

# **PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF DIOXIN IN VIETNAMESE VICTIMS AFTER THE VIETNAM WAR**

**Nguyen Dac Nhu-Mai**

Dr. d'Etat ès Lettres et Sciences Humaines

Représentante Permanente VAVA France & EU

During the Vietnam War, from 1961 to 1971 the United States of America dropped 77 millions of litres of Dioxin, a toxic defoliant on Vietnam in an attempt to remove the jungle used for cover by The Liberation Forces. Decades later, civilians still suffer the consequences. Dioxin still lurks in Vietnam's soil, causing human deformities which are passed on from one generation to another. Now, through international press and media, and some important documentary screenings, people knows that Dioxin causes cancers, especially breast cancer, and recently that it is highly poisonous to the cells of our bodies<sup>1</sup>. Herbicides or chemical weapon? Vietnam estimates that it continues paying the consequences of chemical warfare. The chemical product in its undiluted form with a high level of Dioxin has not only contaminated the environment of South Vietnam but also the animals and humans.

As they cannot sue the United States for war crime, the Vietnamese victims and VAVA<sup>2</sup> are suing the US chemical companies for damages. They spent five long years pursuing the class action through all three levels of Federal Courts, to demand compensation from the US Chemical Manufacturers. Nevertheless, the only response the Vietnamese victims received was a cold refusal! Since the lawsuit began, all over the world International campaigns organised in the UK, the US, France and UE, India and Bhopal showed that millions of people support the Victims by signing petitions, on paper or online and demonstrating in solidarity.

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<sup>1</sup> Cancer Update from John Hopkins, 3 August 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin : Hanoi central office N°202-208 Bld B17 Luong Dinh Cua, Dong Da Hanoi Tel 844-5745659; 844-5745657; email: hnnccdcvn@fpt.vn; website www.vava.org.vn

The Paris Tribunal of May 15-16, 2009, has been the most crucial conscience' sake civilian case with regard to requiring compensation of damages. Firstly, in calling The US as the one who sprayed toxic chemical product without any right to do so. Secondly in calling the firms who provided the product, knowing the use, or at least not advising of the noxiousness, the International Peoples' tribunal of Conscience has separately examined summons and complaints *versus* the US Government and *versus* the 32 firms by hearing Victims and Experts. US Government and Chemical Firms are *guilty of an offence against land of Vietnam and its people. Because the ones who pollute, have to pay.* Struggling for securing dignity and human rights to the Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin is calling for the universal right to reparations, a reality. Calling about compensation is calling for a right to live in decent life in an environment clean of dioxin's toxicity. In the world the mobilisation to support all Victims, American, Indian (Bhopal) and Vietnamese is strongly connected in spite of various contemporary economical crises.

**In France**, supports for the Vietnamese Victims of Dioxin are relatively strong and have an important well coming. French associations in particular, Association Pour la Promotion des Femmes Scientifiques Vietnamiennes (AFSV, Orsay), Centre International de la culture paysanne et rurale (CICPR, Treffieux), Droit-Solidarité (Paris), Union Générale des Vietnamiens de France (UGVF and its Federation, Union des Commerçants de France, Paris), Union des Etudiants Vietnamiens en France (UEVFN, Nantes), Association des amis de Dalat sur les traces de Yersin Association (AD@IY, Montpellier), Village Van Canh (Villejuif), Vietnam Enfants de la Dioxine (VED Paris), Fleur d'Orange (Paris), Association d'Amitié Franco-Vietnamienne (AAFV, Paris), Appel de Lorient (Lorient), and others French Humanitarian associations, have already undertaken financial projects. Collectif Vietnam-dioxin founded in May 2004 is actively reinforcing the campaign. Several meetings, informative actions, conferences and exhibitions have

been taken place in Paris, Créteil, Lyon and Montpellier<sup>3</sup>. Hundred of friends and supporters have participated during those events.

**In Vietnam**, indeed, for the victims themselves lives have changed. After having struggled so long to cure their diseases both with traditional drugs or/and with western medical treatment for external uses as well as medicines for internal uses, a great number of them died. Unless they were among those who were lucky enough to get some help from outside their homes<sup>4</sup>. In connexion with their disability, a great number of victims cannot work nor do anything to live. They survive because their families took care of them. Then, some of them can get monthly financial help from the government. But they are disabled soldiers -e.g. soldiers who have lost their sight or a leg -or with reference to dioxin illness. A great and sudden misfortune arrives the same time when the young couple desires to have a child. And that child is born with repugnant deformities. Do I abort my child? Do I leave my husband? Do I end my life?

Are these concerns becoming now to affect the economical interests of Monsanto, Dow Chemical and others and burden the ones who polluted with dioxin?

How could we answer to John Trinh, editor of "Agent Orange 30 Years Later" when he has those thoughts to share with us? *On the airplane back to the US, I couldn't help thinking why there were not many Vietnamese people, in France and in the US, cared for what happened to their own people and their own country. In New Zealand, I personally went to one of the universities to invite some Vietnamese professors to come to the screening of my film. They promised but they didn't show up. The film was on a weekday at 8 p.m. In Kansas (US), people of the film festival thought my film was one of the most important stories to tell. They asked me to translate a film flyer into Vietnamese and they personally posted the*

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<sup>3</sup> Exhibition in Créteil 1-28 February 2010 on *Crossed Regards of 5 photographers* concerning Agent orange Victims in Vietnam and in Montpellier the hand manufacturing woolen carpet for the Hanoi Millenium, initiated by AD@IY

<sup>4</sup> Village of Friendship in Van Canh, Hanoi, founded by the Veterans of France, USA, UK, Japan, Germany and Vietnam and Homes built by VAVA Hanoi and all over the country in particular in Hanoi, Thai Binh, Danang, Hochiminhcity, Nhatrang, Ninh Hoà ...

*flyers at the Vietnamese restaurants to promote the film. They were surprised that no Vietnamese people came to see the film. The film was premiered on Friday at 4 p.m. along with Michael Moore's and other famous filmmakers' films. In Montpellier, there was only one Vietnamese man. In Créteil without Vietnam-dioxin group, there would be very few Vietnamese people, and so at Centre Culturel du Vietnam (Paris). I had a chance to meet with many Vietnamese people at the places I went, and on the internet. A lot of Vietnamese people talked nonsense about AO, yet they didn't want to read, to research or simply to find out what AO really was. The spraying of AO and its effects are considered by many non-vietnamese people around the world as a genocide on Viet Nam. Yet the Vietnamese people don't seem to care. If something that devastating, that harmful to your own people and your country couldn't even get your attention, let alone some compassion, then what could? What do Vietnamese parents teach their kids? What have the Vietnamese government done to educate its people? And I am not talking about farmers, peasants, homeless Vietnamese people. I am talking about students, and people with means and education. I notice that the Vietnamese people have the same attitude towards many other important issues involved in the culture and the life of their country, not just about AO. I wonder if that is why our country has always been colonized by many other countries.*

In his contribution to VAVA 2nd National Congress December 2009, Vo Dinh Kim (Coordinator of Collectif Vietnam-Dioxin) has underlined : *Nevertheless, if the French campaign during 2009 was filled with enthusiasm, it was very limited by the lack of means. So many people who participated, worked voluntarily because the campaign had no financial help. Thus, a great number of contacts could not be operational. We are lacking of synthetic information concerning the lawsuit as well as about the fundamental research on dioxin. Information about strategic actions of other countries are very irregular. So many actions remain strictly individual and very isolated, then the impact of which continue to be limited. For every campaign communication is the key component. The English*

*version of the VAVA web must give the precise up to date of the recapitulation of actions concerning the campaign. Mailing list would be helpful. We do think that the coordination must be reinforced and that VAVA would legitimate it and give the motor to go on. The EU would jointly be requested for projects on fundamental research on dioxin as well as for financial help for the Victims . But we have to identify precisely the subjects we are in favour. In spite of those difficulties, we hope that the campaign is progressing and giving good results. Then we must increase means of communication and coordination.*

Are we, Vietnamese, profoundly aware of that *Psychological Impact of Dioxin in Vietnamese Victims after the Vietnam War*? I do hope that all Participants of the Conference will spread over the support to their own victims of the Vietnam War. Peace cannot be edicted on an unpunished crime.