“65 Years of Agent Orange Disaster”
Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations Seminar
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Speech
Vương Thị Quyên, Vietnamese victim of Agent Orange/dioxin

Distinguished delegates, honored guests from Vietnam and abroad,
Distinguished experts, scientists, social activists, and dear young friends,
My name is Vương Thị Quyên. I come from Quang Tri Province, and I am a second-generation victim of Agent Orange/dioxin. I currently work at the Social Protection Center of the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin (VAVA).
Today, I stand before you not only as a representative of millions of Agent Orange/dioxin victims in Vietnam, but also as a living witness to suffering that spans generations—a war without gunfire or bombs, yet one that has continued relentlessly and cruelly for the past 65 years.
Ladies and gentlemen,
The war has long since ended. The bomb craters have healed, and the forests once devastated by war are now green with new life. But another war continues silently and persistently, day after day, hour after hour, within our own bodies and within every family of victims, including my own.
I was born after the war, in 1989, the daughter of a war veteran who had fought on the battlefields of southeastern Vietnam. At the age of nine, physical deformities, a hunchback, and congenital curvature of the spine began to torment me. From an ordinary child, I became a prisoner of my own suffering body, confronted with a cruel diagnosis: the consequences of Agent Orange exposure inherited from my beloved father.
But the suffering caused by Agent Orange takes many forms, and it does not end with me. Across Vietnam, the effects of this poison have extended into the second, third, and fourth generations. There are families in which three or four generations live with severe physical disabilities, their suffering passed down from one generation to the next. Innocent children are born deprived of their intellectual abilities or healthy bodies, while their families face poverty and social prejudice. It is a haunting, unending anguish, a sorrow that exhausts the tears of mothers and fathers who ask themselves: Will our children be born healthy and whole?
But, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,
Today, I am not standing here to tell a sad story. I am standing here to speak about the indomitable strength of the human spirit.
I once asked myself, “Why me?” But then I chose to rise above my circumstances. I have been more fortunate than many other Agent Orange victims. I have had the opportunity to study, to travel abroad, and to share my story—and the voices of those who cannot speak for themselves—with friends around the world. I want to demonstrate that although our bodies may be damaged by Agent Orange, our will to live and our yearning for justice can never be defeated!
I understand that silence and forgetfulness are even more toxic than dioxin itself. There were times when I feared the world would forget us. But when I see our French friends traveling halfway around the world to bring a lawsuit into the public eye, our Belgian friends tirelessly

raising funds, and especially the sense of responsibility shining in the eyes of today's younger generation, I know that I am not alone.

Dear young people and peace-loving friends around the world,

We were born after the guns had fallen silent, yet we carry on our shoulders both the legacy of peace and the burden of the past. Today, I want to share a message with you: Peace must never be taken for granted. It is a legacy purchased with the blood and sacrifice of previous generations, and a flame that can be kept burning only through the actions of today's young people.

The Agent Orange disaster in Vietnam is a painful lesson for all humanity about the limits that must be placed on warfare. Suffering that spans generations cannot simply disappear with the passage of time. It requires solidarity across generations, and it must be alleviated through your own hands, minds, and efforts.

Therefore, we earnestly appeal to the younger generation: Use your energy, creativity, technology, people-to-people diplomacy, and compassionate hearts to join the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin (VAVA) in continuing the struggle for justice, environmental remediation, medical assistance, and sustainable livelihoods for victims.

We need voices that awaken a sense of historical responsibility among international war veterans. We need social activists to continue serving as bridges of conscience and solidarity. Justice for Vietnamese Agent Orange victims is an affirmation of the dignity of all humanity—that no war has the right to rob future generations of their future!

I believe that the bridges of compassion being built in this room will grow ever stronger, bringing closer the day when justice will finally and fully be achieved.

On behalf of millions of Vietnamese Agent Orange victims, I extend my deepest gratitude to all of you.

Thank you very much!