

Speech by Ambassador Daniel J. Kritenbrink
Dioxin Remediation at Bien Hoa Project Launch
(Simultaneous interpretation will be provided)

REMARKS: [five minutes]

[Word count – 632]

Deputy Prime Minister Trương Hòa Bình [CHUONG HOA BING],

*Vice Minister Nguyễn Chí Vịnh [WIN CHI VING] and representatives
from the Ministry of National Defense and Committee 701,*

*Chairman Đinh Quốc Thái [DING QUOK THAI] and 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,

Good morning! Thank you Vice Minister Nguyễn Chí Vịnh [WIN CHI VING] for co-hosting this event to mark the beginning of the historic U.S.-Vietnam effort to remediate the largest remaining hotspot of dioxin contamination in Vietnam.

This initiative has been in the making for some time. After President Trump affirmed the U.S. commitment to dioxin remediation at the Bien Hoa Airbase Area during his 2017 visit to Vietnam, I asked USAID to finalize plans with the Ministry of National Defense to prepare for the project we are launching here today.

It is difficult to understate this operation; it will be one of the largest remediation projects in the world and require the best minds and technology that the United States and Vietnam can muster. The fact that two former foes are now partnering on such a complex task is nothing short of historic. The work that the United States and Vietnam accomplished at Danang and will accomplish here at Bien Hoa serves as an example to the world, of how two former enemies can work together, with mutual respect, towards cooperation and peace.

After our work in Danang, which was a similarly complex endeavor, I stand before you today confident of the successful clean-up of Bien Hoa. I'm confident for two reasons.

First, because of the strong support from the American people for our efforts, as evidenced by the participation of Senator Leahy and his eight esteemed colleagues from the U.S. Senate in today's event. Their presence demonstrates a bi-partisan, whole-of-government commitment to this effort; the U.S. Government is unified in its view of the importance of this project and others like it.

I would also like to especially recognize Senator Leahy who has worked for over 30 years on activities that have been instrumental in bringing our two countries together. When discussing war legacy issues, his office states, "we need to work together to take issues of contention and turn them into areas of collaboration". Bien Hoa is evidence of those words, as the United States and Vietnam are about to collaborate on our biggest endeavor yet.

Second, I'm confident that we will be successful because of the strength of the Vietnamese commitment to our partnership. That commitment is so clearly demonstrated in the words and actions of Senior Lieutenant General Vinh, both in his role as Deputy Minister of Defense and as Chairman of the Standing Board for Committee 701. With his guidance and support, we are confidently resolving not only dioxin contamination, but also other humanitarian and wartime legacy issues, like the removal

of unexploded ordnance, bringing the remains of our fallen soldiers home, and programs that support persons with disabilities.

The United States and Vietnam have found that working together to resolve these legacies of our past has opened the door to a forward-looking relationship. Our countries now cooperate on a comprehensive range of issues from economic prosperity and trade, to education and security. Being honest with each other and working together to overcome the past has created a successful multi-faceted relationship that improves by the day.

So today we mark the beginning of an historic United States-Vietnam effort to erase a lingering ghost from our past. May our success in this joint effort free us to focus on the future and our work together to build a strong, prosperous, and independent Vietnam.

Thank you.