



Press Conference by Deputy Secretary Negroponte in Hanoi, Vietnam

John D. Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State

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DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: [In Vietnamese. Laughter and clapping].

I want to thank you for joining me today as part of my trip visiting both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Reflective of the close partnership between the United States and Vietnam I have a full schedule of meetings covering a broad range of issues.

In Hanoi I had the privilege of meeting with the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Khiem, Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Nhan and many others. During these meetings we focused on areas in which we can strengthen our relationship. The United States aims to deepen our economic and commercial ties, to expand our diplomatic cooperation, encourage reform, and broaden our cooperation to enhance regional peace and security. Our Joint Advisory Committee on Agent Orange and Dioxin is also meeting here in Hanoi this week. Its work is another example of successful cooperation that is producing positive results.

Education is a high priority for us. In the coming weeks members of the Education Task Force will meet to discuss how we might strengthen our work together in this area. This task force will examine ways in which we can increase the number of Vietnamese students in the United States and Americans studying in Vietnam and what can be done to increase exchanges between United States and Vietnamese universities. We also want to link American companies and Vietnamese universities to help graduates acquire the skills that they need to find good jobs in the new and growing Vietnamese economy.

In Ho Chi Minh City, where I am going next, in addition to meetings with government officials I will meet with local business leaders to learn first-hand about Vietnam's economic growth. The United States is one of Vietnam's largest investors, but increased transparency, dedication to tackling corruption and a commitment to combating inflation and maintaining stability will facilitate even more investment.

Throughout my trip I have underscored the importance the United States places on a candid and productive human rights dialogue. Enhancements in governance, the rule of law and the protection of human rights will forge an even deeper United States-Vietnam relationship and should contribute to Vietnam's own goal of greater integration with the international community.

In conclusion, I would like to say that my brief visit to Hanoi has confirmed my optimism about the prospects for United States-Vietnam relations in the years ahead.

Now I'd be pleased to answer a few questions.

QUESTION: Hi, I'm Ben Stocking from the Associated Press.

You mentioned the work of the Joint Committee looking into the Agent Orange issue. Some Vietnamese have expressed a little bit of disappointment about the amount of money that the U.S. has devoted to this issue. They're pleased that the Congress set aside \$3 million, but there seems to be agreement that the cost of cleaning up dioxin is going to cost a lot more than that. So I guess my question is do you think the United States should or might consider setting aside more money for the cleanup of dioxin here?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: First, by way of a general response to your question let me say that I think that while it is important that we focus on the future of the relationship between our two countries, and that is the area of activity that takes up most of our energies, we also must deal with the legacy issues from the war. Those are issues I'm pleased to say we are working on cooperatively with the government of Vietnam, whether it has to do with Agent Orange or POWs and MIAs, or with the removal of mines, for example, that were laid during the war. I think we have a positive and a constructive dialogue and positive and constructive activities in all of these areas.

You asked about the specific amounts of money and whether they are adequate for this problem. Our approach has been, in our discussions with the government of Vietnam, to first of all have important exchanges between the experts on this subject, and that's what's been happening this week here in Hanoi, so that there is an adequate exchange of information.

There are remediation measures that are being taken, and I think the focus there is to try and find the areas of priority. So, for example, one of the priority areas is around Danang. There are several other places that have also been identified for priority action.

In addition to remediation measures I would also mention that we have provided resources for treating disabled Vietnamese people regardless of cause over a long period of time now. We have spent some tens of millions of dollars to help assist disabled Vietnamese, regardless of what it was that caused their disablement.

QUESTION: I'm from People's Army Newspaper.

The Vietnamese and several U.S. companies have cooperation contract in the South China Sea we call the East Sea here. But there has been abuse of the territorial sea water, often by China. So when such things happen, what legal grounds does the U.S. Department of State use to make statements about those cases?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: My answer to that question would be as follows. First of all, the question of maritime jurisdiction between countries, especially when there are disagreements, is something that ultimately must be settled by those countries themselves in accordance with the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention.

We ourselves don't take a position on the merits of these particular disputes, but we do believe they should be dealt with peacefully and without resort to any type of coercion. We do believe the companies that you refer to, the American companies you refer to have the right to engage in the activities in which they are engaged.

QUESTION: I am from Agence France Presse.

You talked about the human rights dialogue. Could you tell us, did you raise any specific case on behalf of the U.S., and if so, which ones?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: The answer to your question is, first of all, yes, we did discuss human rights issues in several of my conversations including, in particular, my meeting with the Foreign Minister as well as with representatives of civic society with whom I met yesterday evening. But I did not get into any particular specific cases. As I said in my opening statement, this is an issue that we believe is important. The degree that the human rights situation in Vietnam is dealt with adequately and effectively, we think will be to the benefit of Vietnam's standing in the international community and it will also, of course, in our view be to the benefit of the Vietnamese people.

QUESTION: I'm from Vietnam Television.



My question is, yesterday you had a meeting with Vice Prime Minister Nguyen at the Ministry of Education and Training. What do you think about education cooperation between Vietnam and the U.S., and can you be more specific on the educational cooperation between our two countries?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Yes, absolutely.

Oh, sorry.

Give me one more week and I can interpret for you. [Laughter].

We had a very good meeting. This is one of the areas of cooperation between the United States and Vietnam that I think is particularly exciting. The Education Minister spoke about the desire of Vietnam to graduate 20,000 more PhD students over the next 12 years -- 10,000 with PhDs from abroad, from other countries, and 10,000 trained in Vietnam itself. So one area that we talked about was ways in which we could increase the number of Vietnamese students going to the United States to help fulfill the goals of this program. That I think is something we will want to pursue upon my return to the United States.

Another area that we spoke about were the plans of the Ministry to have universities established here in Vietnam that use the curriculum of foreign universities. He mentioned the example of a German university that's being established in Ho Chi Minh City at the moment. He expressed a strong interest in United States universities engaging in the same kind of cooperation with Vietnam.

One last area I might mention since you asked for specific examples, was the desire on the part of the government, and I'm sure that others share it, of trying to improve the quantity and the quality of English language training in this country.

QUESTION: I'm from Prensa Latina.

Given the human rights situation and the importance of progress here, what are the [inaudible] now [inaudible] at a time of war, and Agent Orange and all those things. [Inaudible] nothing about Vietnam [inaudible]. And now we are talking the same [inaudible].

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: I'm sure if you asked most Vietnamese they would tell you the situation today is substantially changed and substantially improved over what it was in the 1960s. Just to cite one example, this is an economy here that has consistently grown at a rate of seven or eight percent a year for a decade or so and is considered one of the real miracles of economic development. It has lifted the Vietnamese out of poverty, giving them more space and opportunity to develop their personal lives. So that would be my first observation in response to your question.

While personal opportunities for development and personal space have increased significantly, there are still issues, as you mentioned and as I have also mentioned, particularly in the area of political rights. Our views on that subject are well known. It's an area where we don't necessarily see matters eye to eye with Vietnamese authorities, but I think we are appreciative of the fact that this is a subject that is on the bilateral agenda between us. We've actually had a human rights dialogue with our Assistant Secretary for Human Rights visiting here recently to hold in-depth discussions with the Government of Vietnam.

So this will be, I expect, an issue that will continue to be one of discussion between our two governments, but it will be in the context of an expanding and improving and friendly relationship between our two countries.

QUESTION: I would like to ask you what did you discuss with the Vietnamese government about corruption?

And the second question is, I like your Saigon accent -- [Laughter]. What feeling do you have when you return to Vietnam after 35 years?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: On the first question, one of the subjects that has been a constant issue of discussion between our embassy and the government of Vietnam has been the rule of law, questions related to corruption, and how strengthening the rule of law, in our view, will enable the Vietnamese economy to prosper and develop and the Vietnamese people to prosper and develop even more. So we think it's in the self interest of the government and people of Vietnam to tackle the matter of corruption and improve the rule of law.

As for my Saigon accent, I'm very happy to be back after 35 years. I sometimes ask myself why I took so long to come back. I'm very optimistic about the future of our relationship. I certainly look forward to visiting Ho Chi Minh City, which I will be doing after this press conference. We're leaving for Ho Chi Minh City and I will spend about two days there, so that will be an opportunity for me to see how much things have changed in Ho Chi Minh City.

But perhaps what fills me with the greatest optimism is the fact that our two countries fought a bitter war. It was a bitter and difficult war for both sides. And yet I find that on both sides there seems to be a tremendous amount of goodwill, to want to develop the relationship in a positive way in the future. I think that is almost a universal feeling. That's certainly the way I feel about the relationship.

So as I mentioned, we have to now go and catch an airplane. I thank you very much for this opportunity to meet with you this morning. Thank you.

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