

**Speech by Ambassador Daniel J. Kritenbrink
Disabilities Memorandum of Intent Signing Between USAID and
Office 701**

(Simultaneous interpretation will be provided)

REMARKS: [five minutes]

[Word count – 632]

*Vice Minister Nguyễn Chí Vịnh [‘WIN CHI VING’] and representatives
from Committee 701,*

Representatives from the Dong Nai People's Committee,

*Senator Patrick Leahy, Senator Lisa Murkowski, Senator Debbie
Stabenow, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Senator Tom Udall, Senator Rob
Portman, Senator Tammy Baldwin, Senator Mazie Hirono, and Senator
Tim Kaine,*

Honored guests and members of the Press,

It is an honor and privilege for me to join all of you here today to witness the signing of this Memorandum of Intent between USAID and Office 701. The timing of this event is particularly meaningful as Vietnam just celebrated its national Disability Day on April 18th.

Since 1989, we have partnered with Vietnam to provide direct services to people in need -- such as prosthetic limbs for war veterans and assistive devices, such as wheelchairs. Over the years, our partnership has evolved from direct humanitarian assistance toward working with Vietnam to build the systems and modern institutional and physical infrastructure it needs to help persons with disabilities today, and well into the future. Working together we - the United States and Vietnam in partnership - have provided services to millions of Vietnamese in need,

and have laid the groundwork for ensuring such services are sustained into the future.

Our goal, simply put, is to improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities here in Vietnam. We are and will continue to do that by working with our partners to create a comprehensive service system that supports caregivers as well as persons with disabilities. We provide the tools and know-how needed so that as many people as possible can actively, and productively, participate in society, and that those with immediate needs, particularly the severely disabled, are provided with the care that they need as soon as possible.

Our vision is to create a model of care in each of the provinces in which we work. Over the next five years, under this Memorandum of Intent, and under the leadership of Committee 701, USAID will work with MOLISA, VAVA, the Ministry of Health, and the People's Committees in seven priority provinces, including Dong Nai where we are today. The model in each of these provinces will be to work on the provision of direct care, to build the capacity of the rehabilitation sector, and to develop community level social services.

Success will not happen overnight, but together with our Vietnamese partners, we are building the foundation for a comprehensive system. For example, a modern medical system needs trained practitioners, and recently, USAID helped establish Vietnam's first bachelor degree programs for occupational and speech therapy. In a few years, these graduates will start deploying their much-needed skills in the field. We also hope some of them will continue and get Masters degrees and PhDs, so that they can teach the next generation these professions. Creating a comprehensive care system takes time, but by focusing on people, both the patients and the caregivers, we're committed to supporting Vietnam's success in this sector. It took us decades in the U.S. to create such a system and we are still working to improve it, getting the right services to the right people when they need

it. That's why we're committed to work with Vietnam for the long term, to build their self-reliance through a sustainable system.

In the meantime, while we work to build the system of the future, we are also committed to serving those in immediate need. This means providing support at the home level to those with severe disabilities, the provision of assistive technology to help with daily living, or connecting them and their families to economic and social support.

Through this new partnership with Committee 701, we know that together, we will be able to reach more people in need, succeed in creating a comprehensive care model, and truly achieve our goal of increasing the quality of life of persons with disabilities here in Vietnam.

Senior Lt. General Vinh and Senior Lt. General Rinh, we look forward to working with you on this important endeavor. And along with the strong support of folks like Senator Leahy and the Congressional Delegation with us today, we also look forward to working with the many NGOs and Disabled Persons Organizations, who are championing the disabled every day. I know that together, through hard work, we will make a difference in the lives of persons with disabilities in Vietnam.

Thank you.