U.S. assistance to Japan for 1946-1952 was roughly \$15.2 billion in 2005 dollars, of which 77% was grants and 23% was loans.

Why can’t we do more for our U.S. veterans and the people of Vietnam? We can and should do more, and this is why I am pleased that our witnesses have accepted this invitation to testify. I especially thank and recognize Dr. Phuong, former Vice Speaker of The Vietnamese National Assembly and now Director General of the Ngoc Tam Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City, who has traveled far to be with us.

The Subcommittee also thanks Mr. Walter Isaacson, President and CEO of The Aspen Institute, and former CEO of CNN and editor of *Time* Magazine, who is currently in Louisiana helping with Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts and will soon be en route to the Palestinian Territories. Despite the demands of his hectic schedule, Mr. Isaacson has submitted a statement for the record on behalf of the victims of Agent Orange, and I personally thank him for his generosity of time and talent.

I now recognize our Ranking Member for his opening statement.