

ENVIRONMENTAL CONFERENCE ON  
CAMBODIA, LAOS & VIETNAM

PROJECT REVIEW

PREPARED BY  
AL BURKE, CO-ORDINATOR

# PROJECT REVIEW

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## PREFACE

What eventually came to be called the Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam took place in Stockholm, Sweden, during 26-28 July 2002. This report by the initiator and co-ordinator reviews the history of the project from its initial conception, some three years earlier, to the present date nearly two years later.

The report is intended primarily for sponsors, steering committee and subcommittee members, and conference delegates. It may also be of interest to others contemplating similar projects concerning the same or related issues; hence, the inclusion of numerous details on humdrum practical matters.

The original objectives of the conference were quite ambitious, and were only partially fulfilled. Since those objectives remain worthwhile, the obvious question is: What were the principal impediments to a satisfactory outcome, and what would be required to produce such an outcome if a fresh attempt were to be made?

In order to develop an answer to that question, it is necessary to describe the conduct of the individuals and organizations involved. That is an agreeable task with regard to the many positive contributions that were made. When it comes to those who presented various kinds of obstacle, however, there is an obvious ethical dilemma which I have tried to resolve by cloaking them in anonymity to the greatest extent possible. In a few cases, the identities of the less-than-helpful may be evident to readers who are already familiar with their behavior; apart from that, I hope and believe that their anonymity has been preserved.

In preparing the report, I have not consulted with anyone else, including the

members of the steering committee. This is mainly because a thorough account must necessarily touch upon matters which some may regard as sensitive or controversial, and there is no reason to subject others to the risk of any displeasure that may result.

My apologies to anyone who may be offended. But for such a review to be of any value for past or future reference, it must deal candidly with the problems and shortcomings of the project, in addition to its more positive aspects.

One of those shortcomings is that I had no prior experience of organizing such an event. Accordingly, the perspective of this report is that of a novice or curious amateur, with all of the limitations and perhaps some of the advantages which that implies.

More experienced practitioners of the conferential arts may find much in these pages to be trivial or self-evident. To me, however, the experience was quite new, often educational and sometimes rather strange— all of which has no doubt colored the following account. In any event, it is entirely my doing, and no one else is in any way responsible for whatever imperfections it may contain.

*Al Burke  
Stockholm  
9 June 2004*

## ORIGINS & PURPOSE

The idea for the conference developed from several years of sporadic attempts on my part to learn about the residual effects of the Vietnam War. I found it very difficult to gather the sort of information necessary for a comprehensive overview. There were bits and pieces available from a wide variety of sources, but it appeared that no systematic effort had ever been made to document and summarize all of the war's long-term consequences.\*

This struck me as oddly negligent, given the enormity of the suffering and destruction caused by a war which had given rise to the concept of ecocide and had frequently evoked the notion of genocide. After discussing the matter with several like-minded souls, I concluded that an effort should be made to clarify the issues. Among other potential benefits, it could be expected to raise awareness of the war's continuing impact, and to assist in determining priorities for remedial action.

The basic task seemed fairly straightforward—to assemble all existing knowledge about the long-term consequences of the war and organize it into a coherent whole. The assumption was that it would be possible to enlist competent experts in the relevant fields to carry out that task on a voluntary basis.

Theoretically, it could all be done via e-mail and other forms of communication, but a conference seemed desirable for several reasons. The most important of these was that theory and practice often diverge, something that is certainly true of human communication. Given that the issues involved are large and complex, and that those recruited to work together on them would not share a native tongue, the need for some measure of personal contact to iron out

the details seemed obvious. It also seemed unlikely that everyone would have equal access to the necessary communications technology or be equally at ease in using it. In addition, a conference would presumably help to generate publicity and legitimate the final outcome. These assumptions were borne out by subsequent experience.

Of course, it was obvious from the start that organizing such an event would not be easy. The lack of prior effort in this area by “proper authorities” and established organizations, despite the obvious need, testified to the controversial nature of the subject. It was fairly evident that, if the thing were to be done well or at all, it would have to be as a private initiative. But without the credibility and sheltering prestige of a reputable agency or institution, it would be difficult to raise the necessary funds and recruit the necessary expertise.

Accordingly, an essential first step was to establish credibility by assembling a confidence-inspiring steering committee of competent individuals with a suitable range of credentials and expertise. The search for likely candidates began by asking for suggestions from a variety of sources, including my own personal network, Swedish NGOs and government agencies, and relevant experts with whose published work I had become acquainted.

Of the several individuals who offered valuable advice during this early stage, one of the most helpful was Göran Eklöf, Director of International Programs for the Swedish Nature Conservation Society. An ecologist with considerable experience of Vietnam and neighboring countries, Göran would become one of the first members of the steering committee.

Another future member of the steering committee who was very helpful from the start was Wayne Dwernychuk, an environmental

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\*My personal motives are of little importance in this context. But in case the question arises, there are basically two: The first is that, as someone who was a citizen of the aggressor nation at the time of the war, I have always felt an obligation to do whatever might be within my (very limited) power to alleviate its awful consequences. The second is my conviction that, for the sake of the victims and the world at large, it is essential that the war and its devastating impact not be swept under the rug of history; this theme is developed more fully in the conference **report on ethical, legal and policy issues.**

scientist with Hatfield Consultants Ltd. in Canada, whose work on war-related problems in Vietnam is internationally recognized. I did not meet Wayne in person until the conference took place, but our communications via telephone and e-mail were quite sufficient to form the basis of a fruitful co-operation. Among other things, Hatfield photos have played a valuable role in the published materials of the conference.

In connection with the recruiting process, which got under way during the summer of year 2000, it was of course necessary to outline the goals and purpose of the project. I did so in fairly general terms, as I assumed that the members of the steering committee would wish to participate in the design of the project, and that at least some of them would have acquired useful experience in that regard.

The first task was to devise a suitable title. Early on, it had occurred to me that it would be wise to affix an environmental label to the project in order to minimize any aura of controversy that it might evoke. That consideration was especially relevant to the recruitment of scientists who, in my experience, tend to be wary of anything that might be perceived as “political”—an impression that was amply confirmed by subsequent events. An environmental emphasis would also be consistent with some of the most important and well-known issues associated with the Vietnam War, including ecocide and dioxin contamination from the use of Agent Orange.

The working title thus became “Vietnam Environmental Conference”, and the initial proposal began as follows:

Among its other effects, the Vietnam War left a legacy of environmental contamination and destruction that has yet to be thoroughly examined. The issue is important in its own right, but also for the useful knowledge it may yield regarding more recent and future events of a similar nature. The tragedy of the war and its aftermath have thus produced a sort of laboratory for the study of modern warfare and its environmental consequences. . . .

Over a quarter-century has now elapsed since the war’s formal conclusion in 1975, and over half the current population has been born after that date. This means that an entire generation has grown up in an environment exposed to the massive impact of modern warfare, and that it is now possible to study the long-term effects. Furthermore, the political climate for the discussion and investigation of such issues has become more open in recent years, suggesting that the time is now ripe for a systematic review of available knowledge on these and related issues.

In order to incorporate the widest possible range of issues, the concept of environmental impact was defined broadly, as: “Any alteration of ecosystems by physical, chemical or other means which impairs ecosystem function, endangers human health or interferes with economic activity.” It was also noted that:

The primary focus of the conference will be on the long-term environmental consequences of the Vietnam War, in terms of their interrelated effects on ecosystems, public health and economic activity in the region. The principal objectives of the conference are to:

- develop an overview of the current situation based on available knowledge
- identify priorities for future research
- outline an action plan for appropriate corrective measures, including necessary inputs.

As it turned out, the original statement of purpose remained essentially unchanged for the duration of the project. However, the main objectives were only partially fulfilled, due to a variety of factors that are discussed in the following pages.

Since at this point not a single penny of funding had been raised, the conference was tentatively and somewhat vaguely scheduled for June of 2002. It would then coincide with the 30th anniversary of the first U.N. Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, and precede by a couple of months the second follow-up scheduled for Johannesburg.

It was also too early to outline the conference program in any detail, since that was something for the yet-to-be-assembled steering committee to decide upon. In the meantime, the following general guidelines were provided:

In accordance with the stated objectives, the conference will be mainly concerned with reviewing and consolidating the current state of knowledge, rather than with detailed presentations of the latest research findings in specific areas. Such findings may, of course, be included among the reference materials to be drawn upon. But the principal task will be to discuss and finalize a comprehensive account of the war’s long-term environmental consequences.

The proposal was circulated among interested parties who were asked to endorse the project and submit statements of support. Quite a few responded favorably, and their endorsements were published along with the proposal and related materials on a conference web site that was established in the early autumn of year 2000.

Meanwhile, the quest for suitable and willing members of the steering committee continued.

## STEERING COMMITTEE

By the end of November, 2000, I had discussed the project— primarily via telephone and/or e-mail— with over one hundred individuals representing a variety of interests and expertise. Since I was the only one who had been in contact with everyone, I suggested a two-stage process by which I would select the first five members of the steering committee, who would then select the remaining members to a maximum of fifteen. I also proposed the following selection criteria:

- The committee should reflect a good mixture of interests and areas of expertise, including scientific specialties, environmental organizations, public health agencies, etc.
- Since so many different interests and fields of knowledge are potentially involved, it will probably be too cumbersome to have all of them represented on the committee. It should therefore include individuals with a good general grasp of the current state of knowledge in several related areas or fields of study.
- Since the conference will be held in Sweden, the committee should probably include a few current residents of Sweden. But given the blessings of e-mail and other telecommunications, it should be possible to include people from all over the world. As the work progresses, the committee can decide if and how often it needs to arrange meetings in the flesh.
- For obvious reasons, the committee should include a number of members from Vietnam. The perhaps not-so-obvious reason is that, as a result of their ongoing work in the country which is the focus of attention, Vietnamese experts have presumably developed a broad range of contacts with colleagues from all over the world who are interested in these issues.

These suggestions met with general approval and I proceeded to select the first five members, all of whom were natural scientists within a variety of fields, including citizens of Vietnam, Europe and North America. I did not appoint myself, partly because I did not possess any relevant or impressive credentials, and partly because I was then involved in a public-education project on related matters that was regarded in some quarters as controversial. I did, however, continue to serve as project co-ordinator.

Over the next few months, the original five selected nine additional members, following consultations with me and others. The formation of a 14-member steering committee (later expanded to 15) was announced in April of 2001. It was a diverse mix of natural and social scientists, NGO representatives and a member of the Swedish parliament.

So, now there was a steering committee with an impressive roster of names. But it was not yet clear how it was supposed to function, and there were several other difficulties to contend with. One major constraint was that expressed by the maxim, “If you want something done, find somebody who doesn’t have the time to do it.” Everyone on the steering committee was very or extremely busy with other important matters, and all of them warned that they would have little time to devote to this project. Possibly for that reason, no one was willing to act as chairperson; an attempt with rotating chairs fizzled out after the first round. The consequence was that the co-ordinator became a sort of informal chairman, as well.

Another difficulty was that the members were spread all over the globe and had never before met, all in one place— although quite a few were known to each other personally or by reputation. A meeting was tentatively planned for Hanoi in the autumn of 2001, but the necessary funds were never found. As it turned out, the entire committee never did get together, not even during the conference (more on this later).

Instead, the business of the steering committee was conducted almost entirely by e-mail. Essentially, the committee existed only in cyberspace. It functioned surprisingly well, nonetheless, but there were inevitable consequences. One was that the normal tendency for committees to be dominated by a few individuals was

accentuated. This was quite natural and, as far as I could see, not especially detrimental in this case. Those members who most frequently contributed to the flow of e-mail communication were presumably those who had the most time and the strongest motivation to do so.

The main disadvantage was that the “silent partners” were invisible, so that it was not possible to ascertain by means of body language if their silence implied consent or something else. My repeated urgings that everyone respond in at least some minimal way to the various comments and proposals were ignored. I never did find out why; but I suspect there were a variety of reasons for this lack of participation.

These circumstances indicated the need for active and decisive co-ordination. I informed the steering committee that I was quite prepared to stand aside if they could find someone else more capable. But apparently they could not, and I was kept on. One influential member reasoned that, “It seems inevitable to me that Al Burke will have to remain as our very active substantive ‘Coordinator’ (i.e., coordinating in the sense of performing our main guidance and leadership).”

I was at first wary of playing such a dominant role, for the reasons noted in the following response to a request for my views on a question that arose at an early stage: “I am reluctant to offer my opinion, because I feel that it is the proper role of the ‘co-ordinator’— which is what I am supposed to be— to serve the committee, rather than to participate in its decision-making. There is the added problem that, since the project started at my initiative and I have carried out most of the chores to date, I could easily end up taking over the whole thing out of sheer inertia. That might be convenient (for everyone but me) in the short run. But in the long run, it could lead to alienation, and perhaps some resentment.”

But that is essentially what happened, nevertheless. As time wore on, it became evident that not much was going to get done unless I continued to perform most or all of the chores, offer most of the suggestions and make most of the decisions. Gradually, by default, the steering committee became more of an advisory committee with an implicit power of veto. This was certainly efficient from the standpoint of administration, and most of the committee seemed content with the results.

But, alas, my premonitions of alienation and resentment were at least partially fulfilled. By the time it was all over, three members of the steering committee had resigned, including the one who had urged me to provide the “main guidance and leadership”, all for very perplexing reasons. Another committee member went behind my back to form a little coalition on one delicate matter, rather than discuss the problem openly— an alternative to which there was, as far as I am aware, no obstacle.

Despite such distractions, which are discussed in greater detail below, a sizeable majority of the steering committee seemed willing to tolerate my efforts, and a few were strongly supportive. So the negative and positive forces tended to balance out each other.

Obviously, it would have been preferable to maintain a more cohesive atmosphere. But given the circumstances of the committee’s formation and operation, tensions of the sort that developed were probably inevitable. In addition, a few issues emerged which tended to divide the steering committee into silently opposing factions. One was the question of whether or not to invite the participation of a well-known scientist who had conducted some useful research in Vietnam, but whose habitually obnoxious behavior had alienated numerous colleagues, and had also caused some problems for the Vietnamese. Another was the question of how, or even whether, to address the overwhelming responsibility of the United States for the war and its consequences.

Often underlying these tensions were apparent concerns about the implications of the conference for personal careers and reputations. I got the impression that some of those who had signed on to the project out of sympathy with its purpose soon began to have second thoughts about the wisdom of doing so. A few of the scientists were clearly worried that the final results might be regarded as scientifically inferior and/or contaminated with political overtones. At least one of the NGO representatives appeared to be anxious about the risk of offending current and potential sources of funding for his own projects, and was especially eager to avoid any critical reference to the United States.

These and similar issues were never thrashed out by the committee, which is hardly surprising. It is difficult enough for people who know each other to deal effectively with such

matters, even when they can gather together and look each other in the eye. To do so via e-mail in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual group whose members have yet to meet in person would have been a tricky business, to say the least. I suspect that everyone on the committee was at some level aware of the difficulty, even though it was never openly discussed.

The unspoken solution was for me to juggle the opposing viewpoints as best I could. In some cases, it was necessary to favor one over the other— e.g. by disinviting the obnoxious scientist— and I did not always succeed in placating the disappointed faction. It was within such contexts that resignations and other unpleasantness tended to occur.

Problems of this sort might well have been

avoided if it had been possible for all of us to meet at least once in order to become acquainted, thoroughly discuss the project and develop a foundation of trust. The lack of financing for such a meeting was a major impediment to the committee's smooth function.

Otherwise, the steering committee probably functioned as well as could be expected under the circumstances. It served its primary purpose of lending credibility to the project, and several of the members offered valuable advice and other assistance. For my part, the committee's existence provided an opportunity to become acquainted with a number of highly competent and dedicated individuals from various parts of the world whom I quickly learned to admire and respect.

## ORGANIZATION & ADMINISTRATION

One of the first questions I was asked by the funding officer at a Nordic foreign-aid agency was, “How many staff people do you have working in the project office?” When I laughed and told him that there was neither an office nor anyone else to staff it— that such resources awaited the granting of adequate funds— he seemed quite perplexed and clearly doubtful that anything would ever become of such an initiative.

The sad fact is that my little computer and I turned out to comprise virtually the entire organization and administration of the project. That was certainly not by choice or expectation. With what proved to be preposterous optimism, I had assumed that it would be a relatively easy matter to enlist a number of eager volunteers to help out with the preparations. Sweden was, after all, the Western country that had demonstrated the most outspoken opposition to the Vietnam War and, despite strong pressure from the United States to refrain from doing so, had provided continuous support afterward. Surely, I reasoned, there must be many veterans of the anti-war movement and perhaps a number of younger people who would welcome the opportunity provided by the conference to concretely express their solidarity with the peoples of Indochina.

At first, that assumption seemed to be confirmed. An announcement of the planned event was greeted with a number of favorable responses. The most enthusiastic was from the head of an important coalition of peace groups who seemed captivated by the theme and by its resonance with both the 1972 Stockholm Conference and the follow-up event to be held in Johannesburg. Subsequently, there were one or two encouraging messages from that quarter— but never any action. In the end, not a single Swedish peace, solidarity or environmental organization participated in the conference or its preparation, despite numerous expressions of sympathy with its purpose.

After it became painfully apparent that no help would be forthcoming from those ostensibly self-evident sources, I called a series of public meetings that were fairly well-attended by Swedish standards. Again, there was much initial enthusiasm, but little activity to match. A few individuals did a few small things— e.g.

contact a potential subcommittee member or dig up an item of information. These were useful gestures, to be sure; but they were isolated instances that could be counted on the fingers of one hand. I could find no one who was able or willing to sustain a commitment of so much as ten minutes a week— although a few were kind enough to let me know that they could do a much better job of organizing the conference than I. Unfortunately, they were apparently not at liberty to take over, or even to assist.

Eventually, I came to the reluctant conclusion that my limited time could be used more efficiently by doing everything myself than by wasting it on a fruitless and dispiriting quest for helping hands. Another and in some ways greater problem was that a few individuals did promise to perform various tasks, but then failed to do so— without offering any notice or explanation.

Oddly enough, it was much, much easier to enlist the participation of people halfway around the world whom I had never met, other than by e-mail or telephone, than in my own backyard. The contrast was striking. (More on the problem of Swedish indifference below, under “Diverse Difficulties”.)

The inevitable consequence of all this was that some important tasks were performed inadequately or not at all. I never did find the time, for example, to conduct a proper publicity campaign. The one advantage of my solitary labor was that of continuity: To the extent that I was able to keep all the details straight in my head or on paper, the risk of duplication, omission, etc. was minimized.

One procedural question which needed to be resolved was that of the conference’s formal auspices: Some legitimate organization would have to assume responsibility for the legal and financial obligations. I had originally enter-

tained the hope that one of the Swedish NGOs active in Vietnam would be willing to serve in that capacity. The idea was that any funds eventually raised would be turned over to the sponsoring organization, which would then administer the conference as a special project. But given the pervasive lack of interest noted above and the modest level of funding ultimately provided, that option was not available.

The fall-back solution was to revive a dormant non-profit organization, *Föreningen Levande Framtid* ("Living Future Society") of which I was the sole remaining member. A group of sympathetic friends and acquaintances stepped in to form a reconstituted board of directors, which sufficed to provide a legitimate framework for the project's implementation. It was not a very impressive enterprise, to be sure; but it was a legally constituted non-profit organization and served its purpose well enough.

The project got a major organizational boost in the spring of 2002, when I visited Hanoi for two weeks to discuss preparations for the conference with government officials, members of subcommittees and the steering committee, and a number of prospective delegates.

My visit was facilitated by superb co-operation and support from Amb. Nguyen Van Nam, then based in Stockholm as Vietnam's representative in the Nordic countries. Once there, I received indispensable assistance from two members of the steering committee, Lady Borton and Chuck Searcy, both U.S. citizens with many years' experience as NGO field representatives in Vietnam (see Appendix F for background information on all committee members). Their knowledge of Vietnamese culture and language, the extensive networks of personal contacts which they had built up, and the esteem in which they were held by the Vietnamese people and government were crucial to whatever success the project ultimately achieved.

Through the good offices of Lady Borton and Chuck Searcy, I was able to meet a number of key Vietnamese citizens and officials whose co-operation was essential. One of the most impressive was Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Toan, Hanoi's foremost OB/GYN professor and a well-known writer on issues of women's health. Theoretically retired, but displaying the energy and enthusiasm of a 25-year-old, Dr. Toan described the purpose and method of the conference better than I could. After our meeting, she went off to persuade the legendary General Giap—an old family friend under whom Dr. Toan's husband had served as second-in-command at Dien Bien Phu—to support the project, which he apparently did. Those who are familiar with Vietnamese society understand that it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of General Giap's endorsement.

Another fruitful meeting was with the Vietnam Red Cross whose president, Prof. Nguyen Trong

Nhan, expressed his enthusiasm for the project and arranged a meeting with another legendary figure—Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh, then Vietnam's Vice President and Chairperson of the Agent Orange Victims Fund. She granted Chuck Searcy, Lady Borton and myself an hour of her time, and concluded by saying: "Tell me what you need, and I will do my best to see that you get it."

The support of the government—essential for the participation and co-operation of Vietnamese experts—was thus secured. Another important development was that the Vietnamese Red Cross under the leadership of Prof. Nhan assumed responsibility for organizing the Vietnamese delegation to the conference. This was a very meaningful sponsorship within the context of Vietnamese society. During the months leading up to the conference, I worked closely via e-mail with Red Cross officials, Lady Borton and Chuck Searcy in selecting the delegates and arranging transportation to Sweden. Ms. Mac Thi Hoa of the Red Cross handled most of the practical details with great efficiency, to my enormous gratitude and relief.

I also had the opportunity to discuss the project with many other participants, including Prof. Vo Quy of the steering committee, Dr. Hoang Trong Quynh of the public health subcommittee and Mr. Phung Tuu Boi of the ecosystems subcommittee. In addition to assuming a crucial responsibility for the conference report on public health (see below).

Dr. Quynh kindly served as a patient guide and interpreter during much of my visit—and even as my physician, by curing me of a nasty intestinal infection.

These are just a few of the many helpful individuals I had the privilege of meeting during those two weeks in Hanoi, most of them Vietnamese but also several Western NGO representatives. It would require a very large space to list them all and note their contributions; and I fear that I might inadvertently neglect someone if I tried to devise such a list.

Suffice it to say that the level of interest and activity was just the opposite of the near-total indifference that I had experienced in Sweden. That was a very pleasant and encouraging change, although it was to be expected that those who were directly affected by the war would be more anxious to document its consequences than were distant observers, however sympathetic.

But in one respect, the strong response was also dismaying: That a poorly funded private initiative whose outcome was then uncertain could be greeted with such hopeful enthusiasm was a clear indication of how shamefully the needs of Vietnam—and, by implication, those of Cambodia and Laos, as well—had been neglected by the world community since the end of the military war.

## FINANCING

At a fairly early stage, I prepared a preliminary budget that was based on the experience of previous conferences on similar themes. The total figure of slightly over USD 300,000 provided for the expenses of fifty delegates, of which at least half were to come from Indochina, as well as publication of the conference proceedings in book form, staff salaries, audio-visual materials, press kits and several other useful things that never came to pass.

In the end, less than one-fourth of that “dream budget” materialized. Total funding came to approximately USD 75,000. Of that amount, roughly one-third did not turn up until the last few weeks before the conference, and was thus unavailable for planning purposes. The working budget was actually about USD 50,000, necessitating a drastic lowering of the original ambition level.

The enormous gap between the preliminary budget and the final result is testimony to my ineptitude as a fund-raiser, and to the absence of anyone else to take up the slack. I had no prior experience of raising funds for such a project, nor any useful contacts among likely sources. But I assumed—correctly, as it turned out—that several members of the steering committee did have such experience and contacts. Indeed, at least one member from the United States had been recommended precisely because he was reputed to be a wizard at fund-raising.

Unfortunately, very little of the committee’s collective competence in this area was applied to this particular project. For example, I asked one Swedish member to make a single, introductory phone call to a potential source that he was eminently more qualified than I to approach. Weeks and months passed, but he never did get around to making that phone call. In the end, he suggested that it was a poor strategy on my part to initiate such a project without first having raised the necessary funds. When I attempted to remind him of the connection between formation of the steering committee and the fund-raising process, he simply repeated that it was a mistake not to have got the money up front. That style of reasoning certainly gave me something to think about.

When I asked the U.S. fund-raising wizard to present the conference proposal to potential sponsors in North America, he declined. He recommended, instead, that I find the necessary funds in Europe—which, of course, I was already trying to do. I later learned that he might have been able to assist even in that regard. Upon arriving for the conference, he mentioned in passing that one purpose of his visit to Sweden was to lobby a government official of long and fruitful acquaintance for one of his own projects. This individual turned out to be the head of a crucially important department to which I had, at the expense of much time and effort, unsuccessfully applied for conference funding. I had never been granted an opportunity to meet this key figure, and it had apparently never occurred to his old acquaintance and my presumptive collaborator to mention the conference to him—not until it was already in progress, that is.

This is perhaps the most disheartening illustration of the steering committee’s general detachment from the problem of financing. I am not certain of the reasons for that lack of involvement, but several plausible explanations come to mind. The most obvious is that fund-raising tends to be a laborious, time-consuming and often frustrating activity. I have yet to meet anyone who rejects an opportunity to avoid it.

Another possible explanation is that most members of the subcommittee were involved in other worthwhile projects that also needed to be financed. Devoting effort and expending “contact capital” on behalf of this one might well have jeopardized the success of others, especially since the range and depth of funding sources for such purposes appears to be quite limited. In other words, there may have been a

built-in conflict of interest with regard to fund-raising. If so, the conflict was certainly not resolved in favor of this project.

A third likely factor has been previously mentioned, i.e. a certain lack of cohesion. Quite possibly due to the functional constraints on the steering committee, we did not succeed in developing a collegial atmosphere based on a sense of mutual and equal commitment. Instead, there was a tendency throughout to regard the conference as basically my responsibility. It was made quite clear that, having initiated the thing, it was up to me to make it happen. That tendency was no doubt strengthened by the uncertainty surrounding the project from the start, with many on the steering committee adopting a wait-and-see attitude that applied not only to fund-raising, but to participation in general.

All of this is very human and very understandable. It must also be stressed that no one was under any obligation to help out with the fund-raising or anything else, as previously explained (see above, "Steering Committee"). Merely by virtue of its existence, the committee made an essential contribution; without it, not even the modest level of funding eventually provided would have been possible.

There were also some helpful individual efforts, especially after the worst uncertainty was dispelled by setting a definite date for the conference. One member of the steering committee provided useful advice on the complicated process of applying for an important government grant. Another got me started on a similar application to a major foreign-aid agency. Alas, those two applications were denied.

But a third committee member did succeed with an intensive last-minute effort to dig up sufficient funds to increase the number of delegates from Indochina. This was a major contribution which greatly increased the value of the conference.

As noted, however, most such efforts were made rather late in the game. First, it was necessary to secure enough funding to ensure that the conference would definitely take place. As far as I could determine, there were three main categories of potential sources: national foreign-aid agencies; NGOs active in Indochina; and charitable trusts and foundations.

As regards the foreign-aid agencies, the most likely place to start was with the Nordic

countries, and not only because the conference would be taking place in one of them. With Sweden in the lead, the four major Nordic countries have been among the most consistent and reliable providers of aid to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. If none of them could be persuaded to support the conference, it was highly unlikely that any other country would do so.

Despite the investment of many hours, a great deal of energy and a tidy little sum of money, not a single penny of support was supplied to the conference by any of the four Nordic countries. The scepticism of a key official at one foreign-aid agency has already been noted (see above, "Organization & Administration"). At another Nordic agency, no one ever found the time to meet me or even speak to me by telephone, despite repeated attempts. In Hanoi, the field officer of a third informed me with admirable candor that the (by Nordic standards) conservative government then ruling that country would never support such a project.

A field officer of the fourth Nordic country's foreign-aid agency reacted with something like panic to the mere hint of support for such a project. Before the steering committee had even been formed, and long before any grant proposal was submitted, this official was referred to the conference web site by a colleague in another department—for no more insidious purpose than to inform him of a project concerned with matters that clearly fell within his sphere of responsibility.

The innocent informant received a weird response from the field officer, in which he explained that the agency had already discussed the project and had decided not to support it. When I subsequently inquired how it was possible to deny support to a project before it had even been presented and before any application had been made, I received an even weirder response full of references to agency policy and proper procedure. "To base an initial decision on support at this stage, without any concrete information other than a reference to a web site is quite simply impossible," he wrote, along with much else that was equally self-evident and, in this context, irrelevant.

It was a very strange business. But it was fairly evident that an early warning flag had been hoisted over the project at this particular agency. It thus came as no surprise when my application, after it was finally submitted over

a year later, was denied. I later discovered by chance that the official who made the final decision was someone whom I had never been granted the privilege of meeting. All the formal niceties of the application process had been observed; but I never got past the secretary, so to speak.

Of course, I also informed the relevant U.N. agencies, but their responses only confirmed what was already known from other sources—that the organization was under the thumb of the United States, and therefore could not associate itself with any project that would shed light on the consequences of U.S. aggression in Indochina. One sympathetic official in the Hanoi office of a key U.N. agency told me that its operations in Vietnam were dominated by U.S. right-wingers who routinely obstructed proposals to deal with war-related problems.

Another Hanoi-based official in a different U.N. agency said that his superiors were interested in the conference, but were reluctant to get involved because they felt that the government of Vietnam disapproved of anything that might irritate the United States. When I related this argument in general terms (i.e. without naming names) to a highly-placed Vietnamese official, he laughed out loud and said, “They are just saying that as an excuse to hide behind!”

So much for the United Nations and the foreign-aid agencies of the Nordic countries. My attempts to enlist support from humanitarian organizations and other NGOs active in Vietnam were no more successful. Naturally, I contacted all the major international organizations with branches in Sweden. One was totally uninterested, even though it conducted programs in Vietnam that were directly related to the central issues of the conference. Another toyed with the idea of sponsoring one delegate, but never did.

A third well-known humanitarian organization seemed for awhile to seriously consider the sponsorship of several delegates. But those plans ran afoul of a disagreement with its sister organization in Vietnam, from which the delegates in question were to be selected. The nub of the disagreement was whether the necessary funds should be debited to existing programmes, or be treated as a separate budget item. We all spent many hours trying to settle that dispute; but for reasons that remain a mystery to me, the problem was never resolved.

## CONFERENCE SPONSORS

Oxfam America  
 A. & N. Ferguson Charitable Trust  
 Vereinigung Schweiz-Vietnam  
 NOVIB (Oxfam Netherlands)  
 Sea Otter Productions  
 Stiftung Umwerteilen  
 Red Cross of Switzerland  
 American Friends Service Committee  
 Green Cross of Switzerland  
 Ford Foundation

In the end, the only humanitarian organizations that contributed to the conference were the national Red Cross societies of Norway and Switzerland, both of which sponsored delegates in response to an appeal issued to the global Red Cross “community” by the Red Cross of Vietnam. I believe that Anjuska Weil of the Swiss-Vietnam Association played a key role in securing the assistance of the Swiss Red Cross.

As I had no contacts among nor experience of foundations and charitable trusts, I was forced to apply a modified shotgun approach in the quest for funding from that sector. From a variety of sources, including standard reference works on foundations and the like, I compiled a list of some 425 prospective donors in Europe, North America, Japan and Australasia. To these I sent via regular mail the project proposal and preliminary budget, along with a request for application forms and instructions in the event of any interest. By this time, the steering committee had been formed and we had accumulated a fairly impressive collection of endorsements, details of which were also enclosed with the initial enquiry.

I received just under one hundred replies, over 95 percent of which regretted to inform me that it was a standard policy never to support conferences of any kind. A grand total of four respondents expressed interest and invited formal applications, three of which were approved by: Stiftung Umwerteilen in Germany, the Allan & Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust in England, and the Swiss-Vietnam Association.

In short, the overall success rate for this particular “campaign” was less than one per cent.

During the final weeks before the conference, additional funding for delegate expenses was provided by the American Friends Service Committee and the Hanoi office of the Ford Foundation, thanks to the above-noted efforts of steering committee members. Green Cross of Switzerland also contributed delegate funds, as an indirect consequence of my earlier contacts with the international headquarters on another matter.

The single largest grant “walked in the door” when the Director of Oxfam America’s Southeast Asia Regional Office contacted me with an offer of support in August of 2001, after having seen the conference web site. This led, in turn, to a contribution from Oxfam Netherlands, as well. Thus, it would appear that my most productive fund-raising activity was to construct the web site.

In any event, it was the early and sizeable grants from the Ferguson Trust and Oxfam America which enabled me to make a firm commitment to holding the conference. This is in no way to diminish the value of the other contributions that were made; every penny was very useful and much appreciated. But without the substantial early commitments of the Ferguson Trust and Oxfam America, there would have been no financial basis on which to confirm the conference dates and, most likely, no conference.

Theoretically, it might have been possible to wait until additional funds had been accumu-

lated. In practice, however, that was not a promising alternative, partly because it was far from certain that significantly larger amounts could have been found by the mere application of more time and effort. The most likely prospects had already been solicited, and there was the question of who would expend the necessary time and effort. My own modest resources were nearly exhausted after a year of devoting most of my time to the project.

It was simply impossible for me to take off another year and, as indicated, no one else had shown any particular interest in raising funds for the project. Furthermore, several members of the steering committee had expressed growing impatience for a firm date to be set. The scientists, in particular, seemed to find the uncertainty difficult to endure. One of them actually resigned as a result, but relented at the urging of his colleagues on the committee. (He would subsequently resign again, for very peculiar reasons, just four days before the start of the conference.)

There was a clear risk that the steering committee would disintegrate if the uncertainty continued for another half-year or more. It would also have been difficult to sustain the enthusiasm of others who had expressed various kinds of interest, including members of the subcommittees. Thus, there was strong and mounting pressure to set a definite date, and there turned out to be a bonus: As previously explained, making that commitment had the effect of generating additional funds—roughly one-third of the final amount.

## SUBCOMMITTEES

The main purpose of the planned conference was not to present recent findings and theoretical developments, but to summarize and consolidate existing knowledge regarding the long-term consequences of the Vietnam War. In that sense, it had more in common with the compilation of an encyclopedia than with a typical scientific conference.

The assumption was that the relevant knowledge was possessed by experts in various fields who would be willing to co-operate with each other to produce the conference reports in four main areas: ecosystems; public health; economic and social impacts; and ethical, legal and policy issues.

According to the original proposal: "In addition, a special committee— including at least one representative from each of the four subcommittees— will be formed to develop a model of the Vietnam War's interrelated effects on ecosystems, public health and the economy." However, we never got that far (see below).

It was agreed that I would select the four subcommittee co-ordinators, who would in turn select four colleagues with whom to work on the report. Each subcommittee was free to decide upon its own working procedure, but I did suggest some guidelines which were approved in principle by the steering committee (see "Subcommittee Guidelines", p. 13).

From the formal announcement of the conference dates, the lead time was roughly half a year, which some regarded as impossibly brief. But given the nature of the task and sufficient expertise, I was fairly certain that it would be possible to achieve the "first step in what presumably must be an ongoing process", as suggested in the subcommittee guidelines. I had myself carried out tasks of a similar nature within my own few areas of expertise, with considerably tighter deadlines.

### Ecosystems

My optimistic assumption was confirmed by the ecosystems subcommittee which, under the efficient leadership of Arthur H. Westing, followed the suggested procedure almost exactly. The only deviations were that just one draft was published prior to the conference— not two, as

recommended— and no reference list was published for comment and revision. Neither of these omissions affected the final result to any significant degree.

The smooth functioning of the ecosystems subcommittee demonstrated that the basic procedure was feasible. However, things did not go so smoothly with the other three subcommittees.

For one thing, it proved surprisingly difficult to persuade qualified individuals to serve as the subcommittee co-ordinators; in the end, I was forced to perform that function for all three. It proved no less difficult to recruit the ordinary members, with dozens of telephone conversations and volumes of e-mail correspondence producing scant results.

Not unexpectedly, many of those I contacted said they were too busy with more urgent matters. Others declined to participate because they felt there was too much politics involved. In most cases, it was the perceived or anticipated displeasure of the U.S. government and its allies that was the source of greatest concern. But a few complained that the Vietnamese government was in the habit of meddling in the scientific process: "They are all politicians," said one European scientist of colleagues in Vietnam, based on personal experience of field research in that country.

My general impression from these exchanges was that concerns about professional reputations and future access to research funding were, in most cases, regarded as more important than the task at hand. If so, the participation of the experts who did agree to serve on the subcommittees was all the more admirable.

Somewhat to my surprise, the majority of those I contacted found it difficult to grasp the concept of the subcommittee process. For many, it was a novel and therefore questionable way

*(continued on page 14. . .)*

## SUBCOMMITTEE GUIDELINES

As previously noted, it is up to each subcommittee to devise its own working procedures. But for whatever they are worth, the following general guidelines are offered for consideration.

The basic tasks of the subcommittees are implicit in the stated objectives of the conference, which are to:

- develop an overview of the current situation based on available knowledge
- identify priorities for future research
- outline an action plan for appropriate corrective measures, including necessary inputs.

Given the tight deadline we are facing, it is clearly not possible to do all that with complete thoroughness or perfection. But it would probably not be much easier even if we had a year or two at our disposal. It is a large and complex undertaking.

Accordingly, the best we can hope to achieve is a first step in what presumably must be an ongoing process in which the issues are further clarified and developed. However, it is a necessary first step which could well turn out to be quite useful.

The assumption is that most of the work will have been completed prior to the actual conference, via the medium of the Internet. The basic steps of the procedure might be as follows:

1. Communicating via e-mail, the subcommittee develops an initial list of issues to be addressed.
2. This initial set of issues is published on our web site for comments and suggestions.
3. With the help of this feedback, the subcommittee produces the first draft of its report, which is then published for comments and suggestions.

4. A reference list is presented and further developed by the same procedure.
5. The second draft is published for additional comments and suggestions.
6. The final draft is completed following discussions at the conference.

Please note that no research or groundbreaking theoretical work is required. It is “simply” a matter of organizing on paper what is already known and, perhaps equally or more important, what is *not* known. Conclusions regarding research priorities and corrective measures can then be based on the current state of knowledge. The editing and writing is something that I can assist with, if time and energy should turn out to be in short supply.

Such a procedure would make it possible to draw upon relevant expertise all over the world. I am fairly certain that it can be done, given the experience of the project to date. Despite a plethora of problems, we have come quite a long way almost entirely by means of the Internet. In some ways, it is more efficient than assembling people physically in one place, where a great deal of time may be spent on non-essentials or on lectures and discussions which are not always especially enlightening.

The purpose of the conference in July would thus be to put the finishing touches on the final report, and to provide concrete substance to the enterprise. Its function will likely be more symbolic than substantive—but that is a crucial function. The program should probably be left open until we see what the various subcommittees come up with. In any event, I hope to ensure that it provides ample opportunity for informal meetings and discussions.

— *Memo from co-ordinator to steering committee, 25 February 2002*

(continued from page 12)

of doing things. There was also some evident nervousness about the broad scope of the conference.

A possible explanation of all this was suggested to me by one of the more helpful members of the steering committee: "It has been my experience that scientists, in general, are more likely to err on the side of a conservative approach, as opposed to taking a step into the unknown without having a firm empirical base. Sometimes we are not too adept at abstract thinking, or at processing ideas that cannot be corroborated with quantitative data."

Whatever the factors involved, the process of forming the remaining three subcommittees and co-ordinating their activities turned out to be much more laborious, time-consuming and complicated than I had imagined.

### Public Health

The public health subcommittee, for example, got off to shaky start. A member of the steering committee had agreed in December of 2001 to serve as its co-ordinator. But in late March of 2002, he suddenly resigned from the entire project. The reasons he cited— e.g. that the conference would not be "open"— did not make much sense and, when I requested further explanation, he came up with new ones. The only thing that became clear to me was that he was determined to drop out, for reasons that he would not or could not explain.

So, with just four months remaining to the conference and not an inch of progress having been made on the public health report, it was a matter of some urgency to put together a subcommittee and get to work. At this point, Dr. Hoang Trong Quynh came to the rescue. I had corresponded with Dr. Quynh since the project was announced the year before; he had provided valuable information and advice about the conference in general, and public health issues in particular. I had assumed that he would be selected for the subcommittee by the now-departed co-ordinator, so it was natural to turn to him in this hour of need.

To my great relief, Dr. Quynh assumed the primary responsibility for preparing the first draft of the report. He was also of great help in filling out the subcommittee to include three members from Vietnam, one from Australia and

one from England. The first draft was not quite ready for publication prior to the conference. But we did manage to publish a set of issues, along with an abstract prepared by Dr. Barry Noller, the Australian on the subcommittee.

Dr. Quynh's first draft served as the basis of further discussion during the conference, at which time a sixth member was added to the subcommittee. This was Dr. John Constable from the United States, who attended the conference at very short notice and at his own expense. It was very fortunate that he did so, as the two other Western scientists were not able to attend.

There was general agreement on most of the issues reviewed in Dr. Quynh's draft. But there was an occasionally heated discussion on the subject of Agent Orange and dioxin poisoning. By all accounts, that discussion was very fruitful, with an outcome that seemed to satisfy everyone involved (for details, see "Conference" section below).

Following some final adjustments by doctors Quynh and Constable, the revised document was published on the web site several weeks after the conference. Since no significant objections have been raised, and the report's conclusions have been confirmed by subsequent international conferences on the same and related matters, no further revision has been necessary.

### Ethical, Legal & Policy Issues

The subcommittee on ethical, legal and policy issues seemed at first to get off to a more promising start. In January of 2002, I was referred to a highly qualified Swede who expressed an eagerness to co-ordinate the subcommittee. But after several weeks, there was no sign of any progress and the gentleman in question declined to answer my telephone and e-mail messages.

Reluctantly, I started recruiting the subcommittee members, myself, hoping that a suitable and reliable co-ordinator would turn up in the process. By the end of March, I had managed to assemble a distinguished subcommittee, but could not persuade anyone to assume the role of co-ordinator. Nor did most of the members have enough free time to serve in other than an advisory capacity. The one exception was Prof. Kenji Urata who prepared a useful memorandum on certain aspects of international law.

I thus became, once again by default, the subcommittee's co-ordinator, researcher and writer. But the other members provided invaluable assistance by critically reviewing the various drafts of the report; their corrections and suggestions greatly enhanced the accuracy and overall quality of the final product. Equally valuable was the significant weight that their names and reputations added to the report's credibility.

As time was short and I was rather busy with other preparations, the first draft of the ethics/law/policy report was not published until a few days before the conference. It was not very thorough and not very well-organized, but it did serve as a point of departure for discussion during the conference.

That discussion was often quite lively, as the issues involved are among the most controversial of the entire project. They are summarized in my post-conference memo to the subcommittee, which was approved by the other members and served as a basis for revision (see Appendix A).

Due to other obligations associated with the conference and the need to start making a living again, I was not able to resume work on the report until early 2003. As there was quite a lot of research remaining to be done, especially with regard to the section on legal issues, it took me the better part of that year to complete the final version which was published on the conference web site in late October of 2003.

### **Economic & Social Issues**

In attempting to assemble a subcommittee on economic and social issues, I spent more time with less result than for any of the other three. The search for suitable members continued until just a few days before the conference, by which time five economists had agreed to serve—two from Vietnam and one each from Australia, England and Sweden.

The expectation level was not very high, as I explained in a memo to the subcommittee: "No one is expecting you to produce a standard reference work or a treatise suitable for publication in a professional journal. It has been my impression from the outset that this particular area has been relatively unexplored—

an impression that has since been confirmed. If you do nothing more than define the problem and offer some suggestions as to how it could be studied, that would be a valuable contribution."

This seemed to be an attainable objective—certainly no one suggested otherwise. But work never really got started. No draft of any kind was produced prior to the conference, and only one member of the subcommittee attended. This economist led a well-attended workshop; but no publishable document resulted. Nor was any effort made to activate the subcommittee after the conference; so it just faded away without anything having been accomplished.

I have no idea why it was not possible to at least "define the problem and offer some suggestions as to how it could be studied". It is a task which, one would assume, is well within the capacity of any competent professional—and there was no doubt of the subcommittee's competence.

The failure to produce any kind of report on economic and social issues was a major shortcoming, of course. That, in combination with the modest financial and other resources available to the project, explains why no attempt was made to establish a special committee to develop an integrated model of all long-term consequences of the war. In those two respects, everything remains to be done.

The three reports that were produced have received a good deal of praise, and only a few minor criticisms. However, they are far from exhaustive treatments of the issues addressed. Among other things, it remains unclear whether certain post-war developments are consequences of the war or of other factors. That lack of clarity is, in turn, related to political sensitivities surrounding some issues, and to difficult methodological problems that require greater attention.

In short, the original objectives of the subcommittee process were only partially fulfilled. With the possible exception of the report on ethical, legal and policy issues, it is probably best to view the work of the three functioning subcommittees as an initial contribution to a larger and more systematic process that has yet to take place.

## DIVERSE DIFFICULTIES

Naturally, implementation of the project was complicated by a number of difficulties that emerged along the way. Some were probably common to all such enterprises, others specific to this one. But I find it impossible to distinguish between the unique and the universal in this case, nor do I have any means of assessing the separate or combined effects on the end result. Accordingly and for whatever it's worth, I will merely review some of the more troublesome problems that arose.

### Swedish indifference

As previously noted, there was a near-total absence of support for the project in Sweden. Most surprising and dismaying was the lack of interest among NGOs that are directly involved in efforts to alleviate the long-term consequences of the war in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The lack of response from environmental and peace groups was also a disappointment, to say the least.

This general passivity was all the more curious, given numerous strong expressions of agreement with the purpose and goals of the conference. I doubt that talk has ever been cheaper in Sweden than in relation to this project. I can only speculate on the reasons for this, but some are fairly plausible.

One is that the Vietnam War and the suffering of its victims is "old news" which has been superseded by more recent and recently publicized disasters, including those in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. The global market in death, suffering and misery is vast, and the competition for resources and attention is correspondingly tough.

It may be fairly easy to grasp, at an intellectual level, that people are still suffering and dying as a consequence of a war that officially ended several decades ago. But without direct personal experience of that reality, or daily reminders by TV and other media, it is evidently difficult to establish activating links between the brain and the heart.

By way of contrast, Swedes turned out in record numbers to protest the start of the most recent U.S. war against Iraq. The organizers of that demonstration were no doubt aided by the preceding months of intense public debate and a worldwide protest movement, which in

Europe was strengthened by the unusually strong opposition of the French and German governments.

It is difficult to compete for attention against such currently hot issues. That difficulty is compounded by the lack of any systematic effort to maintain knowledge and awareness of the Vietnam War and its consequences. There is a small remnant of a solidarity organization that played an important role in the Swedish and international anti-war movements. But its numbers and activity level have sharply declined since the shooting stopped—the usual fate of such organizations.

In any event, there has been no persistent effort to educate the Swedish public about the long-term consequences of the Vietnam War. Instead, the information vacuum has been filled by the propaganda of the United States and its many allies in Sweden, aided by the customary subservience, ignorance and indolence of the mainstream press (see for example "Suffering Americans" at: [www.nnn.se/disinfo/vithus.pdf](http://www.nnn.se/disinfo/vithus.pdf)).

Another likely factor is that Sweden has experienced the same trend that is evident elsewhere, namely a decline in traditional volunteerism. That trend is reflected in the sharply reduced membership rolls of peace and environmental organizations, which in turn helps to explain their lack of interest in the conference. With fewer members and membership fees, such organizations are hard-pressed to sustain existing programs, let alone support the initiatives of others.

Many individuals are still active in voluntary organizations. But in keeping with the neo-liberal spirit of the times, there has been an increasing tendency to devote spare time and energy to local activities of a more self-interested

nature. Of course, there are plenty of exceptions, and occasional large-scale mobilizations such as that against the latest U.S. war of aggression. But the general trend of recent years has been toward less involvement in activities such as the Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

These are factors that seem to apply in all or most western countries. Others are related to more specifically Swedish behavioral patterns.

With the usual reservations for exceptions and individual variations, my experience has tended to confirm the stereotype that Swedes have of themselves— i.e. as exceptionally slow to make up their minds and lurch into action. This is seldom noticeable among Swedes abroad, possibly due to the stimulation of travel and the statistical deviance of travelers. On their home ground, however, Swedes seem— to a relative newcomer like myself, at least— to be snugly wrapped in a cloak of inertia.

Another and perhaps related trait that is not very well-suited to volunteerism is a tendency to regard personal commitments as merely conditional. It has been my sad and repeated experience that a promise from a Swede to perform a voluntary task, no matter how small or simple, is very likely to be worthless. In connection with the environmental conference, it got to the point where, if someone promised to help out, I found it safest to assume that it would never happen. With few exceptions, that expectation was sadly fulfilled.

The tendency to treat commitments lightly is strengthened by a curious Swedish norm which protects shirkers from any repercussions. Even to remind someone that he or she has failed to keep a promise is regarded as a social sin, one that typically earns a (usually) mild reprimand. In other words, it is permitted to dishonor a commitment, but it is not permitted to criticize or even remark upon such behavior.

This norm appears to be embedded in the consensus culture that predominates in Sweden, and its function is presumably to minimize conflict. But it requires that offended parties silently swallow their disappointment— perhaps to be regurgitated in some inappropriate way at some future date— and is hardly conducive to the atmosphere of co-operation and trust which is essential to the success of any project involving more than one person. For those who carry on, of course, the effect of such large and small betrayals is demoralizing, to say the least.

This syndrome is epitomized by a member of the steering committee to whom, for the sake of anonymity, I will refer as MX and who was enlisted to represent a vitally important national institution. Originally, another representative of that body had been recommended to me. That person was eager to participate in the project, but felt required by organizational etiquette to defer to MX who sat on a committee dealing with Indochina-related matters.

At first, MX displayed great enthusiasm and readily agreed to carry out four simple, but vitally important, tasks. These mainly involved contacting key officials who were in positions to mobilize various kinds of support for the project. Altogether, it would have required perhaps 30 minutes of MX's time.

But months went by, and nothing was done. From time to time, I gently reminded MX of the agreed-upon tasks' crucial importance to the project, but to no avail. At one point, MX claimed to be suffering from distress due to ill-treatment by professional colleagues, but promised to carry out the assignment "soon".

But soon never came. Repeated attempts to reach MX by telephone, e-mail and surface mail yielded no response. With just a few months remaining to the conference, I was forced to return to the original candidate with a desperate last-minute appeal. But not surprisingly, that individual felt uncomfortable at the prospect of intruding upon the domain of a colleague. In any event, it was too late: The efforts and decisions that needed to be made would have required much more time than what remained at that point.

In short, a total fiasco and a serious blow to the project. I wish it were possible to report that this was an unusual case. But the only thing unusual about it was the amount of damage it caused. Otherwise, it was an all-too-familiar pattern of behavior, the psychological impact of which should be fairly easy to work out.

One feels personally betrayed, of course. But far more dismaying is the harm done to the interests of the project's potential beneficiaries, and the evident disregard for the efforts of those who do keep their word. It is all very depressing.

The practical consequence is to increase the burden of those who continue working. They either have to perform the neglected tasks themselves, in addition to their other duties, or try to find someone else who can *and will*— all of which requires the expenditure of additional

time and effort. It does not take too many such episodes to suggest the conclusion that it is more efficient to do everything oneself than to waste effort on a quest which, experience indicates, is much more likely to be disheartening than productive.

That is the conclusion at which I eventually arrived in connection with the conference. The unresponsive behavior of MX, reinforcing long experience of the Swedish mentality, also led me to devise a basic rule of conduct: Make no more than three attempts to communicate; if there is no response, give up and move on. This rule has proven to be very useful, saving much time and energy (both physical and mental); I only wish that it had occurred to me many years before.

Another trait that may help to explain the near-total lack of support for the project in Sweden is what appears to be a heavy dependence on the leadership of authority figures and powerful institutions. The Swedes are not alone in this, to be sure; it is a fundamental trait of all social animals. But it appears to be significantly more pronounced in this society than in the few others with which I am familiar.

The fact that no leading authority figure or institution openly supported the environmental conference pretty much ensured that it would not be regarded as especially interesting or worthwhile— regardless of its merits on mere rational or ethical grounds.

Certainly, the current political climate is ill-suited to such a project. This will no doubt come as a surprise to anyone who has learned to regard Sweden as a world leader in matters of peace and solidarity. But to the extent that such concerns still influence Swedish foreign policy, that is largely a lingering effect of Olof Palme's enlightened leadership. His successor, Göran Persson, is almost the exact opposite of Palme, particularly with regard to foreign policy (see: [www.nnn.se/nordic/damage.pdf](http://www.nnn.se/nordic/damage.pdf)).

The only Vietnam-related comment ever made by Göran Persson of which I am aware is: "Vietnam is a swinishly capitalistic country." That seems to exhaust Persson's knowledge of and interest in the subject. If the Vietnam War were to take place today, it is almost certain that Sweden's current prime minister would either support it or maintain a diplomatic silence.

As recently lamented by author Tariq Ali, a key figure in the British and international move-

ments against the Vietnam War: "Sweden has completely adapted itself to the United States' world view. I am shocked over the Scandinavia of today. Olof Palme is forgotten."

That about sums it up, and it is all the more regrettable in that there is a large reserve of generosity and good will among the Swedish people which is readily awakened when they are provided with good leadership.

It is likely that all of the factors reviewed above contributed to the lack of support for the conference among Swedes and their organizations. Of course, my own lack of leadership skills may have also played a role. It is entirely possible that someone else could have elicited a more enthusiastic response.

But such a person would almost certainly have to be native-born. I strongly suspect that it is difficult for any immigrant to get very far with an initiative of this sort in Sweden. For one thing, group and mental processes among native Swedes tend to be regulated by very subtle but nonetheless powerful rules of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Even slight deviations from the norm can cause sensitive Swedish souls to become ill at ease, aggravating the tendencies to inertia and decision-making anxiety.

Whatever the factors involved, after dwelling among the Swedes for over fifteen years, I remain largely incapable of persuading them to move from thought to action or to honor the commitments which some of them occasionally bring themselves to make (exceptions gratefully noted).

That perception may seem dubious and/or disdainful, but it is far from mine alone. Even natives have been known to complain of their countrymen's sluggish behavior, and most immigrants appear to experience difficulty in adapting to it. The vigorous and forthright Finns, in particular, are often driven to distraction by the comparatively glacial pace and inscrutable processes of Swedish life.

It must be emphasized, of course, that this has mainly to do with subconscious processes. The Swedes possess many admirable traits, and I am immensely grateful for having been allowed to become a citizen of this most civilized of nations. It is just that they do not seem very well-equipped to deal with an initiative of this sort without the safety and security of established routines and institutions. It is something of a standing joke or ironic observation that,

when Swedes are presented with an initiative of any sort, their first question tends to be: “Which [powerful] interests in society are behind this?”

In this light, it is rather sad to contemplate the message of support issued by then Vice-president Nguyen Thi Binh prior to the conference: “I am very pleased that this conference is taking place in Sweden, a peace- and justice-loving country that has been sympathetic toward and supportive of Vietnam and its people in times of war and peace. I hope that the conference will receive support from the Swedish people and government. . . . I would very much like to attend the conference, myself, in order to contribute my ideas and to thank in person the delegates and the Swedish people.”

Given that the conference received hardly any “support from the Swedish people and government”, it is probably just as well for Mme. Binh’s fond memories of Sweden that she was not able to attend.

Fortunately, the outside world remains largely innocent of the malaise that has afflicted Sweden since the assassination of Olof Palme. Thanks to the legacy of good will that he left behind, Sweden is still widely regarded abroad with respect and admiration. This helps to explain why it was so much easier to enlist support for the conference in distant lands than on home ground. Thus, all the good that Palme did continues to live after him.

### Committee tensions

As previously noted, the steering committee fulfilled its most crucial function quite adequately; and several of its members offered much-appreciated encouragement and support—especially after it became certain that the conference would definitely take place.

At least one member appeared to understand the difficulties involved in organizing the project, writing to me a few weeks before the conference that, “What you have done in pulling this together is nothing short of remarkable. I, for one, would never (emphasis on never) attempt what you appear to have pulled off through organizing this get together and carrying it to its present position.”

Always gratifying to receive recognition for one’s efforts, of course. But since human beings were involved, the committee also generated a number of problems which tended to complicate matters. Some of those problems, such as

the low level of participation and feedback, have already been noted. Another was the impatient pressure of a few committee members who were unable or unwilling to understand why it was not immediately possible to conjure up a mess of funding and set a firm date. At times, it was a bit like being on a long car trip with a bunch of kids in the back who keep whining, “Are we there yet?”

Uncertainty about the feasibility and timing of the conference was the main reason cited by a scientist who resigned at a fairly early stage. As he was one of the most prominent members of the steering committee, that sudden announcement came as an unpleasant shock. But he was persuaded by the urgings of his committee colleagues to withdraw his resignation, and went on to make a valuable contribution.

But then, just four days before the conference was to start, he resigned again and demanded that his name be removed from the web site and all other conference materials—for reasons that were utterly groundless. He complained, for instance, that he had not been provided with “a more nearly acceptable revised draft of the conference declaration”. But that was, in fact, the responsibility of the steering committee, including himself (more on this below).

He also objected to my “exclusion from the conference (for some apparent combination of political and personal reasons) of at least one highly knowledgeable relevant scientist”. However, he had months before requested an explanation for my decision to disinvite the scientist in question, and had fully approved, as follows: “Thank you for your very detailed commentary on your trials and tribulations regarding [“The Disinvited”, TD]. I leave any conference decision regarding [TD] entirely up to you.”

The accusation that my decision was based on a “combination of political and personal reasons” was utterly false and, under the circumstances, quite insulting. (More on this below; see “The Disinvited”.)

If he had bothered to check with his colleagues on the committee or with me—we had previously conducted several lengthy telephone conversations without any apparent failure or reluctance to communicate—he would have been quickly reassured and/or reminded that his complaints and accusations were entirely without foundation. But he did not extend that basic courtesy to any of us.

In short, the abrupt resignation on the eve of the conference was a breathtakingly irresponsible act, demonstrating an appalling lack of consideration for his colleagues and the potential beneficiaries of the conference. Receiving the fateful message late on the Sunday night before the conference, I thought to myself: “Well, there goes our credibility.” Fortunately, however, the sudden disappearance of the eminent scientist went largely unnoticed, and he later consented to the retention of his name on one vital document.

But coming as it did in the midst of the usual last-minute chaos just days before the conference, the resignation was a crushing blow. Three days later, another of the scientists jumped off the steering committee— doubtless influenced by the example of his distinguished colleague, but also by the unpleasant business of The Disinvited.

That made a total of three departed scientists, including the one who abandoned the public health subcommittee in March (see page 14).

Another major source of headaches was a non-scientist who, as I was eventually to discover, strongly objected to my management of the project on at least two grounds. One was my decision to disinvite TD, apparently an old friend and/or colleague. The other was my insistence on addressing the issue of U.S. responsibility for the Vietnam War and its long-term consequences.

The first issue was never openly discussed by the steering committee, as explained below. The second issue was discussed in connection with the drafting of the conference declaration, at which time this particular committee member objected strenuously to even the slightest indirect reference to U.S. responsibility. From the condescending and somewhat overwrought tone of his remarks, it was apparent that he considered his judgement in such matters to be impeccable, and mine to be seriously flawed. He is referred to throughout this report as “The Chief Critic”.

Despite my evident lack of wisdom, I responded at some length to his criticisms, which were repeated in much the same terms during the conference in connection with the draft report on ethical, legal and policy issues. Thus, Appendix A summarizes the major points of disagreement in both instances.

I never received any further response to my line of reasoning on that issue, and therefore concluded that it had been accepted. That was not the case, however. As I was later to discover, The Chief Critic felt that my approach was too “political” and propagandistic. It seems that he was also upset over my handling of the problem with TD.

But he chose not to pursue these matters openly. Instead, he shared his concerns with a handful of committee members, in an apparent attempt to build a faction that would prevent any reference to the United States and ensure the participation of TD.

As it turned out, however, no such proposals were ever presented to the entire committee. The main effect of this surreptitious politicking was to arouse or aggravate the doubts and anxieties of a few individual members, including the two scientists who resigned just days before the conference. This may help to explain why those two gentlemen did not bother to discuss their concerns with the entire steering committee. Their worst suspicions had presumably been confirmed by the gossip that had taken place behind the backs of everyone else.

Again, there was nothing to prevent anyone from openly raising such concerns with the steering committee as a whole. That The Chief Critic chose to pursue a furtive strategy may reflect some anxiety that his views would not prevail.

As for his motives, they appear to have stemmed primarily from worries about the possible negative effect of a “politicized” conference on his personal reputation and the associated risk of alienating sources of funding for his own projects. This I have deduced from subsequent utterances.

More generally, the question of U.S. responsibility was a constant source of understated tension. As one might expect, the committee members who were most eager to avoid reference to that issue were U.S. citizens. The members from other countries were more disposed— in some cases eager— to include it on the conference agenda. But for the most part, the issue was diplomatically ignored. The only occasion on which it surfaced prior to the conference was in connection with the draft declaration.

## Delayed declaration

It having occurred to me that a declaration could be useful for generating publicity and encapsulating the themes of the conference, I prepared a draft for the steering committee's consideration. The idea was to develop a version that would be acceptable to the entire committee, and then be presented at the conference for discussion and final approval.

The first draft was distributed in mid-May 2002 to the steering committee, the conference sponsors, and a handful of other well-informed individuals. Up to that point, the issues under discussion had been fairly uncontroversial. But that can not be said of the proposed declaration.

With few exceptions, the reactions of steering committee members were overwhelmingly negative, while those of non-members were overwhelmingly positive. Typical comments from around the world were, "Excellent! . . . Very well done. . . . A powerful statement", etc. A Vietnamese scientist wrote: "It is a beautiful declaration with concise and ornate style. I was impressed after reading it."

It was primarily the U.S. members of the steering committee who responded, and some of them were definitely not pleased. One wrote: "I have read your draft conference declaration and must say that it makes me uneasy to think that what is being presented as a scientific conference is supposed to come out with such a political statement based in part on unsubstantiated (and wildly exaggerated) statements." Among the phrases he found especially offensive were "invading army" and "American grass" (see Appendix B for full text of the first draft).

According to another U.S. respondent, "The term 'invasion' is totally counterproductive. I don't disagree with your analysis of history, but I do feel that you are caught in a time warp, fighting a battle that is long over at the cost of today's struggle. The conference was not seen as an opportunity to reaffirm the left's analysis of the Vietnam War." He also instructed me that, "As the key organizer, you need to think about whether these documents reflect faithfully the basis on which you sought and obtained institutional support and funds for the conference." (As noted, the draft had been sent to all sponsors for review; the only objection was from one sponsor who felt that it should include a strong denunciation of the United States.)

Others characterized the document as strident, angry, and reminiscent of Emile Zola's famous jeremiad, "J'accuse!"

Of course, I had expected the draft to stimulate discussion—that was the purpose of the exercise. But the hostile intensity of such reactions came as a surprise, given the presumptive knowledge and values of this particular assemblage. Eventually it became clear, from this and subsequent episodes, that most U.S. members of the steering committee strongly opposed even the mildest reference to their homeland's aggression and responsibility.

Thus, it mattered little that the allusions in the first draft were quite obscure. In fact, the United States was not even mentioned by name. The nearest reference was to "American grass", the bitterly ironic name given by the Vietnamese to the species of weed that has colonized land ruined by the United States' chemical warfare.

The criticisms were much the same as those directed at the first draft of the report on ethical, legal and policy issues, and my analysis was also much the same (see Appendix A). However, the critics seemed to take no notice of that analysis, nor of the many positive comments on the first draft. Theirs was the only point of view that was worthy of consideration, it seems. Most striking was the total disregard of the views of the Vietnamese respondents (see below, "The Shadow of the U.S.A.")

A knowledgeable European observer who (unbeknownst to me) had received the correspondence in this matter via a member of the steering committee wrote to me that, "Upon reading the criticisms of the first draft I became puzzled and, frankly, a bit angry by some of them. It was with great relief that I read your brilliant summary and analysis. Congratulations, I could not have restrained myself as you did."

Exercising restraint was not especially difficult. The requirements of my "office" as coordinator demanded it and, having grown up in the United States, I was accustomed to the characteristic behavior of its citizens. As for the "brilliant summary and analysis", it had little noticeable effect on the critics. Accordingly, my second draft, which took many of the criticisms into account, was also found wanting.

At that point, one of the milder U.S. critics offered to assume the burden of composing a thorough revision, in co-operation with the

other members of the steering committee. And that was the end of it. No revised document was forthcoming—a circumstance for which I was unaccountably held accountable by the eminent scientist who resigned from the steering committee just days before the start of the conference (see above, “Committee tensions”).

Naturally, the lack of a suitable draft to present to the delegates was one of the main items on the agenda when the steering committee met for the first time on the day before the start of the conference. (Only eight of the remaining twelve members were able to be present.) The most critical U.S. member, The Chief Critic, proposed that we simply forget about the declaration. But that suggestion was rejected by the Vietnamese members, a couple of others, and myself.

Then, The Chief Critic appointed himself to head a drafting committee to work out a new version. This occurred while I was temporarily absent, tending to one of several emergencies that cropped up during the meeting. Apparently no one else objected to this odd turn of events, and the best I could do upon returning was to ensure that there would be at least one person on the drafting committee who did not share The Chief Critic’s point of view.

Apart from that, I did not challenge this *fait accompli*, as I could detect no likely support for my misgivings among the others present—it was not clear that everyone understood what was going on—and there was a great deal of other business to attend to.

The Chief Critic and his committee produced a draft that was presented to the plenary on the second day of the conference and was then subjected to a detailed scrutiny which continued into the third and final day. Altogether, roughly one-third of the total time in plenary session was taken up by this process, which was presided over by The Chief Critic. It was a discourse which excluded most of the delegates from Indochina—for whose benefit the conference was supposedly intended—as their English-language skills were not sufficient to permit active participation or even, in many cases, comprehension. I suspect that many of them had a difficult time staying awake.

In short, a great deal of time and attention was wasted on a process which marginalized a large proportion of the delegates, and should have been nearly completed in advance of the

conference. But given the dynamics of the situation, it was not possible for me to intervene, and no one else chose to do so. Among other things, it would have required an open confrontation with The Chief Critic, whom I was in any event forced to challenge in connection with one of the subcommittees (see below, “The Conference”). Apart from that, there were countless other large and small crises that had to be dealt with.

Consequently, there was little alternative but to let the quibbling over the declaration drone on. Even so, the text was still not complete by the end of the final session. When at last it was suggested that the steering committee be authorized to put the final editorial touches on the document, it was approved unanimously with a collective sigh of relief. Probably the only disappointed members of the audience were the correspondents from Reuters and Agence-France Presse who had waited patiently throughout the day, hoping to quote the declaration in their stories.

The steering committee and I worked on the text for a few hours the following day before everyone went home, and then for a few days afterward via e-mail. The final result was not as bad as it ought to have been, given the circumstances. Compared with the original draft, however, the final version was longer, duller and bereft of passion.

But there was one nice touch—the addition of an apt introductory quotation of the South African bishop and Nobel Laureate, Desmond Tutu: “The past, far from disappearing or lying down and being quiet, has an embarrassing and persistent way of returning and haunting us unless it has in fact been dealt with adequately. Unless we look the beast in the eye we find it has an uncanny habit of returning to hold us hostage.”

The quote was apparently too strong for The Chief Critic, however. When the steering committee gathered for editing duty on the day after the conference, the last sentence had been mysteriously deleted and the quotation had been moved to the end of the text. With the support of the committee members from Indochina and a few others, I managed to get the quotation returned to the head of the text where it belonged. But Bishop Tutu’s “beast” and its disconcerting eye were not permitted to return to haunt the declaration.

## The Disinvited

It seems that in most or all human endeavors, there is at least one individual whose problems and demands absorb a disproportionate amount of time and energy. That was certainly the case with the environmental conference, which was besieged by a phenomenally importunate U.S. scientist who was convinced that his participation was essential to the success of the project.

A depressing amount of my time was spent responding to a barrage of lengthy memoranda from this individual, whose generous assessment of his own worth was matched by a dismissive and insulting attitude toward the members of the steering committee. A few excerpts from his numerous critiques:

“Why is there so much enthusiasm for the [research group of one committee member]? They have yet to publish their first article in a peer reviewed scientific journal. And their data is not very remarkable, in my opinion. . . . The [steering committee] list is heavy with persons active in the past, but not active the past decade or so. The list also lists people who have not conducted health research in Vietnam and published in peer reviewed scientific literature. . . . If you do not start with the science of what is known and not known, the policy aspects may be quite wrong. . . . I am already being asked whether your conference will be based on good science first, and therefore important enough to take time for the meeting, or just another emotional get together without good science as a basis for action. . . . I know your intentions are of the highest order. But if you fail, you will bring a lack of credibility to the effort and the field.”

Here, it may be noted that the “unremarkable” research in question— which was not originally intended for publication in a scientific journal, but since has been— is widely regarded as among the most valuable and significant to be conducted in Vietnam. Further, the steering committee included several eminent scientists with up-to-date knowledge of the issues involved; there was certainly no need to lecture them on the need to “start with the science of what is known and not known”, etc., etc.

In addition to his patronizing attitude toward the steering committee, The Disinvited (abbreviation “TD”) had a very difficult time understanding that its purpose was not to

represent the current state of knowledge within his relatively narrow field of study (henceforth referred to as “Substance X”). In fact, he never did manage to grasp the much broader scope of the conference, reflecting an evident preoccupation with his own career interests.

As one scientist on the committee reasoned in an internal memo: “The steering committee is just that, a steering committee, and is not intended to be a list of everyone who has ever done work in Vietnam. Often there can be benefits in having the most experienced (i.e. ‘older’) people on such a committee, and in including people (like myself) who are not currently doing work in Vietnam, and are therefore not competing with other scientists. For the same reasons, there can be benefits in including people from countries that were not involved in the war. . . .

“It is important to get a balance between science and policy, but I am suspicious of the viewpoint that the science comes first. The danger is that we end up with yet another scientific conference where the scientists have a good time arguing with each other and presenting their work, but little else comes out of it. After all, there have been annual international symposia [on Substance X] for many years, and I don’t see any need for us to reproduce these.

“It is important that the conference benefits the Vietnamese, who are the real victims of [Substance X], something I have stressed in a press releases here where the focus has been on the health effects on [my country’s] soldiers. This was a real problem with my visit to Vietnam with a U.S. committee, where the focus was on what would benefit U.S. veterans, and U.S. scientists; there was little concern for the Vietnamese, or willingness to help the Vietnamese develop their own studies and their own research capabilities.

“I think the balance of the steering committee (in terms of scientists, NGOs, etc.) is about right. I actually feel that [TD] should not be added to the steering committee. If he is, there is a danger of this turning into another competitive scientific meeting about [Substance X], rather than a more co-operative, more general meeting about all of the environmental effects of the war.”

The committee as a whole approved this line of reasoning. But when I conveyed its essence to TD, it failed to penetrate. The response

was: "Thank you for your letter. I do remain very convinced that your work will be less good than it should be if you do not include major scientists working in this field in Vietnam."

In short he was nothing if not consistent. I had worked with scientists in various capacities for nearly four decades, and had never before experienced any pattern of behavior quite like this. But it came as no surprise to much of the steering committee which included both scientists and non-scientists who were familiar with TD from previous conferences and related activities.

From those and other sources— including the memoranda of TD, himself— it soon became apparent that he was egocentric, rather aggressive and prone to insulting his professional colleagues at the drop of a hat. He acted as though he "owned" the issue of Substance X and was indispensable to any discussion of it; furthermore, it was the only issue worth discussing. I also received numerous reports that he had been a disruptive and domineering influence at previous conferences.

Another problem was that he tended to be uninformed, condescending and insensitive toward the Vietnamese. In one message, he stated that, "Vietnam, like Prussia before it, is a strong, tough country which is repeatedly at war with one or another country. . . . The Vietnam government is now using [Substance X] as part of a political, economic and PR battle with the USA and involving other countries. . . . Vietnam is forbidding or discouraging health studies or research at this time involving Vietnamese-foreign health projects and collaboration."

A U.S. veteran familiar with TD informed me that, "The Vietnamese had a problem with him because of his bigotry toward them. [He told me] that the Vietnamese scientists were stupid, that their research was all wrong, and on and on."

This was especially worrying, given that a key objective was to establish conditions for the utmost participation by the Vietnamese delegates. Such an atmosphere would hardly be encouraged by the presence of an ugly American like TD since, in my experience, Vietnamese tend to silently withdraw in the face of such conduct— partly out of bewilderment, I believe, and partly out of embarrassment on behalf of the individual making a fool of himself.

Given all this, I would have much preferred to simply ignore TD. But that would have been

imprudent, for two reasons. One was that, despite his evident lack of social skills, he was said to have established an extensive network within the scientific community and was not averse to using it for his purposes. Several members of the steering committee warned me not to provoke him, out of concern that he might attempt to discredit the project— with negative consequences for both fund-raising and credibility.

The other cause for prudence was that two members of the steering committee, while granting that TD was not the easiest person to get along with, felt that his scientific work entitled him to a leading role in the project. Fortunately, they neglected to nominate him to the steering committee until it was too late, and thus a potentially heated discussion on that question was avoided. But the underlying conflict remained and, from my vantage point as the spider in the net, it was clear that the critics of TD far outnumbered his supporters. Some members of the steering committee could barely tolerate him— not without cause, from what I had observed.

As I could see no reason to risk a split within the steering committee over such a person, and as his potential for mischief had been noted by many, I decided to humor him as long as possible. This I did by responding courteously to his various pronouncements, however condescending or insulting, and by congratulating him on the publication of research findings, attention in the press, etc.

This somewhat duplicitous process continued for over a year, causing his sharpest critics on the steering committee to marvel at my patience. It came to an end a few months prior to the conference when he demanded, as his self-evident right, an invitation and payment of all his expenses. At that point I was forced to make the decision that I had been putting off for as long as possible— namely, to explicitly disinvite him, explaining why in a lengthy memo which reviewed the problems noted above.

I invited him to discuss the matter further, together with his closest ally on the steering committee if he so wished. He replied that he would carefully consider my reasoning "and try to reply in a positive way in the near future".

I never got a reply. Instead, he complained to his supporters on the steering committee, leading to the factional politicking noted above. This, in turn, contributed to the resignation

from the steering committee of two scientists, and possibly a third (see “Committee tensions”).

Prior to resigning, one of the scientists on the committee urged me to change my mind about inviting TD. My reply, reproduced in Appendix C, was approved—but not for long. This same individual would resign several weeks later, citing my exclusion of TD for “political and personal reasons” as one of the main reasons.

Thus, The Disinvited contributed to the partial dissolution of the steering committee, after all. In retrospect, it is tempting to second-guess that it would have been wiser to allow the conflict to erupt openly. But I doubt that the outcome would have been any more positive, and could well have been even more disruptive.

As it turned out, TD was not missed at the conference. In fact, several delegates with experience of his conduct at other events expressed to me their relief and pleasure at his absence. The wisdom of his exclusion was also confirmed about a year later when he was publicly rebuked—an extremely rare occurrence in such circles—for a breach of professional ethics.

In an extraordinary open letter, the organizers of another conference complained that, “[TD] released this document without permission and in violation of conference policy. [TD’s] action constitutes a material breach of confidentiality, and an unconscionable breach of our confidence in him. . . . [TD] no longer deserves the confidence entrusted in him by the organizing committee and should not be allowed to serve as the chair of a conference session. Furthermore, he should be subject to sanctions as determined by the Institute of Medicine, the Conference, and/or the American Public Health Association.”

One of the principals added, “The sooner we can expose the charlatans of the world like [TD]; the better off science and the struggle for the rights of American and Vietnamese veterans, as well as the Vietnamese people, will ultimately be.”

## Malicious gossip

Any effort to deal with sensitive or controversial issues is likely to be met with various kinds of unpleasantness, including whispering campaigns and other forms of malicious gossip. That is true even of projects conducted by well-established organizations with impressive

credentials; for a private initiative like this one, the risk is obviously greater.

The conference did, indeed, stimulate a certain amount of gossip and some of it was quite bizarre. For instance, one story that made the rounds was that I initiated the conference in order to promote the interests of Swedish business in Vietnam, while another postulated that the whole thing was a plot to embarrass the Swedish government (probably not the most effective way to promote Swedish business).

Silliness of that sort is easy enough to ignore from a personal standpoint. The problem, of course, was the potential of such gossip to discourage participation, scare off financing, and generally discredit the enterprise. It was largely for this reason that I devoted so much effort to humoring The Disinvited (see above). There is reason to believe, however, that he did spread negative publicity about the project via his personal network.

There were others, including one or two U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War. During the course of the project, several GIs contacted me via e-mail and in most cases this led to a fruitful correspondence. But a few seemed to be torn between remorse for their participation in the war and a tendency to belligerence, often with patriotic overtones. Some of these individuals expressed concern that the conference would be an exercise in “America-bashing”—a term which apparently refers to any reminder of U.S. crimes against international law and the peoples of Indochina.

One of them responded as follows to the first draft of the conference declaration (see above): “The reader does not need to know who is responsible; the reader, hell, every reader knows who is responsible. . . . There is a violence in your ways of peace, Al, and there is a closed-mindedness in your way of communicating. These are the characteristics that produce wars and atrocities.

“Get off your high, self-righteous horse. Get down on the fuckin’ ground and pitch in with your old enemies (people like me) and let’s work together and forget this enemy/invaser/political shit. . . . I want to see what you’re trying to do, work, and I can see it not working because of your own personal agenda, which I believe (ironically) dismisses the needs of the people you claim you want to help. Their needs are dismissed because your personal needs

have been given the high horse," etc., etc. A year later, this individual apologized for his outburst. But he was far from alone, and there was a lot of this stuff flying about during the planning period.

The individual who probably caused the most damage was a scientific advisor to a very important international agency. Also a U.S. veteran of the war, he operates an e-mail news list which disseminates information on matters relating to the environmental impact of the Vietnam War. Taking offence at some innocent remark in one of my e-mails, he suggested to his subscribers— who appear to include most of the scientists, aid workers and others interested in the issues addressed by the conference— that I was an over-sensitive individual who sent him disagreeable messages.

When I was foolish enough to object to that mild slander, a flood of invective was released, for example: "Unless I am mistaken you are not a victim of the war, the chemicals or the disruption of life caused by it. Those of us who were— purportedly the people you want to help— should not be forced to feel grateful for the honour of your company. As far as I am concerned, please do your job and make this meeting a success. A good deal could depend on it.... By your manner, I am a nobody. My wife who is, in your view, another nobody agrees with me in writing this message", etc., etc. (Needless to say, I never so much as hinted at my opinion of this person, as I had none, and had never stated or implied anything about his wife.)

He then wrote to a number of key figures on his e-mail list to warn them about me, which I discovered when one of them forwarded his messages to me. They included the following observations: "The organiser of the conference, Al Burke, came through Ha Noi a couple weeks ago and this left me rather concerned about the nature of the meeting. Al is a '60s generation radical who seems to have no real interest in Viet Nam. He's a US migrant to Sweden, with affiliation to Left politics in that country. I get the sense that local politics is important to him and it worries me that the conference could be used as a way to embarrass the Swedish government. . . ."

"I became concerned about Al Burke in discussions with him almost a year ago. He seemed to be pushing his own philosophy at me. My impression was that he was not in touch

with realities here and, further, he didn't want to know. I dropped the discussion because I don't want to listen to political manifestos. . . ." and much more of the same.

Several members of the steering committee and subcommittees came immediately to my defense, including one who recalled a previous experience of the raging e-mailer: "All his comments were negative about the quality of work done by Vietnamese scientists and very negative— close to a diatribe— about [the director of a Vietnamese research program]. . . . My guess is that [the e-mailer] feels he owns the subject, 'Viet Nam + environment'. . . . This type of behavior is designed to control and hold a perceived or wished-for superior position by silencing other voices."

Thus, the onslaught of this territorial male did not have any noticeable effect on those already involved with the project. But it almost certainly damaged its reputation among those with no other source of information. That was the concern of one scientist whose participation in the project had been singled out for disapproval:

"I am thoroughly pissed off! I was ALWAYS under the impression that the conference was as far away from politics as one could hopefully get. I still am of that opinion. It boggles my mind where [the e-mailer] got this impression.

"Seeing my name in his e-mail does not please me. If this e-mail gets around, which obviously it has, it throws a rather uncomplicated light on our [organization's] intentions simply by 'splash over'. I do not like the insinuations. . . . We cannot afford that linkage; we're walking a tightrope as it is."

Of course, it is not possible to determine the ultimate effect of all this backbiting. But it may safely be assumed that it did not help.

## NGO politics

Non-governmental organizations were involved in the project in a variety of ways. Some supported the project financially, while others provided moral support and sent delegates to the conference. In addition, several members of the steering committee were associated with (but did not formally represent) various NGOs.

The financial contributions were crucial; without them, the conference could not have been held. But the number of NGOs that did

contribute and/or participate was disappointingly low, especially among the Swedish branches of international organizations with ongoing programs in the countries of Indochina (see above, "Swedish indifference").

This lack of support may have been partly due to general atmosphere engendered by the famous terror attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001. I was told by several individuals with experience in such matters that, following "9/11", it had become much more difficult to raise funds for any project that might in any way be construed as inimical to the interests of the United States. If so, the gratitude owed the NGOs that did contribute is all the greater.

There are certainly plenty of indications that pressure is often applied to NGOs and other interests which criticize or disagree with official U.S. policy. Recently, for example, it was reported that Save the Children U.K. "had been ordered by its US office in April to stop criticising military action in Iraq. The American wing was worried about jeopardising financial support from Washington and other big donors. . . .

"Alan Simpson, the Labour MP for Nottingham South who worked in the voluntary sector before entering parliament, expressed concern that the British charity was under so much pressure from its US partner. He criticised Save the Children US's closeness to the White House, and said: 'This is a new American imperium—you not only invade countries but also charities.'" (*The Guardian*, 29 Nov. 2003.)

According to Canadian author Naomi Klein, the current U.S. government has adopted an aggressive policy toward troublesome NGOs: "The war on NGOs is being fought on two clear fronts. One buys the silence and complicity of mainstream humanitarian and religious groups by offering lucrative reconstruction contracts. The other marginalises and criminalises more independent-minded NGOs by claiming that their work is a threat to democracy.

"NGOs had to do a better job of linking their humanitarian assistance to US foreign policy and making it clear that they are 'an arm of the US government'. If they didn't, [the head of USAID] threatened to 'personally tear up their contracts and find new partners. . . .'

"That is the message of 'NGO Watch', an initiative of the American Enterprise Institute and the Federalist Society for Law and Public

Policy Studies that takes aim at the growing political influence of the non-profit sector. The stated purpose of the website, launched on June 11, is to 'bring clarity and accountability to the burgeoning world of NGOs'. In fact, it is a McCarthyite blacklist, telling tales on any NGO that dares speak against Bush administration policies or in support of international treaties opposed by the White House." (*The Guardian*, 23 June 2003.)

It was fairly evident that this polluted atmosphere, which had begun to develop long before the current U.S. administration, had an inhibiting effect on several individuals who participated in the conference, especially those associated with NGOs based in the United States. One such member of the steering committee expressed anxiety on several occasions about the risk of alienating potential sources of funding for other projects. This individual, along with several U.S. delegates to the conference, tended to oppose the slightest reference to U.S. responsibility for the war and its consequences.

Even those U.S. members of the steering committee who felt very strongly about the crimes committed by their country against the peoples of Indochina were reluctant to address that issue openly. Clearly, they had to take into account their responsibilities to the organizations with which they were associated and, at least to some extent, they seemed to share the belief that no good and perhaps some harm would come from "digging up the past" (see below, "The shadow of the U.S.A."). In short, their membership in the steering committee placed them in a delicate position, and the conflict of loyalties was at times quite apparent.

Another problem they had to grapple with was the need to remain on good terms with the government of Vietnam in order to achieve any positive results with the programs of their NGOs. As it is not always an easy matter to divine the wishes and implicit restraints of that government, a sizeable measure of caution is generally in order. Among other things, there appears to be some uncertainty about the eagerness of Vietnam's government to press the United States for compensation to victims of the war (see below, "Cultural factors").

For all of these reasons, there were constraints on the freedom of NGOs and their associates in connection with the conference. At

least to some extent, I understood their predicament and did not press them—largely out of respect and admiration for the important work they were and are doing, and for their splendid beings. With one or two exceptions, they are among the finest human beings it has ever been my privilege to meet.

### Cultural factors

When I reflect upon my frequently slow-witted attempts to understand Vietnamese norms and behavior, I am reminded of an article I read many years ago in connection with a course in anthropology. It described an encounter between an American Indian and an “Anglo” who were gathered around a campfire. The Anglo asks the Indian if he has seen a missing knife, but nothing is said in reply. The Anglo repeats the question several times, with mounting irritation at the seeming lack of response. Finally, he blurts out, “Well, you could at least have the decency to respond!” Whereupon, the Indian explains that he has done so every time—by pointing to the knife with his eyes.

This is not a direct parallel with similar encounters between Westerners and the Vietnamese, who are usually quite willing to communicate via speech. But it does illustrate the potential for misunderstanding when representatives of very different cultures consort with each other.

I suspect there were quite a few misunderstandings during the course of the project. If so, however, they were not readily apparent—largely because the Vietnamese tend to be exceedingly polite and tolerant. They have been forced to deal with various species of Westerner for a very long time and, in my experience, are astonishingly patient with behavior which by Vietnamese standards is unthinkably rude or clumsy.

If they disagree, it is often in terms so subtle and diplomatic that it can be difficult for inattentive foreigners to grasp the message. This may help to explain why some of the Westerners involved in the project were inclined to misrepresent Vietnamese positions on certain issues (see below, “The shadow of the U.S.A.”).

Thus, while the habitual courtesy of the Vietnamese greatly facilitated the project by smoothing out the jagged interfaces of divergent cultures, there remained barriers of com-

munication and understanding that probably influenced the final outcome.

Among other things, it was often difficult to know exactly what Vietnamese delegates and committee members felt and thought about various issues. Further, it has been my experience that direct questions seldom receive direct answers, especially when other people are present. Or perhaps, like the unobservant Anglo of my anthropology studies, I have received answers that I was too ignorant to notice or interpret.

The only thing I know for sure about Vietnamese behavioral norms is that I do not know very much for sure. The limited understanding I have been able to acquire is largely thanks to Lady Borton, a U.S. member of the steering committee who was prepared an excellent guide to Vietnamese principles of etiquette.

Another obvious source of misunderstanding was, of course, language. Since only a few of the Western delegates and committee members knew Vietnamese, the working language of the conference was English. Most of the Lao, Cambodians and Vietnamese had varying degrees of skill in that language, so very different from their own, and excellent Vietnamese-English interpretation was provided by Mr. Hoang Cong Thuy and Dr. Bach Tan Sinh. But, of course, it is never the same thing as speaking in and listening to one’s native tongue, especially in connection with relatively complex issues.

The inevitable consequence was to aggravate the dominance of native English-speakers; many of the delegates were partly or entirely excluded from a number of plenary and committee discussions. Much of the difficulty could have been alleviated by more varied and extensive interpretation services; but the available funding did not permit that obvious solution.

In addition to these intercultural factors, there were also some internal constraints that tended to inhibit the proceedings. I am certainly no expert on Vietnamese society, but it is hardly any secret that it is organized according to comparatively strict rules of hierarchy and deference to authority. Westerners often interpret this as indicative of tyranny or oppression, while repressing awareness of the power structures and deferential behavior of their own societies.

In Vietnam, such structures are clearly interwoven with an ethical system based on ancient

traditions that appear to be fairly similar throughout Asia, where deference to authority is a moral obligation. It also necessary to take into account the inevitable consequences of invasion and occupation by a succession of foreign powers, including France, China, Japan and the United States. One need merely observe the widespread repression that has taken place in the United States since the attacks of 9/11/2001, a trivial episode by comparison, to understand that societies generally do not respond to aggression by becoming more open and democratic.

In any event, it was evident that Vietnamese delegates and committee members were not free to speak with perfect candor. It seemed particularly important for them to avoid noticeable deviations from government policy. With regard to the matters addressed by the conference, however, that policy is not always easy to determine.

All governments have their secrets, of course. But Vietnam's appears to be much more opaque than those of Europe and North America with which I am familiar. The result is widespread uncertainty about what is politically correct and incorrect. During my preparatory visit to Hanoi, for example, one very knowledgeable and competent individual asked me, of all uninformed people, to explain his government's position on key issues such as Agent Orange. I gathered that he was somewhat nervously seeking reassurance that his participation in the conference would not get him into any sort of trouble.

Another reason for caution is that there are, as in any society, powerful interests that might be embarrassed and thereby offended if negative social and environmental effects of economic activity are exposed to view. That risk is particularly great in connection with the exploitation of natural resources, a key issue in any effort to determine the long-term environmental consequences of the war. The question is how to distinguish war-related effects from those stemming from post-war exploitation—a problem that was diplomatically avoided.

A different kind of constraint was imposed by norms controlling the powerful but often suppressed emotions associated with the death, suffering and destruction caused by the American War. Danish anthropologist Helle Rydstrom has noted that, despite the official policy of forgiveness and reconciliation, many survivors

understandably feel "great bitterness, rage and sorrow" as a result of their traumatic experiences. She notes, however, that deeply rooted norms of honor and of respect for others prescribe that such emotions shall not be displayed, especially in the presence of outsiders.

Consequently, it was sometimes difficult to persuade Vietnamese experts to describe the destruction of the war, a fundamental concern of the conference. After patiently enduring my repeated urgings, one scientist finally explained, "I will try. But it is very painful for me to speak and write of such things."

## Agent Orange

The stated purpose of the conference was to summarize all the environmental consequences of the U.S. war against the nations of Indochina. But it was a constant struggle to maintain that broad perspective against pressures to concentrate on the single issue of Agent Orange/dioxin. No matter how often I emphasized the comprehensive scope of the project, some single-minded souls insisted on referring to it as an "Agent Orange conference".

The debate over the effects of the toxins in Agent Orange and other herbicides used by the U.S. during the war has been raging for decades, and it was hardly surprising that it became a central concern of our conference. That it threatened to take over was due primarily to the strong interests of (a) certain western experts who have invested much time and effort (and, in some cases, career ambitions) in the study of the issue, and (b) Vietnamese concerned with the plight of their countrymen who are believed to be victims of dioxin poisoning.

There are several conflicts involved in all this. One pits the unsentimental norms of scientific inquiry against the humanitarian impulse to assist the presumptive victims. This is a major source of tension, as the scientific evidence for hypothesized links between dioxin contamination and various medical conditions is weak or inconclusive in most cases. That is especially true of birth defects, the primary focus of concern.

Those who are driven by humanitarian pathos tend to regard the cautious conclusions of scientists as unhelpful, obstructive, or even antagonistic. The human need is so great and urgent, that it is very disagreeable to hear that

science has been unable to establish a definite link between dioxin and birth defects, for example.

The not-infrequent result is resentment, at times quite bitter, which may even be directed at scientists who sympathize with the plight of the alleged victims and would no doubt welcome evidence of the thus-far missing link. This includes the odd Vietnamese scientist who has dared to question the prevailing humanitarian dogma. I have myself been the unwilling audience for a rather slanderous attack on one highly competent Vietnamese scientist whose intellectual honesty has prevented him from accepting the widely-held belief that dioxin has caused millions of birth defects.

This conflict between the scientific and the humanitarian approach flared up on several occasions before, during and after the conference. In principle, however, there should be no conflict. On the contrary, the presentation of indisputable scientific evidence probably offers the best hope of extracting any kind of compensation from the responsible party, the U.S. government. That body has never acknowledged the slightest *moral* obligation toward the victims of its war; and given the prevailing U.S. political climate of denial and self-deceit, it is unlikely ever to do so. (This problem is discussed at some length on pages 40-59 of the conference report on ethical, legal and policy issues.)

In short, the United States has demonstrated that it can easily ignore the moral claims of its victims in Indochina. But it would be more difficult to ignore scientific evidence whose validity is confirmed by the global scientific community. Such evidence would strengthen the claims of all those exposed to Agent Orange—not only citizens of Laos and Vietnam, but also veterans of the United States and allies such as Australia and New Zealand.

This probably helps to explain why the U.S. government has never demonstrated any eagerness to investigate the matter, even though Indochina has provided a tragically unique opportunity to study the effects of exposure to dioxin. It is very likely that much or all of the current scientific uncertainty would have been resolved long ago if the U.S. had chosen to finance a full-scale research project immediately following the war.

Instead, it chose to nurse the festering sore of its wounded warrior pride, support the murderous Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, conspire with China (the original designated villain of

the piece) against Vietnam, and compound its war crimes with punishing embargoes against both Cambodia and Vietnam which, among other things, severely retarded scientific development in both countries.

Meanwhile, there has been no widespread enthusiasm among the scientific community, in the United States or elsewhere, to get to the bottom of the dioxin problem. This has been commented upon by Ben Selinger, professor emeritus of chemistry at the Australian National University: "Getting involved in this area does put one's mainline career at risk. It is important work but don't expect to get thanks from within your professional societies."

Consequently, neither the U.S. government nor any other is in a position to complain about the lack of hard scientific evidence for postulated links between dioxin and various medical conditions, including birth defects. For the same reason, it is easy to sympathize with the position of Vietnamese spokespersons such as former Vice-president Nguyen Thi Binh who, in a letter of support to the conference, wrote that:

"I sincerely hope that the conference will increase awareness among the people of the United States regarding the severe consequences remaining from the American War in Vietnam, and help persuade the U.S. government to recognize its liability and its responsibility to assist in the alleviation of those consequences.

"The war ended more than a quarter-century ago, but its deadly aftermath for the people and the environment of Vietnam linger on, with no end in sight. This applies especially to dioxin, which is the cause of diseases transmitted from generation to generation. Many of our people have died in sorrow. Many innocent children born after the war also suffer from the indirect effects of dioxin, their bodies afflicted by malformations and incurable diseases. Humanitarian organizations, the government of Vietnam, and Vietnamese society in general have been taking active steps to overcome the severe consequences of the war. In addition, many individuals, non-governmental organizations, national Red Cross societies, and other governments have been very supportive in this regard. However, the resources thus far available have not been adequate to the great needs of the victims. We need more assistance from our friends around the world, especially in the United States."

Mme. Binh is now chairwoman of the Vietnam Association of Agent Orange/Dioxin Victims, key plaintiff in a class-action suit against U.S. manufacturers of Agent Orange that was filed in a New York federal court in early 2004. That initiative could well end up being derailed by legal technicalities. But if it overcomes such obstacles, there remains the problem of demonstrating the alleged links between dioxin contamination and various medical problems. As indicated above, that will not be easy.

In one vital sense, however, the scientific arguments are of secondary importance to those most directly concerned. For, what is at stake is something far greater than dioxin and its health effects: It has to do with a longing for justice, and for acknowledgement of the terrible suffering to which Vietnam and its people have been subjected.

These are powerful and perfectly natural emotions which one would expect of any human beings that have been subjected to the prolonged and intense abuse inflicted on Vietnam. However, there are also powerful restraints on the expression of those emotions, as noted above (see "Cultural factors").

In addition to norms prescribing a fundamental attitude of dignity and respect, Vietnam's long tradition of forgiveness, the Buddhist principle of acceptance, and an insistent government policy of forgiveness and reconciliation have combined to suppress feelings which in other societies are regarded as perfectly natural and acceptable. Of course, this does not mean that such feelings have evaporated. As anthropologist Helle Rydström observes, "great bitterness, rage and sorrow" are not unknown—but rarely expressed beyond the private sphere.

It is against this background that the Agent Orange/dioxin issue should perhaps be understood. For a variety of reasons, it has become the only war-related issue through which it is acceptable for the Vietnamese to channel their bitterness, rage and sorrow, and has therefore acquired enormous symbolic weight. This almost certainly explains why so many well-educated Vietnamese, including physicians and scientists, appear to have so little concern for the scientific niceties of the case. It is not primarily a question of science; it is first and foremost a question of humanity and justice.

This is reflected in, among other things, the response to a petition in support of the above-noted law suit that was posted on the Internet by Len Aldis of the Britain-Vietnam Friendship Society. The petition has attracted an unusually large number of signatures from around the world within a relatively short period of time. The vast majority of endorsers have Vietnamese names, and many of them have expressed their gratitude to Len Aldis with personal messages such as the following:

"I just send you to say 'Thank you so much'. I'm a Vietnamese young boy, It is not important who I am. I want to say, the ones like you make me believe in a bright future of the world! Thank you! My Uncle!!!!" [Note: "Uncle" is a Vietnamese term of respect for older persons.]

"I've seen many victims of agent orange in many provinces. I feel compassion for them. . . . I think this web site is very useful to every people from every countries who want to say their opinion, their petition. We need more and more practical actions to help these victims of agent orange who have to suffer injustices and I hope we can bring the justice to them. On behalf of Vietnamese people and victims, I would like to say thanks to you and wish you good luck."

The Agent Orange issue has been gaining momentum in recent years, and may have reached a climax with the law suit filed in early 2004. By some accounts, however, the government of Vietnam—or at least one faction of it—is not very enthusiastic about all the attention being focused on Agent Orange, for two reasons: One is the long-term goal of reconciliation with the United States, which might be put at risk by dwelling on contentious issues left over from the war; the other concern is the risk to Vietnamese exports which may be suspected of containing residues of dioxin and other toxins.

But such accounts are not always credible or consistent: For example, one western scientist with extensive research experience in Vietnam favored me with both of the following assertions: "The Vietnam government is placing obstacles in the path of the Vietnam Red Cross, [a leading Vietnamese scientist], and U.S. university research. . . . The Vietnam government is now using Agent Orange as part of a political, economic and PR battle with the U.S.A. and involving other countries."

Of course, it is certainly possible that there are factional disputes within Vietnam's govern-

ment on this and other issues; such disputes are commonplace in all human organizations. In my limited experience, however, there has been no reluctance to address the problem of Agent Orange/dioxin. In fact, the U.S. embassy in Hanoi has accused the government of making entirely too much of the issue (see below). In addition to Mme. Binh, both the government and the Communist Party seem committed to pursuing the matter, regardless of the consequences for relations with the United States. If that were not the case, nothing like the law suit would have been permitted.

As for the risk to Vietnam's exports, that is a matter of legitimate concern. To cite the conference report on ethical, legal and policy issues: "A congressman from one of the three leading catfish-producing states has opposed the imports on the ground that Vietnamese fish may be contaminated with dioxin residues from the toxic chemicals sprayed in vast quantities by the U.S. during the military war. 'That stuff doesn't break down,' warns Marion Berry, an Arkansas Democrat. An advertising campaign was launched against the invading food product with messages such as, 'They've grown up flapping around in third world rivers and dining on whatever they can get their fins on.'"

Similar smear campaigns have been conducted against Vietnamese exports of coffee and shrimp. Accordingly, several of the Vietnamese delegates and subcommittee members were very concerned about the potential effects of such scare tactics on the export market and the farmers who supply it. One of them applied polite but firm pressure on me to ensure that the dioxin issue would be played down in the conference reports, and some confusion developed when I passed along that request.

The dilemma was also on the mind of at least one U.S. member of the steering committee, who observed that, "The issue of Agent Orange already creates many contradictory pressures for Vietnam domestically, bilaterally with the U.S., and globally in terms of Vietnam's perceived safety as a tourist destination and source of agricultural and aquatic produce."

In short, the humanitarian impulse to assist the presumptive victims of Agent Orange appears to conflict somewhat with the strict rules of science, the sector of the Vietnamese economy involved in the export of food products, and possibly some elements of the government. At the very least, one would expect that

those Vietnamese who are primarily concerned with building up the national economy and developing good relations with the United States are less eager to pursue the Agent Orange issue than those who are in various ways responsible for looking after the millions believed to be victims of dioxin poisoning.

The position of the U.S. government has been and remains that more and better scientific research is needed to determine the links, if any, between dioxin and serious medical conditions. It also appears that the U.S. has decided to blame the Vietnamese government for the lack of scientific progress. That is apparent from a memorandum, dated 16 February 2003, from the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi to the Secretary of State (foreign minister) which touches upon many of the problems referred to above:

"The Embassy believes that this lack of progress reflects the unwillingness of the GVN [Vietnamese government] to allow its scientists to engage in genuinely transparent, open, rigorous scientific investigation to determine the true extent of the impact of AO/dioxin on health in Vietnam. We believe that the GVN will attempt to control, disrupt, or block any research project that could potentially produce scientific evidence that refutes the GVN's allegations of broad, catastrophic damage to the health of Vietnamese citizens, especially birth defects. . . .

"We believe that the GVN's highest priority continues to be waging its ongoing propaganda campaign to morally indict the USG in collaboration with sympathetic members of the broader international community as its highest priority. . . . The government makes every attempt to use this to generate sympathy and funding, especially within the international community, and often links the two issues of AO/dioxin and UXO together to maximize the effect of demonizing the U.S. for the 'holocaust' of the Vietnam War (a term that is constantly used by the GVN and their international sympathizers)."

Needless to say, the U.S. embassy in Hanoi can hardly be regarded as an impartial source of information in such matters. Among other things, given the malicious intent and effect of the United States' massive anti-Vietnam propaganda over the years, the memorandum's indignant references to 'Vietnamese propaganda campaign' reflects the preposterous double standard for which the superpower is well-known.

One thing that emerges clearly from the memo, however, is that embassy officials are definitely not of the opinion that the Vietnamese government has been suppressing the Agent Orange issue in order to build warmer relations with the United States—quite the contrary. In order to counteract the “demonizing” that the memo alleges, it suggests a strategy which may become evident in the not-too-distant future:

“We feel that ignoring this situation will have the probable outcome of continued success on the part of the Vietnamese in engaging the broader international community to exert pressure on the USG to remediate and remunerate all the ‘victims’ . . .

“The Vietnamese are succeeding at their longstanding propaganda campaign. We need to counter the disinformation with valid, scientifically documented information. We should challenge bogus, slanted journalism—both vernacular and international—with factual, objective responses that expose the fallacies of the GVN propaganda and describe other potential factors that contribute to the health problems that the Vietnamese attribute solely to AO/dioxin. Silence or bland, non-specific responses will only tend to ‘confirm’ the disinformation in the eyes of the audience. . . .

“Embassy requests that [several government agencies] prepare a concise summary on dioxin which Embassy and other agencies involved in the AO/dioxin issue can use as a basis for talking points that address key questions related to dioxin and what the international scientific community knows about it. Our intent is that this would provide sufficient factual, objective information that would demonstrate why the USG has taken the position that there are many unanswered questions about the health effects, and justify our call for further scientific research to determine how much, if any, adverse impact AO/dioxin has had on health in Vietnam. In other words, we need to be able to counter the Vietnamese position that exposure to dioxin, no matter under what circumstances and at what levels, eliminates all other possible causes of a health problem. This document would also serve as a primer for the uninformed, particularly the press who tend to focus solely on the fact that dioxin is a persistent organic pollutant linked to health problems.”

Accordingly, it should come as no surprise if the U.S. government should adopt a more

aggressive approach to the AO/dioxin issue in the future. If, in addition, the law suit leads to an outcome which favors the defendants (the manufacturing companies), the case for compensation on the basis of dioxin poisoning will more or less collapse. In such an event, the U.S. government is almost certain to declare that the outcome confirms its position that the war has not had any lasting effects on public health or the environment, and that “it is time to forget the past and move on”.

The options then remaining for the Vietnamese would not be many; for, as noted above, AO/dioxin is the compensation issue which they and their international supporters have most consistently and energetically pursued. Partly for that reason, I have been sceptical about the wisdom of focusing on that sole issue, a scepticism that has been strengthened by consultations with knowledgeable and sympathetic experts (see Appendix D).

A related problem with such a narrow focus is that it tends to divert attention from the entire range of damage and suffering caused by the U.S. war of aggression. The conference was fairly successful in maintaining a broader perspective. But many of the delicate problems associated with AO/dioxin were never openly discussed, and remain unresolved.

## Cambodia & “Indochina”

Although all three countries of Indochina have suffered terribly from the war and continue to do so, the emphasis of the conference was on Vietnam, for two main reasons. One is that Vietnam was assaulted for a much longer period of time, and the devastation has been correspondingly greater. The other is that, despite serious limitations, there has accumulated a larger body of research findings and other information regarding the environmental consequences of the war for Vietnam.

Nevertheless, it was always the ambition to include Laos and Cambodia to the extent that resources permitted. Unfortunately, that extent was not very great. It did not become certain until the last few weeks before the conference that there would be sufficient funds to sponsor delegates from Cambodia and Laos. This gave the regrettable but unavoidable impression that those two countries were included as an afterthought, which was not the case.

Despite these inauspicious circumstances, the delegates from Cambodia and Laos (four from each country) amiably followed the proceedings, and several actively participated in the discussions. The only complication arose when the Cambodian delegation objected to use of the term, Indochina, in connection with the conference. This first became an issue when the steering committee decided to change the original title of the project, Vietnam Environmental Conference, in order to reflect the broader scope of the entire region.

The Cambodians argued that “Indochina Environmental Conference”, for example, was undesirable because the concept of Indochina was an undesirable remnant of French rule. That notion came as something of a surprise to me, as I had read that Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia had attempted to vitalize the concept during the 1960s by, among other things, arranging a “conference of Indochinese peoples” in Phnom Penh. According to historian Jean Lacouture, “The Pnomh Penh conference made no advance along the road to peace; but it confirmed and made manifest the ‘Indochinese’ theme, and brought to light aspirations held in common by the most diverse delegations.”

Of course, a great deal has occurred since then— most especially Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia which, while it displaced the hated Khmer Rouge, was not regarded as an unmixed blessing by all Cambodians. Apart from that, there is a lot of unfinished historical business between the two countries which, according to a variety of sources, periodically flares up in various forms of aggression against the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia. (I must emphasize, however, that my knowledge of these matters is very limited.)

In any event, it was my impression that the reference to the colonial origins of the Indochina concept was a diplomatic feint which concealed a different motive, i.e. to avoid any implication that Cambodia and Vietnam are in any way similar or united. That is why, for example, the conference report on ethical, legal and policy issues includes this footnote:

“Some citizens of the three countries which comprise the area known as Indochina object to the term on the grounds that it was imposed by the French empire for its colonial purposes, and implies a regional unity that has never existed. However, the term is firmly established in the

literature—in references to the First and Second Indochinese Wars, for example—and provides a useful shorthand for Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam when discussing matters relating to all three countries. For those reasons, only, Indochina is referred to in this report. No historical, political or cultural unity is stated or implied.”

I am not at all certain that my interpretation of the Cambodian delegates’ viewpoint is correct. But even if it is, the issue did not occasion any noticeable problems during the conference. Although the Lao and Vietnamese delegations had no objection to the term, Indochina, they readily acceded to the wishes of their Cambodian colleagues, and the title thus became Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam.

### **The shadow of the U.S.A.**

Not unexpectedly, the superpower responsible for the Vietnam War cast its shadow over the entire project. It was like the ghost at the banquet whose unseen presence inhibited the participants from acting, speaking, and perhaps even thinking in ways that might possibly be construed as expressions of anti-ghostism.

Anxiety about the possible displeasure of the United States certainly affected fund-raising chances. One important source told me outright that, while the project was very deserving, no funds would be forthcoming due to worries about offending the United States. Others indicated as much, for example by stipulating that no “America-bashing” would be tolerated. As noted elsewhere, the sin of America-bashing is defined to include even the slightest reminder of U.S. responsibility for the crimes it has committed in Indochina.

This hypersensitivity to U.S. sensitivities was, of course, aggravated by the superpower’s hysterical, belligerent reaction to the comparatively minor terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001. Though it is impossible to document, I am fairly certain that it would have been much easier to raise funds for this project if it had dealt, instead, with the terrible consequences of crimes committed by the Soviet Union or China, for example.

There is no doubt that anxieties about giving offence inhibited participation in the project. As noted in the conference report on ethical, legal and policy issues:

"A European economist who was invited to participate replied: 'I must admit that I do not have knowledge of any study on the economic impact of environmental damages caused by the war. Even more, I have always shied away from the topic. It is too politically charged.'

"A U.S. scholar declined an invitation to contribute to the conference, despite complete agreement with its purpose and goals, out of anxiety that it might jeopardize his chances for a coveted stipend. Such anxieties are not unfounded: In the United States and elsewhere, academics have been dismissed or denied honors and advancement for lesser offenses."

It may also be assumed that the reluctance of some non-governmental organizations to involve themselves was related to similar anxieties. Again, this sort of thing is extremely difficult to prove; but there are clear indications (see above, "NGO politics").

The intimidating, inhibiting influence of the United States was also reflected in the words and actions of those who did participate. Naturally, this was especially the case with U.S. citizens, including those on the steering committee and the subcommittees, and among the conference delegates.

With a few exceptions, the U.S. Americans objected to or felt uneasy with any reference to their country's responsibility for the war and its consequences. This tendency was particularly evident in discussions surrounding the declaration and the report on ethical, legal and policy issues (see above, "Delayed declaration").

The approach that was urged by the majority of U.S. participants was to speak and write of all the destruction, deaths, casualties, misery and illness as ahistorical phenomena— to focus only on problems that existed in the here and now, without any mention of their origins and causes. It was as though we were expected to regard the long-term consequences of the Vietnam War as results of some natural catastrophe or an act of god.

We were also clearly expected to adopt that perspective. It was presented as self-evident— as though some consensus had long ago been established to avoid the issue of U.S. responsibility. When that approach was challenged, the reasons given to justify it were less than convincing (see Appendix A).

It must be emphasized that these were generally not individuals who could in any way be

categorized as "ugly Americans". On the contrary: With perhaps one or two exceptions, they were all strong opponents of the Vietnam War and have acted in solidarity with its victims. Among them are some of the finest human beings I have ever met, including several whose efforts on behalf of reconstruction are acknowledged and appreciated by the citizens and governments of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

But they are also U.S. citizens, and that appears to have influenced their thoughts and behavior in ways of which they were not always aware. The power of the United States has become so great and all-pervasive that it is widely taken for granted that nothing can or should be done to arouse its displeasure. One well-intentioned soul even suggested that I submit the report on ethical, legal and policy issues to the U.S. ambassador in Sweden for prior scrutiny and, presumably, his approval (a suggestion that was emphatically declined, of course).

Of course, one need not be a citizen of the superpower to be affected by its various great and subtle influences. There are certainly plenty of people in Sweden, for example, who unconsciously assume the perspective and accept the agenda of the U.S. government— the current prime minister, for example.

The most perplexing and disagreeable aspect of all this was the assumption that the conference must defer to the brutal, ignorant, often surrealistic climate of opinion in the United States. It was repeatedly argued that the language of conference documents must be worded so carefully as to avoid giving offence to the misguided masses of the United States, even if a more honest and forthright approach would be useful and appropriate for the remaining 95% of the earth's population. When this disparity was pointed out to one of the more prominent U.S. delegates, the emphatic reply was, "But I *live* in the United States. Those are the people I have to deal with!"

Those are the only people of any real significance, it would appear. For the overwhelming majority of the U.S. participants, as far as I could tell, the rest of the world did not count for very much in this matter. That included the people of Indochina: The total disregard of the strong Vietnamese approval of the the declaration's first draft has already been noted (see "Delayed declaration").

In fact, one U.S. member of the steering committee, The Chief Critic, seemed to regard it as a solemn responsibility to protect the Vietnamese from any impulse they might have to criticize the United States. For example, a Vietnamese member of the steering committee wrote that, "I think that the first draft of the declaration is a good one. But I would like to make a small addition to the next-to-last paragraph, as follows (change underlined): 'It is inexcusable that the innocent people of Indochina must endure the neglect of an indifferent world while they struggle to recover from the persistent effects of an unjust war [alt. senseless war] provoked by the U.S.A. which they did nothing to deserve.'"

That proposal earned the following response from The Chief Critic: "I would suggest that the language suggested by [our Vietnamese colleague] is not useful at this juncture of history. I believe personally that the war was unjust and largely took place in the extremely destructive form we witnessed due to U.S. refusal to respect the Geneva Agreement of 1954, but I don't think we want to limit support for the declaration to those who share that view of history.

"Vietnam's current interests must be kept in mind as well as its historic claims. Regardless of the rightness or wrongness of U.S. intervention in the 1950s and 1960s, the destruction that was done to the people of Indochina remains an unmet moral responsibility, especially for Americans. . . . The human cost is undeniable whatever the reason or justification, but it does little good for us as a conference to assess blame."

The presumption is, of course, that U.S. Americans have a better understanding of "Vietnam's current interests and historic claims" than the Vietnamese, themselves— in this case, one of their most knowledgeable and highly-respected scientists.

Nor was this an isolated incident. I have been present on several occasions when a prominent Vietnamese has suggested that the time was long past due for the U.S. to finally assume its responsibility for the suffering and destruction it has caused— only to be followed by a presumptively well-meaning U.S. American who has declared that his Vietnamese friend did not really say what he said, or did not really mean it, or did not really understand its perilous implications.

True to their patiently diplomatic natures, the Vietnamese tend to listen politely on such occasions, without comment— possibly because they perceive that any discussion would be futile and/or distracting. Apart from that, foreigners can sometimes be useful, even if they don't listen, are condescending or talk a lot of rubbish.

Another reason for the self-effacing reticence of the Vietnamese in such situations may be that they genuinely appreciate the contributions of sympathetic foreigners and defer to them out of grateful courtesy. It is clear that, by virtue of their dedicated efforts, the best among the U.S. Americans exercise a moral authority that engenders respect. They have certainly earned mine. But it is not unthinkable that they may sometimes be subconsciously inclined to use that moral authority to "guide" their Vietnamese friends along paths that they otherwise would not have chosen.

There is also the practical consideration that the United States is a demonstrably vengeful superpower whose potential for additional mischief— and perhaps for positive gestures, as well— must be taken into account. It is therefore natural for well-intentioned U.S. Americans to regard themselves as agents of reconciliation whose mission is to build bridges between the former combatants. In that role, they must try to balance a variety of interests, including U.S. majority opinion, the organizations they represent, funding sources, and their Vietnamese hosts.

One of their most perplexing tasks is to divine the wishes of the Vietnamese government. That concern is reflected, for example, in the following message sent to me by a U.S. member of the steering committee apropos the first draft of the declaration: "I believe you need to be more sensitive to the impact on Vietnam of how the conference is perceived. Some Vietnamese will agree publicly with the text, and even more will privately affirm its spirit, but responsible authorities are not likely to welcome this approach."<sup>\*</sup>

Yet another factor which may help to explain the kind of advice and pressure that U.S. Americans tend to apply is that many of them

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Everything in my experience to date suggests that such worries are unfounded. See, for example, the sections entitled "Delayed declaration" and "Agent Orange".

are genuinely peaceful souls who reflexively strive to avoid confrontation under all circumstances. This is a very strong tendency among U.S. peace and solidarity activists, one that resonates with the ethical foundations of Vietnamese society.

Whatever the factors involved, the consequence is that the more assertive and self-assured U.S. Americans usually prevail over the diffident, diplomatic Vietnamese. There is a tendency to suppress any reminder of U.S. crimes against the nations of Indochina or of the associated responsibilities. This leaves the propagandists and historical revisionists unopposed, and their grip on U.S. public opinion appears to be growing stronger rather than weaker. Thus, John Kerry, a former hero of the veterans' anti-war movement, has found it prudent as a presidential candidate to renounce his former criticism of the Vietnam War as misguided youthful excess—and submissively to join the current march of folly in Iraq.

Another consequence of the U.S. American dogma of non-confrontation is the conception of reconciliation as a process in which the peoples of Indochina are expected to forgive and forget, while virtually no corresponding demands are made of the United States and its citizens. At best, the latter are urged to assist their victims as a humanitarian gesture that in no way implies any moral responsibility for the war and its consequences.

Further, it is assumed that any reconciliation that takes place must be entirely on U.S.

terms and conditions, including those imposed by the prevailing climate of imperial arrogance, self-pity, moral blindness and distorted history. In that climate, for example, it is deemed offensively "political" to cite the crimes and responsibilities of the United States, and politically pure to ignore them.

My own view, which should be fairly obvious by now, is that it is essential to confront the superpower and its evil past, partly for the sake of its victims and partly for the sake of us all. That the United States has never been compelled to deal with the enormity of its crimes in Indochina goes a long way toward explaining the wantonly destructive behavior of its current government, several of whose leading figures were involved in the Vietnam War.

At this particular moment in history, the reigning global power happens to be the United States. In some not-too-distant future, there is likely to be another—China, perhaps. What all great powers seem to have in common is a compulsion to rewrite history, dominate the flow of information, and intimidate questioning or dissenting voices into silence.

That is why it has always been so crucially important to "speak truth to power". As far as I can see, the only way to prevent the endless repetition of tragedies like the Vietnam War is to mobilize all humanity to resist the criminal regimes that inflict them.

It is difficult to understand how that can be accomplished by remaining silent for fear of offending the perpetrators.

## THE CONFERENCE

Scientific conferences tend to be rather daunting exercises in information overload, consisting largely of more or less disconnected presentations and panel discussions on recent developments in various fields. But the intended function of the Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam was very different: The main task at hand was to discuss and finalize the declaration and the four subcommittee reports.

As that seemed to call for a maximum of co-operation and a minimum of formality, the program was devised accordingly. There was a mixture of plenary sessions and subcommittee meetings (in which all interested delegates were invited to participate), with plenty of time left over for informal gatherings and personal encounters. The peaceful, semi-secluded setting in a beautiful area on the outskirts of Stockholm helped to establish an agreeable atmosphere, as did the friendly and efficient staff of the Bosön Conference Centre (selection of photos at: [www.nnn.se/environ/album.htm](http://www.nnn.se/environ/album.htm)).

According to the original plan, most of the work on the declaration and the four reports was supposed to be completed by the date of the conference. However, that turned out to be true in only one case—the report on ecosystems. With regard to the other three reports and the declaration, a great deal remained to be done (see pp. 14-15 and 21-22).

As expected, the public health subcommittee sessions were dominated by an intense debate on the issue of Agent Orange/dioxin, reflecting the tensions and conflicts referred to above (see pp. 29-33). But these were resolved more or less amicably, and the basic terms of a draft report were agreed upon by the end of the conference. Apart from the good will of the participants, much of the credit for the positive outcome is due to Andreas Murray, a diplomatic Swedish psychoanalyst who had learned about the conference only a few days in advance, but graciously agreed to serve as moderator for the subcommittee meetings.

The final language of the report was worked out among doctors Hoang Trong Quynh and John Constable of the subcommittee and myself (as editor and subcommittee co-ordinator), and published on the web site some two weeks after the conference. Since

then, no significant objections have been raised and the conclusions of the report have been confirmed at subsequent international gatherings.

For quite different reasons, the meetings of the subcommittee on ethical, legal and policy issues (ELP) also gave rise to some tense moments. As previously explained, I had ended up as the co-ordinator of this subcommittee and the author of its report. But especially during the first day, I was distracted by a variety of emergencies requiring immediate attention, and was not able to lead the session. In my absence, The Chief Critic assumed command and proceeded to steer the discussion into a thicket of trivialities. As with the declaration, he was especially eager to avoid any reference to the United States' moral and legal responsibility for the war and its consequences (the main arguments involved are reviewed in Appendix A).

I had plenty to do at the time and would have been inclined to let The Chief Critic's little coup go unchallenged, if it had not been for the sorry history of the declaration which, at that point, appeared likely to be rendered inconsequential by the same person. Of course, I also had an obligation to the subcommittee which I had assembled, and among whose members a majority shared my perspective (at least one of these was deeply offended by the behavior of The Chief Critic, but chose not to make an issue of it).

Consequently, I reasserted my leadership on the second day of the conference— upon which The Chief Critic immediately challenged my right to do so, on the basis of my limited participation in the previous day's discussion. It therefore became necessary to assure him that I had not resigned as co-ordinator, and that I expected to be assisted during my forced absence, not displaced. It was a rather unpleasant confrontation for everyone in attendance.

Needless to say, that episode was not very conducive to fruitful discussion, and not much progress was made toward clarifying the issues during the conference. That was done afterward by the subcommittee on the basis of the analysis reproduced in Appendix A: The final version of the report, which consumed most of my available time during the following year, was not published until the late autumn of 2003.

As for the subcommittee on economic and social issues, there was none (see p. 18). But Adam Fforde, an Australian economist with considerable experience of Vietnam, attended the conference and led group discussions on the subject. According to the participants, those discussions were quite helpful in conceptualizing the problem of how to study the environment-related economic consequences of the war. Alas, they were insufficient to provide the basis for any kind of report (further details on conference web site: [www.nnn.se/environ.htm](http://www.nnn.se/environ.htm)).

The meetings of the ecosystem subcommittee were primarily concerned with ironing out the details of its draft report, and with discussing the questions raised by delegates. The final version of the report was published on the web site shortly after the conference and has received much praise.

Apart from the unpleasantness over the ELP subcommittee and the drearily protracted nit-picking of the declaration text, the scheduled

elements of the conference proceeded without any noticeable problems or confusion. That was thanks in large part to the civilized conduct of the delegates—hardly any “baby-sitting” was required—and the efforts of two individuals who helped out with the practical chores.

One of the latter was Gabor Tiroler, who immigrated to Sweden from Hungary as a young child after the thwarted revolution of 1956, and a few years later became active in the nascent movement against the Vietnam War. The other was Len Aldis, head of the Britain-Vietnam Friendship Society, who has spent much of his adult life and practically all of his retirement years acting in solidarity with the people of Vietnam. Without the contributions of these two gentlemen, the conference would hardly have functioned as well as it did on the practical level.

As for myself, I was kept rather busy with various duties and the inevitable unanticipated crises. Thus, I had little opportunity to observe the general state and process of things. One who did was Lady Borton of the steering committee, a veteran of many previous conferences on the same and related matters. She concluded that this one was, among other things, quite successful in providing a favorable atmosphere for co-operation and networking. An abridged version of her report to the NGO she serves is presented in Appendix E.

## RESULTS

The main purpose of the project was to conduct a comprehensive review and analysis of all long-term consequences of the Vietnam War which could in any way be related to the environment. That was a very ambitious goal and, although there is difficult to measure such things, it is safe to say that the final outcome fell far short of the original intent. In fact, we merely scratched the surface of that very large and complex subject.

Of course, part of the explanation lies in the limited financial resources available, and in all the other difficulties outlined above. Also, it seems that there are substantial-to-enormous knowledge gaps in many of relevant areas, so that there is little to review or analyze. This was especially evident in the case of economic and social issues. But even for the issue of Agent Orange/dioxin, which has been the subject of so much interest and discussion for nearly half a century, the level of knowledge remains quite low, for the reasons noted.

The fact that the project relied entirely on voluntary contributions was another key factor, of course. As most of those involved were busy with careers and other interests, the amount of time and energy made available to this fleeting enterprise was bound to be limited. To do a proper job would probably require something on the order of a government or university department, fully funded for several years. Even then, however, the quest for knowledge would likely be compromised by political considerations and other constraints of the sort noted elsewhere in this report.

Given all this, the final outcome was probably as good as could be expected with the means available. As far as I know, it was the first such attempt to devise a comprehensive picture of the Vietnam War's long-term consequences, and it came at time when the world was well on the way to developing a disturbing historical amnesia about what was done to the countries of Indochina on the pretexts of democracy, freedom and anti-communism.

The conference thus provided a reminder, however slight, to the peoples of Indochina that at least some elements of the world community have not forgotten them and are concerned for their well-being. That reminder appears to have been very much appreciated, especially in Vietnam, whose fate was the primary focus of the conference.

Upon returning home, a group of the Vietnamese delegates met with President Tran Duc Luong and other government officials to report on the conference. Apparently, that report was highly favorable. I was later informed that, "One of the outcomes was significantly increased government funding for the Vietnamese Red Cross Agent Orange Fund— not one of the outcomes we had expected from the conference!"

On a state visit to France a few months later, President Luong urged the French-Vietnamese Friendship Association ("AAFV") to organize an international conference that would be "like Stockholm, but bigger". AAFV agreed to do so, and is now planning such a conference to be held in the spring of 2005. I have been asked to assist with the planning, and am doing so with the greatest of pleasure and satisfaction.

Inasmuch as AAFV is a large, well-established organization in a wealthy country whose population is nearly seven times that of Sweden, it is indeed likely that its conference will be "bigger than Stockholm". The preparations to date indicate as much. Thus, it may well turn out that the single most valuable contribution of our conference will have been to stimulate the initiative of AAFV.

Another useful outcome of the Stockholm conference was the declaration, which has been published on our web site and otherwise disseminated in four languages (English, Swedish, French and German). Despite its somewhat shaky origins and limited budget, it has served its intended purpose of drawing attention to the Vietnam War's persistent legacy of suffering and the urgent need for remedial action.

One of the most interesting uses to which the declaration has been put has been as the inspiration for an "Early Day Motion" of support that was introduced in the British Parliament by M.P. Harry Cohen at the urging of Len Aldis, head of the Britain-Vietnam Friendship Society,

A similar motion was introduced in Canada's Parliament by M.P. Svend J. Robinson at the urging of Wayne Dwernychuk of the conference steering committee. Although these motions were "merely" symbolic, they did serve to remind both legislatures of the issues involved. (My efforts to induce a similar initiative in the Swedish parliament were met with the lack of response that has characterized my adopted country's attitude toward this project.)

Otherwise, the declaration has been circulated by various means, the Internet not least. In addition to the conference web site, it has been published on those of AAFV, Green Cross International, World Traveler *et al.* From time to time, I learn of its use in a variety of other settings, including school classes and study groups.

The declaration has also been put to use by the Vietnamese. For example, it has been invoked by the Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in connection with the class action suit filed in the U.S. in early 2004.

Both the declaration and the conference in general were discussed in a special session of a symposium entitled, "The Ecological and Health Effects of the Vietnam War", held at Yale University in mid-September of 2002, i.e. about six weeks after our event. The Yale symposium was dominated by U.S. citizens (including many veterans of the war) and their concerns, thus providing an interesting contrast to the Stockholm conference.

According to one of the several members of our steering committee who was also present at Yale, the two events differed "in lots of ways—the declaration and position papers, to begin with. But more important, there was the chance [in Stockholm] for the Cambodians, Lao and Vietnamese to feel some solidarity with them on these issues." Solidarity with the principal victims of the war was no particular concern of the Yale symposium, according to a report by one of the U.S. delegates who participated in both events, i.e. at Stockholm and Yale:

"A nurse and environmentalist from Montana represented some of the experiences of a younger generation when she noted how troubling the war was for her even at age 11, with legacies of 'unintended consequences' that hurt people long after the guns had fallen silent. Some of us shared the pain of the younger participants when they looked back at the damage the U.S.A. has done and continues to do. . . . The Stockholm Conference was acutely aware of

what the U.S. did and is doing to the world. With the exception mainly of the younger persons, the Yale Conference seemed oblivious to those issues."

As noted, I did not have enough time to conduct a proper publicity campaign for the Stockholm conference. But the type and amount of coverage was quite adequate, nonetheless. The proceedings were attended by correspondents from BBC, Agence-France Presse, Reuters, *et al.*, and their reports were distributed in the usual way to various news media around the world. Among the international media that published items about the conference were BBC, Agence-France Presse, Reuters, *Nature*, *The Ecologist*, CBS News (U.S.A.), the *U.N. Observer*, Radio Australia, *Financial Times*, *Suddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany) and *Information* (Denmark).

In Sweden, there was relatively extensive coverage by national public radio and television (corresponding roughly to England's BBC). There was also a two-page spread in *Svenska Dagbladet*, the country's second-most important daily newspaper, and a number of articles in smaller publications. (This deviation from the Swedish norm of indifference to the conference was probably due in large measure to the fact that it took place in the midst of the annual summer news drought.)

Not surprisingly, the conference was the subject of much attention in the Vietnamese press, both before and afterwards. There was probably additional press coverage, as well; but I did not have the time to track it all down, nor the resources to hire a monitoring agency to do so. In short, it was a more than satisfying result, given the limited time I was able to devote to publicity.

Apart from the outcomes reviewed above, Lady Borton's report mentions several others which she felt to be of value (see Appendix E). As far as the delegates were concerned, most appeared to be more than well-pleased, and several wrote as much in flattering notes that I received afterwards.

Particularly gratifying has been the appreciation shown by the Cambodians, Lao and Vietnamese who participated in the conference or have otherwise learned about it. At the same time, it is sad to discover that such a modest event could have such significance. It is an indicator of how woefully these issues and the people they affect have been neglected.

## CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that the project had at least some value, and fulfilled at least some of its objectives. But it is equally clear that it fell far short of its original purpose and potential. Many of its shortcomings can, of course, be attributed to the lack of adequate financing. Foundations and other funding agencies would be well-advised to contemplate the logic of their standard policies against supporting conferences in general, and planning activities in particular. There are precious few alternative sources.

It is unlikely, however, that any amount of funding would have altered those aspects of human behavior which caused so many distractions along the way.\* In fact, this report might well be subtitled, "Why things are never done properly".

This is not to dismiss or diminish the many positive contributions that were made. Without them, little or nothing would have been accomplished. But in reflecting upon the entire range of behaviors displayed during the course of the project, it is striking how little time and energy were devoted to the task at hand, and how much to various personal agendas and preoccupations. There were territorial interests to defend, occupational demands to be met, future funding opportunities to safeguard, governments to placate, professional reputations to protect, national loyalties to bear in mind, etc.—not to mention the various kinds of psychological baggage that humans bring to all of their activities.

Such concerns are very human, to be sure, and I do not mean to suggest that I am somehow above them. But as co-ordinator of the enterprise, I was in a position to observe all of these often diverging and conflicting tendencies, and it caused me to realize what a very tricky business it can be to reconcile them long enough and well enough to achieve a theoretically common purpose.

For anyone deeply absorbed in organizing such an event, it is easy to forget or remain unaware that, for most of those involved, it is merely one item on a schedule filled with other

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\*The unhelpful behavior and other distractions referred to in this account may seem exaggerated, both in number and in nature. The reverse is true, however; many large and small difficulties of various kinds have been omitted.

activities and obligations. The amount of effort and attention they are willing and/or able to devote tends to be varied and limited.

In retrospect, it has occurred to me that this natural state of things may be especially problematical in relation to the goal of achieving consensus. By contrast, a typical scientific conference consists of more or less disconnected talks on a variety of subjects, along with some panel discussions in which the participants are free to agree or disagree. Such an event makes fewer demands of social and intellectual cohesion.

It may well be that something as ephemeral as a conference is not very well-suited to the development of a polished consensus. Given the current state of knowledge regarding the issues involved in this one, however, it was probably a useful first step. But perhaps one should not be too surprised or disappointed that it did not fulfill all of its rather ambitious objectives.

### Organizational matters

The experience of this project suggests a few organizational adjustments that might be useful in connection with similar events. One is to limit the steering committee (or equivalent) to a relatively small number of individuals—seven at the most, I should think—who share a common perspective and are not impeded or distracted by extraneous considerations. The most desirable qualities in this connection are dedication to the objectives of the project and a willingness to co-operate selflessly toward those ends.

Forming the main decision-making body in accordance with these principles might entail some sacrifice of expertise and renown. But those valuable attributes could be included by

means of an advisory panel of confidence-inspiring individuals who, for various reasons, may be concerned about their professional reputations, obligations to their employers, loyalties to their native lands, etc. An advisory panel would enable them to lend their names and expertise to the project without assuming responsibility for its conduct. Further, if at any point they should choose to resign, the potential damage to the project's credibility would be comparatively slight.

Another lesson from this project is that absolutely nothing may be assumed about the willingness of those involved to fulfill their obligations, however slight or essential. Among other things, it seems necessary to point out that:

- compared with activities that offer some sort of personal reward such as money or prestige, voluntary projects require more discipline and dedication, not less
- it is absolutely essential to honor one's commitments; failing to do so threatens the success of the project, and increases both the practical and the psychological burden on more conscientious associates
- if you leave others to do all or most of the work, do not conspire against them
- strive always to resolve any conflicts or tensions that arise, through open and mutually respectful discussion
- constantly keep in mind the purpose and potential beneficiaries of the project—i.e. the reasons that it seemed worthwhile in the first place— while suppressing all tendencies to temper tantrums, *prima donna* antics, personal attacks on colleagues, abrupt and groundless resignations, etc.

It may seem comical or perhaps insulting to instruct presumably responsible adults in such self-evident rules of conduct. Experience clearly indicates, however, that an awful lot of adults are neither responsible nor reliable in such contexts, and that there is very little which can safely be regarded as self-evident. No doubt for a variety of reasons— the distractions of everyday life, problems at work and at home, etc.— people need to be reminded of these and related simple but essential requirements for the success of any project.

## Confronting the superpower

In a variety of ways, the history of this project illustrates the continuing negative influence of the United States on the victims of its aggression in Indochina. Anxieties about the superpower's displeasure adversely affected the amount of funding available, the level of participation, and the freedom to address central issues.

For me, the most perplexing symptom of superpower influence was the strong tendency, bordering on a compulsion, of most U.S. participants to avoid reference to their country's responsibility for the Vietnam War and its consequences. Their stated reasons for doing so are discussed elsewhere in this report (Appendix A, for example).

Although their intentions were presumably good, they acted in effect as unwitting agents of those powerful interests that have been laboring with considerable success to reinterpret the crimes of the United States as part of "a noble, selfless effort". The lies are endlessly repeated; the truth must not be told, for fear of offending the liars and their receptive audience.

This is a matter of great importance, not only for the nations of Indochina, but for others that have been and will be afflicted by the superpower. The revision of history is central to the imperial project of the United States, which to a large extent is based on the "soft power" of propaganda and public relations, the function of which is to minimize opposition to aggression and domination.

The ability to cover up and reinterpret past crimes is a precondition for the commission of new ones, such as those currently taking place in Iraq. There, the United States has run into serious difficulties due to cracks in its image resulting from the publication of photographs and other information documenting its crimes against civilians and prisoners of war. This demonstrates how crucial it is to get the facts out in the open and keep them there.

Accordingly, it would seem appropriate for the well-intentioned U.S. citizens who have been exercising and counseling silence on the their country's crimes in Indochina to carefully reconsider their arguments for doing so. Until such time as they devise more convincing arguments than those presented to date, it would

seem highly inappropriate for them to dissuade others from addressing such issues.

If it is the case that professional obligations, patriotic sensibilities and other considerations hinder U.S. citizens from openly confronting their homeland's dark past, that is no reason for its victims to remain silent. On the contrary: By reminding the world of their fates, they may help to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

In this context, it may be useful to point out that the kinds of U.S. citizens who participated in this project are not, alas, representative of the United States in general. This applies especially to foreign policy, which has long been dominated by the more brutal elements of society. Many leading figures of the current regime were eager protagonists of the Vietnam War, for example.

It should also be kept in mind that such interests have never been consistently opposed by a majority of the U.S. populace—not even during the most appalling phase of the Vietnam War. This is a serious problem that financier and political activist George Soros recently addressed in connection with the latest war of aggression against Iraq:

"I would dearly love to pin all the blame on President Bush and his team. But that would be too easy. It would ignore the fact that he was playing to a receptive audience and even today, after all that has happened, a majority of the electorate continues to have confidence in President Bush on national security matters. If this continues and President Bush gets reelected, we must ask ourselves the question: 'What is wrong with us?' The question needs to be asked even if he is defeated, because we cannot simply ignore what we have done since September 11 [2001]."

Perhaps Soros cannot ignore such things. But a decisive majority of the U.S. public certainly can, as the current state of knowledge and opinion regarding the Vietnam War sadly demonstrates. This is the spiritual descendant of the voting public that overwhelmingly rejected George McGovern, a genuine peace candidate pledged to end that war, to re-elect a genuine war criminal as president. Not so incidentally, McGovern remains the object of much bitter resentment among the citizenry of his home town in South Dakota—for his "betrayal" in opposing the war.

That sort of public opinion and behavior is hardly unique to the United States, of course. But what is the point of subordinating the discourse on the Vietnam War to the emotional needs and demands of people in that state of mind? Such a strategy is highly unlikely to yield substantial benefits in the foreseeable future. As the Association of Agent Orange/Dioxin Victims has observed: "The Vietnamese people have patiently expressed their willingness to co-operate with the United States to settle the heavy consequences of the war. It is regrettable that our goodwill has not been reciprocated."

Especially given the urgency of the problems involved, it seems far wiser to concentrate on enlisting the support of the enlightened minority in the United States and the much larger segment of the remaining 95 per cent of the world's population that does not recoil from the truth in such matters. There is an obvious need for a sustained public education campaign about the Vietnam War in order to: increase global awareness of the persistent consequences; generate support for present and future victims; and illuminate the historical pattern of behavior which is currently being displayed in such diverse settings as Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, and Venezuela.

The goal must be to surround the United States with a sea of knowledge that will make it more difficult for the superpower to remain an isolated island of ignorance and self-delusion. An aroused world opinion also poses a serious obstacle to the imposition of imperial power, as the editors of the *New York Times* and numerous others have observed.

Writer Heather Wokusch, for example, has stressed the importance of an anti-empire policy in the United States' northern neighbor: "A strong and opinionated Canada is a powerful counterbalance to U.S. intransigence, and one that will be ever more crucial in the years ahead."

In the work of developing restraints on the current superpower and its successor(s), an essential role can and probably must be played by the non-governmental sector, including foundations and other charitable organizations. That sector comprises the only feasible source of organizational and financial resources for such a global effort.

Individual organizations and foundations, including those that sponsored the Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam, have occasionally demonstrated a willingness to challenge the superpower. But as indicated above, NGOs in general are subject to various pressures and conflicts which tend to limit the potential for co-ordinated action (see "NGO politics", p. 26). Among other things, they often compete with each other for scarce resources. Some of them have been known to maintain links with the C.I.A. and other agencies.

The obvious way to start dealing with such problems is to bring them out into the open. The time would appear to be ripe for an international conference of all interested parties on the theme of, "The Non-governmental Sector in an Era of Superpower Dominance".

At this moment in history, the United States is the primary object of concern. But its successor(s) could well turn out to be even more ruthless and destructive. If so, that is all the more reason to establish an effective counterweight to imperial power as soon as possible.

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## APPENDIX A. DEBATE ON ETHICAL, LEGAL & POLICY ISSUES

The following summary and analysis of criticisms relating to the report on ethical, legal and policy issues was distributed to the members of the ELP subcommittee by its co-ordinator, Al Burke, two weeks after the conference. The original text has been edited slightly to preserve anonymity. Much the same criticisms and analysis apply, as well, to the conference declaration. Since none of the subcommittee members objected to this analysis, it served as a basis of the final ELP report.

The first draft of our report has been criticized on a number of grounds that I have tried to summarize below from a variety of sources, including the tape recordings of the plenary sessions, [steering committee and subcommittee member] Chuck Searcy's notes of the workshop discussions, and my own conversations with many of the conference delegates. Needless to say, you are all welcome to correct me if I have missed or misinterpreted anything.

As far as I can tell, there are five main criticisms:

### Wrong approach

By focusing on a view of history and a responsibility that the majority of U.S. citizens are not prepared to accept, the first draft gives the U.S. government and many citizens an excuse for doing nothing. The primary goal of helping victims of the war would be better served by focusing on the issues of Agent Orange and other toxic chemicals, the legacy of landmines and UXO, and other consequences of the war in such a way that even those who supported the war would be appalled by what the U.S.A. did and agree that assistance is necessary. Among other things, we should examine U.S. law to discover legal precedents that would also apply to Southeast Asia. In general, we should provide a suitable context for the Bush administration by offering suggestions as to what could and should be done.

### Wrong context

A related argument is that, while the analysis may be correct, this is not the place to present it. The historical discussion should be relegated to other forums.

### Wrong tone

Certain wording and the overall tone would give the U.S. government and many citizens an excuse for turning away and doing nothing. It is important not to close any doors.

### Disputed analysis

The view of history conveyed by the first draft is not generally accepted in the U.S.A., and we cannot

win that debate. We should not make disagreement over the past an impediment to moving ahead in the present.

### Irrelevant issues

It is futile to raise issues of morality and legality, since the U.S.A. will never acknowledge their relevance. It would be more effective to focus on what was done, then find ways to encourage the U.S.A. and other nations to provide greater assistance.

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The most insistent critic of the first draft was a member of the conference steering committee. I am not certain that I entirely understand his critique, so I will simply transcribe his remarks to the plenary session:

"I think that the issue is trying to understand how to convey responsibility in the world of 2002, to the parties who we are trying to motivate to address the consequences of the war.

"It would be fair to say that the draft that Al wrote would be considered among historians as representing a very particular view of the history. It is done in somewhat polemical terms, which obviously could be edited.

"More fundamentally, the analysis of the history, while it may be appealing to us in this room, is not an analysis of the history which is generally recognized in the U.S. and, I would guess, in much of Western Europe, as well. But I can say for certain that, at least in the U.S., it is not a view of history that would be accepted.

"So, then the question is: What do you do about that? Do you say that it is our responsibility to try to correct that view of history. That is actually part of what we do at [our organization]. But even then, how we do that is a problematical issue—because you don't want to make disagreement over the view of history an impediment to moving ahead in the present.

"As a member of the steering committee and as a participant in this conference who is deeply committed to having the world and, in particular, my own country engage in the question of responsibility for the destruction left by the war, it is to

say that we don't deal with those things. Because, if you deal with those things, then we are going to change the focus of the argument. We will allow large numbers of people— it is not the people who will be convinced that the war was illegal from the beginning, and therefore the U.S. has responsibility.

"We simply are not going to win that argument. We can win the argument, as we make clear the consequences of the war, that those consequences are there and, regardless of whether or not the U.S. in 1945 or 1954 or 1975 did or did not do certain things, the consequences are there as a result of the war and the kind of war that was conducted. It was conducted, obviously, largely with a kind of weaponry from the U.S., even though others used it, too.

"That kind of argument— I mean, we are not going to turn around the Bush administration— but we can convince more and more people that these problems are a problem today because of things that were done in the past. They were done and they need to be addressed.

"I think the analysis in Al's draft is interesting and, when people have time, they would want to read it. It would be fine to have on the web site of Al's organization. I just don't think it's an analysis that can be produced by a conference that represents many different viewpoints, and also a conference which has, first and foremost, the goal of bringing about a change in policy in government— first a change in atmosphere, in public opinion, and ultimately a change in policy in governments in the West."

The most emphatic supporter of the first draft at the conference was a member of the Cambodian delegation who spent many years of his youth in the United States, where he was active in the anti-war movement. He argued that, if anything, the report should place even stronger emphasis on U.S. responsibility, and that it is especially important to educate younger generations about the history of the war.

He supported the remarks of Prof. Nguyen Trong Nhan to the plenary session in this regard: "I agree with Prof. Nhan that we should use Al's paper as a basis, with some modifications. I also agree that we need to let the younger generation— not only in the U.S.A., but in countries all over the world— know what has happened in the past.

"As Prof. Nhan says, we have to let the younger generation know. Otherwise, how can they take over the responsibility of helping these three countries. I also agree with Prof. Nhan that we

need to make a stronger case. If we don't, how can we deal with the issues of war reparations and humanitarian assistance. We need to put pressure on the United States. Without a strong case, I don't think we are going to get anything."

"We should also keep in mind that this is not a conference of governments. We are here as private citizens, and we should feel free to say what we think."

Throughout the conference, Prof. Nhan [head of the Vietnamese delegation] consistently emphasized the responsibility of the U.S.A. and the need to recall the history of the war.

## Discussion

The task now before us is to make some sense out of all this and produce a revised draft that is more generally acceptable than the first. Toward that end, I will respond to the criticisms and observations noted above, and offer some suggestions on how to proceed. I hope that all of you will feel free and have the time to join in the discussion.

Actually, I have responded to most of the criticisms and objections before, in connection with the discussion of the first draft of the declaration which took place a few months ago. At that time, I noted that the issues raised by the declaration were much the same as those to be addressed in our report, and invited all concerned to respond to my interpretation of them. I never did get any reaction, leading me to assume that we were all in basic agreement. But the disagreements which emerged during the conference clearly indicate that is not the case.

Therefore, it seems appropriate to offer the same arguments again, which is why much of the following discussion may sound rather familiar. This time, however, I must cordially insist that those who disagree explain what is wrong with my reasoning. Otherwise, it will continue to serve as a basis of the report.

So, with regard to the criticisms noted above. . .

### Wrong approach

I fail to see how our report is necessary to provide "the U.S. government and many citizens [with] an excuse for doing nothing." They have already been doing that— and a lot more, including the embargoes— for nearly three decades. As for the recommendation to focus on Agent Orange, UXO, etc., those issues are quite properly dealt with in the reports on ecosystems and public health. Whether those reports will induce readers to "be appalled by what the USA did" is open to question; but it is significant that even this criticism

assumes that appalling our intended audience is an appropriate function of the report.

I doubt that U.S. legal precedents will be of much use to the people of Southeast Asia; so far, they have not even provided much comfort to U.S. veterans. As for the prospects of influencing the Bush administration, no one seems to genuinely believe in that possibility. According to the sharpest critic of the first draft, “we are not going to turn around the Bush administration”.

At the heart of this particular criticism is the question of the target audience. That question was raised on several occasions during the conference, but I am not aware that it was ever resolved. My own view is that the report should be primarily directed to those who are most likely to respond favourably to an appeal for greater interest and investment in the reconstruction of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

That would seem to exclude the vast majority of the U.S. population, which for decades has been systematically indoctrinated to understand the Vietnam War as a terrible tragedy—for the United States. A brief description of that syndrome is provided in the draft, so there is no need to repeat it here.

The events of last September 11 have also contributed to a general climate of opinion that is unlikely to be influenced by appeals for the reconstruction of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The attacks in Washington and New York have triggered a wave of anxiety, self-pity, fury, revenge and other unpleasant emotions that have crystallized in the “War on Terrorism”.

The government of Vietnam has not only refused to join in that crusade, but has pointedly criticized it. As a result, Vietnam has been lumped together with North Korea, Iraq and other “rogue states” and has been served notice by a high official of the State Department that it “will live to regret it”. Meanwhile, the reactionary forces that dominate U.S. foreign policy continue to chastise Vietnam for its alleged abuses of human rights—this by representatives of the country that has done more than any other to violate the human rights of the Vietnamese people.

Such behaviour is what one would expect from the current U.S. government, which is likely to be around for a long time and represents the same kinds of interests that perpetrated the Vietnam War. For example, Secretary of State (foreign minister) Colin Powell, widely regarded as a moderating influence, was involved in efforts to cover up the massacre at My Lai/Song My. Much stronger is the influence of people like Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Perle, whose aggressive

attitudes and behaviour speak for themselves.

Another important factor that must be taken into account is the large number of other catastrophes that have occurred since the Vietnam War, and those that are likely to occur within a not-too-distant future. Rumsfeld has declared that there are some 40-50 countries that deserve the same kind of treatment to which Afghanistan is being subjected. Such an ambition probably exceeds even the United States’ capacity for destruction, but we may reasonably expect a steady diet of bombing wars and related destruction during the years ahead. That being the case, it will not be easy to stimulate interest in a war that is widely regarded as having ended over a quarter-century ago.

For these and other reasons, it is a delusion to believe that it is possible to arouse sympathy for the people of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam among a majority of U.S. citizens or their current government. There, the primary focus must be on that 10-20 percent of the population which may be open to such an appeal. This presumably includes former participants in the anti-war movement who may now regard the Vietnam War as a thing of the past, have turned their attention to more recent disasters or, perhaps to some extent, have been influenced by the ongoing propaganda campaign against Vietnam.

Keep in mind that fifteen percent of the U.S. population is about forty million people, and that many former anti-war activists are now respectable middle-aged and older citizens with good jobs and sizeable incomes. If a “critical mass” of such individuals were to become actively involved in the reconstruction of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, there is at least a possibility that their knowledge and enthusiasm might spread to a larger portion of the total population. But I very much doubt that they or anyone else would be moved by a report formulated so delicately as to avoid offending the indoctrinated majority.

So much for the United States. The potential audience should be much broader in other “western” countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan. An especially urgent priority is to maintain the relatively high level of solidarity and support that has characterized the foreign policy of Sweden and, to a somewhat lesser degree, the other Nordic countries. Here, there is a much more receptive audience for a powerful statement. The problem is mainly one of forgetfulness and distraction—i.e. the widespread feeling that the Vietnam War is a thing of the past, and the occurrence of more recent disasters calling for immediate attention.

The level of solidarity is probably not as great in Europe, generally, as in the Nordic countries. But the anti-war movement was very strong in most European countries, and there is not the same political or emotional need for denial and distortion that predominates in the United States. A powerful statement is unlikely to arouse much resentment in most of Europe, and very likely to attract support. A potentially helpful factor is the growing sense of unease over the unilateral arrogance of the Bush government. A pointed reminder of what the arrogance of U.S. power can lead to is likely to go down very well in this part of the world at this particular time.

But the existing reservoir of solidarity and good will needs to be constantly reinforced and replenished, especially given the ever-increasing dominance of the United States. Even Sweden, the “one honourable exception” during the Vietnam War by virtue of Olof Palme’s eloquent opposition, has under its current leadership become a vassal-state of *Pax Americana* in virtually all matters of foreign policy.

### A matter of perspective

For all of these reasons, it is essential to review the history and background of the war, and to emphasize the responsibility of the aggressor for its consequences. In this regard, I feel compelled to note that, with one or two exceptions, those who have been most critical of or concerned about raising such issues in both the declaration and our report have been U.S. citizens. This is quite understandable, and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of those who express such concerns.

But for the time being, at least, the world is larger than the United States. Of course, this does not mean that we should go out of our way to offend citizens of that country. But I presume it is self-evident that, in these matters, the perspective of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam must take precedence.

It is not always a simple matter for outsiders like myself to know or understand that perspective. For many years after the war, the standard interpretation of western observers was that the Vietnamese, in particular, wanted to forget the past and get on with building the future. This meant developing good relations with their former tormentors, and politely avoiding any reference to past transgressions.

I was inclined to accept that interpretation—until I began to discuss it with the Vietnamese of my acquaintance. What I heard from them was something quite different. Almost as a litany, I was repeatedly informed that, “We forgive, but we do

not forget”—with the emphasis very definitely on “we do not forget”.

In fact, there seems to be mounting concern among some members of the older, wartime generation that their descendants are becoming oblivious to the American War. One prominent female veteran of the war put it this way during my visit to Hanoi in April: “We did not sacrifice and suffer as we did for such a long time, just to watch our children forget that it ever happened.”

If the Vietnamese do not forget, then why should we? Why should we allow those responsible to not only forget, but to grossly distort the reality of what happened? Perhaps most importantly, why should we make it impossible for younger generations to remember, by failing to provide them with a valid alternative to the Hollywood version of the Vietnam War?

Against this it is often argued that a polite silence about the past is necessary in order to facilitate reconciliation between the former antagonists. But genuine reconciliation is a two-way process in which the perpetrators acknowledge and beg forgiveness for their transgressions, while the victims grant absolution. The best-known and most widely admired model for such a process is that conducted in South Africa following the *apartheid* era.

As noted, however, the United States in general has not even begun to acknowledge its crimes against Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. On the contrary, it has been systematically redefining them as noble efforts, and has even returned to plague Cambodia and Vietnam with economic embargoes, self-righteous posturing on human rights, lectures on democracy, etc.

In short, it is a curiously one-side process that has been passing for reconciliation, and I do not see how any report emanating from our conference could have much effect on it, one way or another.

On the other hand, there is a genuine process of reconciliation that has been taking place, especially in Laos and Vietnam. It has involved people like Chuck Searcy and members of Vietnam Veterans against the War, who are manifestly not afraid of the truth. It is this process that we should encourage, and I do not see how we can do that by ignoring the history of the war or the responsibility of the United States.

Another argument against dwelling on the past is that the government of Vietnam wants to avoid confrontation with the United States. According to [a member of the steering committee], “Vietnam does not want to needlessly make enemies or alienate itself from public opinion and

the governments with which it has many other agendas to pursue.”

No doubt this is true. But it is also true that ours is not a government project. Its primary value derives from the fact that it is an independent initiative for which no government need take responsibility. It would be foolish to waste such an opportunity. As [the Cambodian delegate quoted above] argued at the conference, “We should feel free to say what we think.”

Indeed, why go to all this trouble only to exercise the same kind of self-censorship and submit to the same kinds of political and diplomatic constraints by which governments are bound? They have far greater resources and opportunity to do that sort of thing and I, for one, have far better things to do.

In any event, I am not at all convinced that the government of Vietnam is as timid as has been suggested. I referred above to its pointed criticism of the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan— this, at a time when a crucial trade agreement was making its way through Congress. The government could have chosen to remain silent, but did not— most likely because the bombing awoke all-too-familiar memories.

Following the intergovernmental conference on Agent Orange in early March, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Phan Thuy Thanh noted that Agent Orange is “a pressing humanitarian issue. The United States should take its spiritual and moral responsibility to practically contribute to settling war legacies, including those caused by the Agent Orange/dioxin.” Prof. Nhan has consistently made similar demands.

Pham Ngoc Tien, Deputy Director of Social Affairs in the province of Thai Binh, was even more blunt after the March conference: “We hope that through this sort of conference all those international scientists will help put pressure on the U.S. to pay up. This thing is going on into the third generation. They have really got to start compensating our people for the damage they caused. . . . It takes time to develop a conscience. It’s only now that Japan is apologizing to Korea for what it did all those years ago in the Second World War.”

That sounds like pretty straight talk to me, and I heard quite a bit of it during my time in Hanoi. When I mentioned to one highly-placed official that a certain international agency was very interested in our conference, but was reluctant to get involved because its leaders felt that the government of Vietnam disapproved of anything that might irritate the United States, he laughed out loud and said, “They are just using that as an excuse to hide behind!”

Commenting on our conference, Phan Thuy Thanh has said that, “Addressing war legacies, including the consequences of Agent Orange, is a pressing humanitarian issue. The United States should be fully aware of its responsibilities and fulfil its spiritual and moral obligations.”

All of this leads me to conclude that the issues addressed in the first draft of the report are very much on the agenda of Vietnam’s government, which is not at all reluctant to discuss them openly.

Our policy should be to speak the truth as we know it, clearly and distinctly. If any government disagrees or feels that it is compelled to disagree, it is perfectly free to do so.

### **Wrong context**

To me, this argument seems like an excuse to avoid our responsibility by passing the buck. What are the other forums in which these issues may be addressed? Which other context could possibly be more appropriate than this one?

The tendency to avoid the issues for various tactical reasons seems to be fairly widespread, and we may as well assume that in most cases it is well-intentioned. But it has left the field wide open for historical revisionists who are not in the least reluctant to pound in their message. The result is the dreadful climate of opinion alluded to above, which is not going to improve if we remain silent.

Therefore, we should seize every opportunity to provide a valid alternative, and a conference on the long-term consequences or the war provides a self-evident occasion to do so. In fact, it is so self-evident that I am mystified by the inclination to neglect it.

### **Wrong tone**

Again, the government of the United States and a majority of citizens do not need any help from us in finding “an excuse for turning away and doing nothing”. They have been managing that quite well on their own. To a large extent, I believe, this is due to the fact that they are relatively seldom confronted with a valid alternative to the conventional wisdom on the war. I do not see how that can ever change if those falsehoods remain unchallenged.

There is no easy or painless way to break the truth to people who are strongly motivated to avoid it. Prevalent U.S. beliefs and attitudes toward the war illustrate the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance. In this case, the historical facts conflict with a cherished self-image of invincible warrior, champion of democracy, etc.

Given enough time and other favourable conditions, such mental conflicts may eventually be resolved. But the victims of the war cannot wait for the U.S. populace to reject the massive propaganda campaign to which it has been and will continue to be subjected, or to overcome the political and psychological pressures for denial and distortion.

Those doors are already closed, and it will take a long time to open them. But as noted above, there are other doors that have been closed due to forgetfulness and the distraction of more recent disasters. Many of those should be much easier to open, since they are not subject to the forces of cognitive dissonance.

Thus, there appears to be a choice between language so delicate and obscure that it does not offend the sensibilities of indoctrinated U.S. Americans, or straight talk that has the power to reawaken or arouse the consciousness of people who are not afraid of the truth. If the first alternative is chosen, what is the likelihood that it will lead to a major reconstruction effort? Not very great, as far as I can tell. There is so much misery and suffering in the world, much of it currently being featured on the nightly news. What's so special about Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam?

What's special is the enormity of the injustice and destruction suffered by those countries during such a long period of time, for such inexcusable reasons. That history is the most effective means available to enlist the sympathy and support of people who have forgotten it or have never been informed of it. If we neglect to do so, for whatever well-intentioned reason, we surrender our most valuable weapon in the struggle for public opinion.

In my experience, there is a receptive audience for the recitation of that history. I have, for example, spent some time speaking to Swedish secondary and university students on these matters, conveying much the same information in much the same tone as the first draft of our report. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, with many students eager to learn more, and always the question: "What can we do to help!?" Doors are opened. . . .

In any event, until evidence to the contrary is presented, I suggest that we proceed on the assumption that there are a great many people around the world who are receptive to an honest, straightforward account of the war's history and consequences. I also maintain that it is our duty to provide such an account.

Of course, I am not recommending that we deliberately offend the majority of U.S. citizens.

Obviously, we must try to get through to as many of them as possible—but not at the expense of ignoring or distorting history. Members of the steering committee have, for example, suggested that we should avoid such terms as "invasion" and "puppet regime", because they are controversial and cause offence to many people.

As explained by [a member of the steering committee] in a criticism directed to me: "The term 'invasion' is totally counterproductive. I don't disagree with your analysis of history, but I do feel that you are caught in a time warp, fighting a battle that is long over at the cost of today's struggle. The conference was not seen as an opportunity to reaffirm the left's analysis of the Vietnam War."

The problem is that the concepts of invasion and puppet regime accurately reflect reality, especially as seen from the viewpoint of the vast majority of Vietnamese. To avoid such perfectly suitable terms is to distort reality, and there has been entirely too much of that already.

This is what propaganda is all about: Terrorists become "freedom fighters", war becomes "conflict", invasion becomes "aid to a friend", critics become "leftists", etc. Such words and phrases, endlessly repeated, are especially effective in guiding the thoughts of those who lack knowledge of the issues. Our purpose should be to increase knowledge, not to diminish it.

The issue also has a much broader relevance, as once noted by George Orwell: "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past."

The history of the Vietnam War, arguably the worst international crime committed since World War II, is a case in point. If it is possible to induce people to forget or become indifferent to that historical fact, it is possible to get them to forget or shrug off just about anything. Then, the superpower is free to do whatever it wants with the world.

This kind of analysis is often dismissed as purely "political". But there is nothing more political than to ignore such considerations. Perhaps this is easier to grasp if other historical events are described with the kind of delicate, careful language that has been recommended, for example:

"During the last half of the 1970s, upwards of two million Cambodians died of malnutrition and severe physical injuries."

"For several decades following World War II, the great majority of South Africa's native population lived in suburbs and rural areas where access to social services and economic opportunity was very limited."

“During 1950-1990, roughly 150,000 native Indians of Guatemala died of gunshot wounds.”

“Prior to 1865, most U.S. residents of African descent lived and worked under very harsh conditions, with little or no paid income.”

“On December 7, 1941, a large portion of the United States’ Pacific fleet was sunk in Pearl Harbor during an engagement with a Japanese air force squadron.”

Is there anyone among us who wants to end up with a report that sounds like that?

### Disputed analysis

I am quite aware that “the view of history conveyed by the first draft is not generally accepted in the U.S.A.”. This is a serious problem that is taken up in the report, and my view is that it must be confronted. At the same time, this is a valid concern that we can address in at least two ways: by including a preface to the report which discusses the problem and the difficulties it presents; and by establishing an open forum on our web site in which those who disagree can present their views, and we can document ours.

As for the argument that, “We should not make disagreement over the past an impediment to moving ahead in the present”, I am not sure what that means. It would be useful to have some concrete examples: In what specific ways has progress been impeded by disagreements over history?

### Irrelevant issues

If “issues of morality and legality are irrelevant” in this context, there is no reason for us to continue working on a report that deals with them. However, the fact that the U.S. government refuses to acknowledge their relevance does not make them any less relevant—on the contrary. That in itself is a problem, perhaps the most serious of all.

This and the other criticisms seem to reflect a tacit acceptance of the double standard that has long applied to the United States. In what similar context would these questions even be raised? When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, were we urged to ignore the historical circum-

stances and the issue of responsibility for fear of giving the Soviet “government and many citizens an excuse for doing nothing” about the consequences? Is it unwise to risk closing doors in Indonesia by referring to its brutal assault on the people of East Timor? Shall we abstain from use of the term “genocide” so as not to offend the Khmer Rouge, or the Hutus of Rwanda?

It seems that it is only the United States that is treated with such tender concern for its self-delusions. To the extent that we allow ourselves to be influenced by this sort of censorship, we participate in an embargo on the truth and help to consolidate the lies and myths with which the superpower justifies its imperial conduct to itself and to the rest of the world. In this era of global hegemony, that is no small matter.

### Next draft

Taking all this into account, I suggest that we proceed with the next draft as follows:

- The basic structure of the first draft is retained, including the historical review and the discussion of U.S. responsibility.
- The text is augmented with an analysis of the legal aspects and with additional policy recommendations, including those developed at the conference.
- Wherever possible without obscuring or distorting the facts, the language is modified to minimize the risk of unnecessarily offending our potential audience.
- The issues raised by critics of the first draft, including those relating to tactics and alternative viewpoints, are taken up in a preface to the report. Included in the preface is an invitation for readers to participate in an open forum to be established on our web site.

So much for my views and suggestions. Please feel free to explain what is wrong with them and to present your own alternatives. . . . All of this may take some time. But the issues are important, so we should take whatever time is necessary to come up with a solution that we can all live with.

## APPENDIX B: FIRST DRAFT OF DECLARATION

### Stockholm Declaration on the Reconstruction of Indochina

(Draft 1)

Wars do not end when the bombs stop falling, the stench of napalm leaves the air and the invading army is forced to retreat. The devastation continues long afterward, in the land and in the minds and bodies of the people. Nowhere is this more evident than in the countries of Indochina— Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Over a quarter-century has passed since the formal conclusion of the Second Indochina War, or the Vietnam War as it is usually called. But everywhere throughout the region, innocent people are still being killed or maimed for life by the vast amounts of poisons and explosives left behind in the earth and water.

The victims are often children who chance upon a landmine or an unexploded bomb while playing with friends or walking to school. Other times it is a farmer whose world is blown to pieces in a rice field, by a weapon lying there in wait during thirty years of “peace”. These are human tragedies, affecting entire families and communities, which have thus far been repeated hundreds of thousands of times. There will be many, many more.

Other remnants of the war work their damage less explosively, but no less destructively. Over 70 million litres of extremely poisonous chemicals were sprayed on the forests and fields of Vietnam, and have since worked their way through the food chain to accumulate in human tissues. The results include cancer, diseases of the nervous system and, very likely, terrible birth defects in hundreds of thousands of children who require lifelong care by families already stretched to the limit by poverty and other burdens.

The same chemicals have laid waste to vast tracts of valuable forest, destroying habitats and leaving wastelands in which the only thing that grows is worthless “American grass”. Millions of hectares of prime farmland have been lost to production due to the persistent danger of toxic chemicals and unexploded ordnance. The assault on the environment of Indochina was so intense, widespread and unprecedented that it gave rise to the term, “ecocide”. Much of the land has not recovered, and will not do so within our lifetimes.

These are some of the visible scars of war. Then there are the scars that never felt a wound, and are seldom mentioned by the silently suffering people of Indochina. Among them is a never-ending grief for hundreds of thousands missing in action whose souls, according to widely held beliefs, are condemned to wander ceaselessly for want of a proper burial.

Millions of war widows have spent their remaining days in loneliness and longing while millions more young women have been denied the traditional role of wife and mother by the war-caused shortage of young men. Of those whose bodies survived the war, millions are haunted by nightmares, chronic anxiety and psychic illness in societies that are ill-equipped to deal with such disorders.

All of this, and more, will continue to leave its mark on the land and people of Indochina for generations to come, with human, environmental and economic costs that are impossible to calculate or comprehend. The survivors and their children are struggling to overcome this bitter legacy with great energy and stoic determination, assisted by numerous individuals and organizations from around the world who are trying their best to help.

Thus far, however, the resources available for healing and reconstruction have been meagre, especially in comparison with the need. The community of nations has done very little to help the people of Indochina overcome the terrible suffering that has been inflicted upon them. To a disturbing extent, this neglect appear to be rooted in ideology. The same ideological obsessions that caused the war in the first place continue to work their poison on innocent millions who long for nothing more than what others hold to be self-evident: the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Nearly forty years ago, Olof Palme said: "I do not know if small farmers in the villages of Vietnam have any visions or dreams of the future. The general impression is one of hopelessness and resignation, of confusion and despair over a power struggle that poisons their daily lives. If they dream of a future, it is probably in simple terms— a peaceful existence, one without starvation and in which their human value is respected."

For many, at least part of that dream has come true since the bombs stopped falling a quarter-century ago. But for tens of millions, it is a dream that remains in a vague and distant future, one that they have little hope of experiencing in their lifetimes.

This terrible injustice must not be allowed to continue. It is inexcusable that the innocent people of Indochina must endure the neglect of an indifferent world while they struggle to recover from the persistent effects of a savage, senseless war that they did nothing to deserve.

Therefore, in the name of humanity and simple decency, we call upon all nations and peoples of the earth to actively support the shamefully long-overdue reconstruction of Indochina.

*The final version of the declaration is available on the conference web site at:*

[www.nnn.se/environ.htm](http://www.nnn.se/environ.htm)

## APPENDIX C: THE DISINVITED

The following is the co-ordinator's response to a member of the steering committee who had urged the reversal of a decision to exclude a certain individual from the conference (see p. 23). The committee member had attended a scientific meeting in the United States and been favourably impressed by a presentation of "The Disinvited"—and, very likely, by the latter's complaint about the injustice of his exclusion.

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... If it were just about any other issue, I would be inclined to follow your recommendation without the slightest hesitation. But this case involves problems concerning which you probably have no way of knowing, and of which you would almost certainly prefer to remain ignorant. But since you have more or less forced the issue, I will try to explain what I have done and why.

In connection with my duties as conference co-ordinator, I have been required to engage in an extensive correspondence with [The Disinvited, abbrev. TD], and have also received numerous anecdotes and opinions about him from a wide variety of sources. In fact, the matter of TD has absorbed an inordinate amount of my time and energy from the start of the project.

I will convey my own impressions a bit later on. But to begin with, I will note that TD appears to have alienated or directly pissed off an awful lot of people, including many of those who will be participating in the conference. The same applies to the leaders of the U.S. scientific delegation to the conference [on Substance X] in Hanoi last month. I have it on good authority, i.e. insider information, that they are thoroughly fed up with TD, which is why he was denied any significant role in the proceedings.

Among your colleagues on the steering committee, it is my clear impression that he has one strong supporter, one moderate supporter, at least five harsh critics, and several others who have been put off by his often condescending messages to us over the past year or so. The general consensus seems to be that he is arrogant, self-centred, presumptuous, as well as insensitive toward and often contemptuous of the Vietnamese. Even his supporters concede that he is not the easiest person to get along with.

I must emphasize that I have not solicited any of these remarks or opinions. They have emerged unbidden from conversations and correspondence, usually whenever the issue of

[Substance X] is being discussed. Sooner or later the name of TD comes up, and out pours all this stuff without any encouragement on my part.

Just the other day, for example, I received a lengthy e-mail from [a well-informed individual] who is working on a project that apparently has a lot to do with [Substance X]. In the course of his research, he interviewed TD several times; and apropos nothing in particular, he chose to relate to me the following:

"During my fourth interview with TD, I told him that the Vietnamese had a problem with him because of his bigotry toward them. TD was shocked that I could say such a thing and demanded an explanation. I read back to TD what he had told me, on record, on two other occasions—that the Vietnamese scientists were stupid, that their research was all wrong, and on and on. . . . Every American scientist I interviewed told me that, if I quoted TD's research in my writing, it would be less credible. . . ."

I do not state that this is an accurate assessment. I merely note that it is far from the only time that I have been presented with such views. Several members of our steering committee whom I am pretty sure you respect are of essentially the same mind; I know that for a fact. During my recent visit to Hanoi, several Vietnamese scientists and officials went out of their way to express their disapproval of TD's conduct.

Of course, this may simply mean that he has been misunderstood and unjustly maligned. If so, it is a remarkably consistent and widespread conspiracy of many highly qualified individuals who otherwise give every appearance of being sensible and intelligent. . . .

I have politely responded to all his condescending and insulting remarks about our steering committee (his primary complaint seems to be that he is not on it). But on a few occasions, greater candour has been unavoidable. You

may recall my response to his characterization of the Vietnamese as “the Prussians of Asia”, an outrageous analogy that offended quite a few members of the steering committee. There is much more— I have not bothered the committee with all of it— and you are welcome to the entire correspondence if you like.

Generally, however, I have tried to shield the steering committee from all this, assuming that you would prefer not to be involved. Also, I did not want to force any of the members to declare themselves one way or another on the merits and character of a professional colleague whose aggressive conduct, I have been told on more than one occasion, has been the source of considerable anxiety. Several steering committee members with long experience of TD have warned me not to cross him, for fear that he might damage our project with malicious gossip and unfounded rumors. I have reason to suspect that he has already done so.

Despite those warnings, I gradually came to the conclusion that the damage he was likely to do at our conference was greater than any bad publicity he might circulate— especially since other detractors are almost certain to do that, anyway. After much soul-searching, I made an “executive decision” to disinvite him, without consulting the steering committee, for the reasons noted above.

It seemed to me that putting the question to the committee would inevitably lead to a disruptive and, from my point of view, totally unproductive dispute between TD’s few admirers and his many critics. I might add that his admirers have done little or nothing to support the project, while the critics include those who have been most active and helpful in promoting it.

As for myself, TD’s participation would make little difference one way or another. Having grown up in the U.S., I am quite used to arrogant, self-centred behavior and can easily ignore it. But the participation of TD would, in my view, entail two substantial risks.

One is that, by all accounts, he has a rather forceful personality and a tendency to assume that everyone else ought to share his concerns and point of view. This poses a clear risk that the [Substance X] issue, and his personal involvement in it, would tend to dominate the proceedings. As you know, this is something that I have been determined to avoid from the

outset, and it has been an uphill battle with TD. I wish I had a nickel for every time I have tried to explain to him that our conference is *not* a “[Substance X] workshop”, all to no avail.

The other risk is that the atmosphere of co-operation and mutual respect that is essential to the success of the conference could be jeopardized. This has especially to do with the sensitivities of the delegates from Vietnam, who must be given every opportunity to express themselves— not an easy thing to do in such a foreign language as English, or through an interpreter. This will require from the western delegates a substantial degree of patience and understanding which, as even his admirers concede, are not TD’s strong points. He has, for example, explained the “Prussian” outburst as an expression of frustration over his difficulties in dealing with the Vietnamese: That is exactly my point.

If ours were a typical scientific conference, none of this would be of any major significance. But what we are trying to achieve requires maximum co-operation and goodwill; and I am determined that the conference should, to the greatest extent possible, be an enjoyable and fruitful experience for the Vietnamese delegates. It is my understanding that, at other international conferences, they usually play second fiddle due to their lack of funding and scientific resources. I have been informed by very reliable sources that Vietnamese scientists who delivered papers at the March conference in Hanoi were openly and demonstratively ridiculed by U.S. scientists in the audience.

I do not want even a hint of such attitudes to contaminate our event, nor do I want the Vietnamese delegates to feel the slightest inhibition about expressing themselves. As I am sure you agree, our conference is for the benefit of them and their countrymen, first and foremost. . . .

This, in brief, is why I took it upon myself to disinvite TD. It is a decision that I do not regret. In fact, I suspect it is one of the wisest moves I have made for the good of the project.

I explained my reasoning to TD nearly three months ago at even greater length and with somewhat less bluntness, after he had brought the matter to a head by repeatedly demanding— that is the correct word— that we finance his participation in the conference.

In closing that letter, I offered to discuss the matter with him by telephone, together with his

trusted friend and colleague [on the steering committee] if he liked. He replied: "Thank you for your long e-mail. I will consider it carefully and try to reply in a positive way in the near future."

But no reply ever came, and I did not hear anything more about it until your appeal on his behalf. I do not mean to question your judgement when you write that you were "greatly impressed by TD". It is not at all impossible that he has been chastened by recent events—probably much less so by my disinvitation than by the open rebuke to which he was subjected at the March conference by his influential colleagues from the United States.

I take no pleasure in any of this, as you doubtless understand. Nor do I insist that you take my word on faith or accept my judgement. If you like, I can refer you to some of your colleagues on the steering committee who I am fairly certain would be willing to speak to you candidly on these matters (although I suspect that they would prefer to be left out of it, if at all possible).

I am also quite willing to send you a copy of my letter to TD. However, it was addressed to him in confidence, and you would need to

obtain his consent. You are also welcome to forward this message to him. But unless you decide to make an issue of this with the entire steering committee, I would recommend against it, for fairly obvious reasons.

I am very sorry that you have been dragged into the middle of this. It is something that I have tried to prevent, but I suppose that it was inevitable that it would happen sooner or later.

If you still have any questions or concerns, I will do my best to address them.

\* \* \*

To this explanation, the response of the steering committee member was: "Thank you for your very detailed commentary on your trials and tribulations regarding TD. . . . I leave any conference decision regarding TD entirely up to you."

Despite that vote of confidence, however, he resigned in a huff just a few days before the start of the conference, citing as one reason my "exclusion from the conference (for some apparent combination of political and personal reasons) of at least one highly knowledgeable, relevant scientist", i.e. The Disinvited.

## APPENDIX D: AGENT ORANGE/DIOXIN

In connection with the planning of the conference, a Western scientist specializing in dioxin research sent the co-ordinator a memorandum containing the following assertions about Agent Orange in Vietnam:

- 1) There is no clear evidence at this time that infant deformities can be traced to Agent Orange, and certainly not at the level of 500,000 to one million.
- 2) A high-level group of U.S., Canadian and New Zealand researchers visited Vietnam in 1995 to review the available data on reproduction and child development, and found no evidence linking Agent Orange to the malformations that have been produced to demonstrate such a link.
- 3) The U.S. government has for the past few years— and U.S. academic scientists for a much longer time— offered to collaborate on joint research into the effects of Agent Orange. But these offers have been rejected by the government of Vietnam.
- 4) This lack of co-operation on the part of Vietnamese authorities is a major hindrance to the development of scientific clarity on the health effects of the dioxin in Agent Orange.

In order to clarify these issues, ten leading scientists from around the world were invited to comment on any or all of them. The following are fairly typical of the responses received:

### Vietnamese scientist

In reply to your 'Advice requested' I have some opinions:

1. Really, there is no clear evidence at this time that infant deformities can be traced to Agent Orange. Birth defects in animals were demonstrated by laboratory animal studies. But for humans, only by analogy with studies of laboratory animals, it was suggested that these chemicals might cause infant deformities.
2. Until now proof about dioxin causing birth defects is only suggestive, but not conclusive. That is why it would be better to write "Anywhere between 500,000 to one million infant deformities have been *suspected* as traceable to the effects of defoliant chemicals."
3. Highly respected scientists from the U.S., Canada, France and Japan have conducted research on Agent Orange/dioxin in Vietnam. I have myself taken them into the field to collect human samples (blood, breast milk, human fat tissue, etc.), animal samples (fish, poultry, domestic animal, etc.), soil samples, vegetation samples, and they brought these samples to their countries for analysis. I wonder whether I would be allowed to do the same in their countries.

### European scientist

In my view there is no firm evidence that Agent Orange has caused birth deformities in Vietnam. There is clear evidence that the dioxin in Agent Orange when administered to pregnant rodents will cause birth defects. However, no reliable human evidence to confirm this has been obtained. The evidence which was collected in Vietnam in the late 60's early 70's did not lend itself to any conclusion either way. As far as I know that position is unchanged.

So, the message I would put out is one of neutrality. We just do not know. This area is one that does need researching. But given the time interval since Agent Orange was used it may be difficult to undertake. Linking children with deformities to the use of Agent Orange will be much less difficult than researching whether the chemical caused damage in the womb which may have resulted in a miscarriage. This last study would be practically impossible now.

Finally, I am not convinced by the evidence that Agent Orange can cause birth defects through the male line. In other words the evidence is not convincing that if the father were exposed to Agent Orange he would be more likely to have a child with a deformity.

## North American scientist

Regarding items 1-4 in your memo:

1) I would tend to agree that there are no solid epidemiological data linking infant deformities directly to Agent Orange. There are many reported cases in which deformities have occurred where at least one parent was exposed in the south, while the children of those in the same family who had not been in the south were not deformed. Many similar associations of this sort have been noted. However, there have been no solid epidemiological studies to confirm or refute this kind of anecdotal evidence. This is what the ongoing discussions between the U.S. and Vietnam are all about, i.e. to develop a scientifically valid methodology for investigating the possible linkage between exposure to Agent Orange and birth defects.

Regardless of such a mutually-acceptable methodology can be developed, the question remains as to whether the potential findings are worth the expense and effort. In the best of circumstances, it will probably take hundreds of millions of dollars and many years of research to establish an unequivocal link, if any, between Agent Orange and observed birth defects. Those resources might be better spent on more immediate and direct assistance to Vietnam as it tries to cope with the full range of war-related problems.

2) It is true that there was a delegation of U.S., Canadian and New Zealand researchers in 1995, ostensibly to review the data on Agent Orange. But upon their arrival, they were informed by Vietnamese officials that Agent Orange was not to be dealt with in their meetings and discussions. Instead, the delegation was to focus on herbicides and pesticides, with absolutely no reference to dioxin and/or Agent Orange. This came as a great surprise to the visiting researchers, who had not been notified of this restriction in advance. The reason for it was never made clear.

On the other hand, there was a great deal of confusion concerning the mandate of the U.S. delegation. It turned out that it had been commissioned by Congress to investigate issues that might have relevance for U.S. veterans, and for that reason ignored all issues that applied only to the Vietnamese population, including birth defects.

Furthermore, at least one of the researchers from another country found upon his arrival in Vietnam that he was part of the U.S. delegation. He had agreed to participate on the basis of an invitation from WHO, and was astonished to discover that he had been involuntarily included in the U.S. delegation. He was also very critical of the blatant manner in which the U.S. ignored all issues relating to the Vietnam population. He concluded that the

one-sided approach of the U.S. delegation was the main reason for the failure to produce a fruitful outcome, and obviously contributed to subsequent negotiations over joint research.

From what I understand, there was no extensive "review" of available data on reproduction and child development at this time. I have also been informed that one or more researchers were detained by customs in Hanoi for failing to observe the proper procedure for exporting samples for dioxin analysis. As a result, all samples and all literature referring to dioxin and/or Agent Orange were confiscated. I believe the U.S. State Department was involved in a subsequent, unsuccessful attempt to retrieve the samples. This episode created problems for other researchers in their more proper attempts to export samples. But eventually, the samples were released for exit from Vietnam.

Thus, I feel that item 2 reflects a rather simplistic view of the events in question.

3) I am aware of several proposals for collaborative research from the U.S. However, there may be some good— or at least understandable— reasons for the rejection of those overtures. In my opinion, without a proper attitude and cultural awareness, such proposals are likely to be rejected in the future, as well.

4) I do not believe that the problem resides with the Vietnamese. There would probably be a rapid improvement in co-operation if U.S. authorities were to present serious and respectful proposals covering a broad spectrum of issues.

## Australian scientist

Thank you for all of this. I think that we need to be cautious in this area. However, here in Australia we have been undertaking research that does suggest that there could be a higher rate of certain birth defects and cancer in the children of men who served in Vietnam. As far as one of the cancers goes, this is similar to work in the United States, and there is suggestive evidence of similar birth defects in the children of American veterans.

In our population of Vietnam veterans, we have also detected abnormal patterns of mortality and cancer incidence that could be suggestive of a chemical effect— although, whether this is due to dioxin, Agent Orange or one of the other chemicals, we cannot at this stage say.

I think that the latest Seveso data clearly show a paternally mediated change in the sex ratio that is caused by the dioxin; however, I know that the Ranch Hand study did not show this effect.

For anyone who is interested, much of the Australian research can be found at the following web site: [www.dva.gov.au/health/HlthStdY/study.htm](http://www.dva.gov.au/health/HlthStdY/study.htm)

## APPENDIX E. REPORT OF LADY BORTON

The following are excerpts from the report of Lady Borton, a member of the conference steering committee, to the American Friends Service Committee (Quaker Service), of which she is the field representative in Vietnam.

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### Goal

The participation of Quaker Service in this project was part of a larger effort to work with representatives of the three countries— Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos— in order to address some of the long-term consequences of the war, Agent Orange “hot spots” in particular. The aim of the conference was to gather into one place all available information about the long-term consequences of the war, and then to disseminate that information as widely as possible.

### Objectives

The project had five specific objectives:

- A formal declaration — achieved
- Follow-up at the U.N. Johannesburg Conference on Development and the Environment in August-September. Probably minor, given the short time between the two conferences. But there was an important, unanticipated follow-up at a September conference on the same issues at Yale University in the United States, and a fruitful visit to Hatfield Consultants in British Columbia, Canada. The latter had a tremendous effect on project “SAFEKIDS: Agent Orange Remediation in Viet Nam”.
- Networking — achieved in abundance!
- Significant involvement of Vietnamese and Lao leadership. Definite success. To our knowledge, this is the only conference in the West where Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese comprised half of the participants, and the effect was marked.

### Structure & organization

This event was unique for a conference set in the West, in that half of the participants came from Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam. From the outset, the conference did not follow the usual model of formal, scholarly or scientific presentations. Instead, subcommittees for the four

themes listed above developed drafts that were posted on the conference web site for suggestions before submission to the general conference. . . .

Some individuals, mainly Westerners, fretted that the Stockholm conference would duplicate the intergovernmental conference on Agent Orange held in Ha Noi in March, 2002. It was a constant educational process to help them see the difference between a *non-governmental* conference that was process-oriented and an *official, bilateral governmental* conference dedicated to scientific presentations on Agent Orange followed by bilateral negotiations. The Vietnamese, whom Westerners so often accuse of lacking a non-governmental sector, had no difficulty grasping the difference.

In fact, the Vietnamese quickly saw the Stockholm conference as a way to address questions and facilitate opportunities in ways not possible at the intergovernmental conference. In Stockholm, they often tilted the discussion toward their pressing concerns about victims of Agent Orange and residual dioxin “hot spots”, while also recognizing that other long-term consequences of the war are of great concern.

Since this conference was process-oriented, it did not have the formal structure that is customary on such occasions. Participants spent much of their time in one of four workshops according to the four topic areas. The ecosystems subcommittee had done the most work in advance, and completed its report. The reports of the three other subcommittees are still being developed.

The public health workshop was the scene of prolonged, intense and occasionally contentious discussions which reflected the participants’ decidedly different and occasionally somewhat adversarial views. Some photographs of this process, which capture a moment when everyone finally agreed on a section of the text, are available at this web address:

[www.nnn.se/environ/album.htm](http://www.nnn.se/environ/album.htm)

## Press coverage

There was a steady stream of reporters from Swedish print and broadcast media, as well as the international press, including Agence-France Press and Reuters. A reporter from BBC World Service travelled from London to cover the conference and conducted several interviews for later broadcast. In Vietnam, there was extensive coverage both before and after the event.

## Networking

One of the primary goals of this conference was to provide opportunities for people concerned about the long-term consequences of war to meet each other and have sufficient time together for sustained informal discussion. This resulted in several new “linkages”, including the following:

### *Detailed discussions between Quaker Service and Roger Rumpf*

Roger Rumpf of Project LAOS and I had several discussions about the program proposal for funding Project LAOS. Because the 10-80/Hatfield research on areas of Viet Nam bordering Laos is so extensive, it was possible to completely revise the underlying logic of the Project LAOS proposal by drawing upon the nine years of research by 10-80/Hatfield to formulate, test and prove the “hot spot” theory. Dr. Tran Manh Hung, Director of Viet Nam’s 10-80 Division (founded to research the health effects of Agent Orange) and a co-author of the 10-80/Hatfield report, happened to walk by during one of these conversations and said in English, “Oh! You should talk to us! Save yourselves years of work!”

### *Detailed description of Viet Nam’s Agent Orange research for the Lao delegation*

Dr. Hung spoke with various Lao delegates and met once with the entire Lao delegation for an extensive late-evening discussion to describe the now-accepted premise regarding current “hot spots” of residual Agent Orange dioxin in Viet Nam. This conversation was in Vietnamese and Lao, with one of the Lao translating, and Roger Rumpf and myself also joining in. Dr. Hung’s willingness to share his technical expertise helped the Laotian colleagues in the Project LAOS project to shift their focus from general

aerial spraying to likely “hot spots” in Laos. Dr. Hung invited the Lao to visit to Ha Noi for further discussions. “We’ll share everything we have with you!” he said, “and we’ll take you to A Luoi District so you can see for yourselves.”

### *Discussions between Dr. Wayne Dwernychuk and Roger Rumpf*

Wayne Dwernychuk is the principal author of the 10-80 Hatfield report which establishes the validity of the “hot spot” residual Agent Orange dioxin theory. Over dinner, he reviewed the major findings of the report for Roger Rumpf of Project LAOS, and offered the assistance of Hatfield Consultants in Lao efforts to deal with the same issues.

### *Cambodian delegation*

Although Viet Nam has experienced two wars since 1975 (against the Khmer Rouge, and the Chinese invasion), it has been comparatively at peace since 1975. The same is true of Laos. But this is not the case with Cambodia, of course. Cambodians besieged by the immediate consequences of war have had little time to think about the long-term consequences. The Cambodian delegation, by its own account, attended the conference “to learn”. One member of the Cambodian delegation joined the Steering Committee (as did one member of the Lao delegation). Cambodian delegation members spoke in the plenary sessions and took active part in the workshop discussions.

### *Lao delegation and OXFAM America*

Kate Lazarus, Southeast Asia Program Officer for OXFAM America, had expressed interest in supporting Project LAOS. It was agreed that it would be useful for Lao members of Project LAOS to attend the subsequent Yale conference on the “Ecological and Health Effects of the Vietnam War,” so that they could meet staff and colleagues from U.S. government agencies (NIEHS and EPA, Environmental Protection Agency) and continue to learn about current thinking on the Agent Orange issue. Kate agreed to fund the Lao participation, a very helpful contribution.

### *SAFE KIDS Project*

I had been working with Vietnamese colleagues, and in particular with Dr. Hung, on a project entitled, “SAFE KIDS: Agent Orange

Remediation in Viet Nam." The project originated with the Viet Nam Agent Orange Victims Fund and the Viet Nam Red Cross which recommended it to the Prime Minister of Viet Nam, who gave his approval. There are two main aspects of the project:

"The Map" — delineating AO "hot spots"

"The Means"—facilitating the equipping and training of a Vietnamese Agent Orange team to remediate the worst "hot spot" which is located at Da Nang International Airport, upstream from about one million inhabitants.

Dr. Hung and the 10-80 Division have prepared a project proposal for "The Map", with Hatfield Consultants providing guidance on international standards of quality assurance and control. The conference provided ample opportunity for Dr. Hung, Wayne Dwernychuk of Hatfield and myself to discuss how best to implement "The Map."

. . . Finally, and not so incidentally, I will note that the weather during the conference was superb, tempting many to gaze out the window at the splendid surroundings. There was precious little time for strolling until our hosts guided us through the streets of Stockholm's Old Town. The following evening, there was a great boat cruise through the Stockholm Archi-

pelago, and after the final session an outdoor banquet— both in the magical light of prolonged Scandinavian sunsets. The relaxed and pleasant atmosphere contributed greatly to the success of the conference.

### **Evaluation**

The Vietnamese delegates felt that the Stockholm conference provided them with an opportunity to concentrate on the issues of greatest concern to them, both among themselves and together with international colleagues. They were very active and assertive as NGO-affiliated individuals who were not speaking as government representatives, and were thus in a position to advocate stronger language than that typically used in official documents.

Mr. Tran Duc Luong, President of Viet Nam, invited the Vietnamese delegates to meet with him upon their return to Ha Noi. Photos taken at the meeting show familiar faces and a few new ones, presumably members of President Luong's staff. I have been told that the Stockholm Declaration was read aloud in the National Assembly, but I have not yet confirmed this. It is certainly likely, given that there were several members of the National Assembly in the Vietnamese delegation.

## APPENDIX F: STEERING COMMITTEE

As noted in the main body of the report, the composition of the steering committee changed somewhat during the course of the project. Presented here are the members who comprised the committee in its final form, i.e. at the time of the conference.

Lady Borton  
Quaker Service  
Hanoi, Vietnam

Lady Borton has for many years been the international affairs representative in Hanoi for the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), known in Vietnam as Quaker Service. She has been working with the Vietnamese on Agent Orange and related issues since 1975, and is the author of *After the Sorrow: An American among the Vietnamese* and *Sensing the Enemy: An American among the Boat People of Vietnam*.

L. Wayne Dwernychuk, Ph.D.  
Hatfield Consultants Ltd.  
West Vancouver, Canada

Dr. Wayne Dwernychuk is an environmental scientist with Hatfield Consultants Ltd. in Canada (HCL), and has been actively involved in that organization's studies on the effects of Agent Orange and related issues in Vietnam. That work has included sample-collection in Vietnam and serving as principal technical author for the HCL reports on Agent Orange impacts (October 1998 and April 2000). In the course of these activities, he has developed a broad network of contacts among government officials, scientists and other interested parties in Vietnam and throughout the world.

Göran Eklöf  
Swedish Nature Conservation Society  
Stockholm, Sweden

Ecologist Göran Eklöf has been an active campaigner on environmental issues in Sweden since the mid 1970s. After working as a journalist during most of the 1980s, he focused his attention on environment and development in Asia. He worked with environmental groups in India during 1987–1990, and during 1993–1996 with several Oxfam projects in Vietnam relating to management of the environment and natural resources. Eklöf is currently Director of

International Programmes for Sweden's largest environmental organization, the Swedish Nature Conservation Society.

Diane Fox  
University of Washington  
Seattle, U.S.A.

Diane Fox has been active in Vietnam since 1991 as a teacher, writer and translator. She has also served as a consultant to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in connection with its efforts to assist the disabled poor, including those thought to be suffering from the effects of Agent Orange. That is also the subject of her doctoral studies in anthropology, which she is conducting at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Dr. Alastair W.M. Hay  
Dept of Chemical Pathology  
University of Leeds, England

Dr. Alastair Hay has long been interested in the public health effects of the defoliants used during the Vietnam War, and that interest has broadened to encompass all aspects of chemical warfare. He has written extensively on these and related issues in *Nature* and other publications. Dr. Hay is currently with the Molecular Epidemiology Unit at the University of Leeds, where his current research is on the identification of biomarkers for a wide range of conditions.

John McAuliff  
Fund for Reconciliation and Development  
New York, U.S.A.

John McAuliff is founder and executive director of the Fund for Reconciliation and Development (FRD), which is based in New York. A regular visitor to Vietnam since 1975, he was active in the national leadership of the U.S. anti-war movement, which he represented at several

meetings of the Stockholm Conference on Vietnam. FRD serves as an information centre for the work of U.S. foundations, non-governmental organizations and universities working with Indochina. It also organizes international conferences on behalf of the Forum on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

Prof. Nguyen Tron Nhan, President  
Red Cross Society of Vietnam

Prof. Nguyen Trong Nhan is currently President of the Vietnam Red Cross Society which plays a key role in providing medical and social assistance to the nation's most vulnerable citizens. He is a principal founder of the Agent Orange Victims Fund which was established in 1998 to provide humanitarian assistance to those who are believed to be suffering from the effects of dioxin contamination, most of whom are children. Prof. Nhan, who is one of Vietnam's leading eye surgeons, has also served as Minister of Public Health and is now a deputy of the National Assembly.

Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong  
Director, Tu Du OB/GYN Hospital  
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong is Head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Ho Chi Minh City. Since 1975, she has been studying the effects on humans of Agent Orange and other chemicals used during the Vietnam War, and is regarded as a leading authority in that field.

Nguon Sakhon  
2nd Deputy Secretary-General  
Cambodian Red Cross

Somchai Praphasiri  
Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Somchai Praphasiri is currently Americas Desk Officer at the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with responsibility for bilateral relations between the United States and Laos. He has also served as Third Secretary of the Lao Embassy in Tokyo.

Chuck Searcy  
Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund/  
Asian Landmine Solutions  
Hanoi, Vietnam

A U.S. veteran of the Vietnam War, Chuck Searcy has for the past seven years been actively involved in efforts to ameliorate its consequences as the representative in Hanoi of two U.S. veterans' organizations. His current focus is on the removal of land mines and other war materiel from the heavily affected Quang Tri Province. The effects of Agent Orange and other toxic chemicals used during the war are also of major concern.

Prof. Vo Quy, President  
Centre for Natural Resources  
and Environmental Studies (CRES)  
Hanoi, Vietnam

Prof. Vo Quy is currently President of the Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies at the National University of Vietnam in Hanoi. An ornithologist by training, "the smiling professor" began studying the effects of massive defoliation on the forest ecology of southern Vietnam during the war. Since then, he has played a leading role in national programmes to conserve natural resources and promote biological diversity.

## APPENDIX G: CONFERENCE DELEGATES

### Steering Committee

Borton, Lady  
Quaker Service  
Vietnam

Dwernychuk, Wayne  
Hatfield Consultants Ltd.  
Canada

Eklöf, Göran  
Swedish Nature Conservation Society  
Sweden

Fox, Diane  
Cultural anthropologist  
United States

McAuliff, John  
Fund for Reconciliation & Development  
United States

Nguyen Trong Nhan, President  
Vietnam Red Cross Society

Praphasiri, Somchai  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Laos

Sakhon, Nguon  
Cambodian Red Cross

Searcy, Chuck  
Asian Landmine Solutions  
Vietnam

Vo Quy  
Centre for Natural Resources &  
Environmental Studies, Vietnam

Burke, Al  
Conference co-ordinator  
Sweden

### Cambodian Delegation

Keam Makarady  
Environment and Pesticide Section

Yang Sem  
Cambodian Constitutional Council

William Herod  
AFSC Field Director (former)

### Lao Delegation

Chanhlangkham, Thannee, President  
Sekong Province Women's Union

Khamdala, Wanthong  
Deputy Natl. Program Director, UXO Lao

Luangrath, Sisouphanh, Director  
Environmental Quality Monitoring Center

Rumpf, Roger  
Lao Agent Orange Survey

### Vietnamese Delegation

Bach Tan Sinh  
Institute of Science Policy Studies

Bui Thi Lang  
Marine biologist

Dao Ngoc Phong  
Hanoi Medical School

Do Ba Khoa  
PACCOM

Duong Quang Long  
Ministry of Justice

Hoang Cong Thuy  
VN Union of Friendship Organizations

Hoang Trong Quynh  
Center for Sustainable Agriculture

Huynh Thi Kim Chi  
Binh Duong Hospital

Le Ke Son  
Agent Orange Victims Fund

Le Duc Tuan  
Can Gio Mangrove Biosphere Reserve

Mac Thi Hoa  
Agent Orange Victims Fund

Nguyen Dang Vung  
Ministry of Health

Nguyen Lan Dung  
Vietnam National University

Nguyen Thanh Ky  
Vietnam Red Cross

Nguyen Viet Nhan  
Hue Medical School

Pham Thuy  
Green Cross Vietnam

Phung Tuu Boi  
Conservation & Community Dev't. Center

Tran Manh Hung  
Ministry of Health

Tran Thi Ngoc Dung  
Interpreter/translator

Vu Duc Long  
Ministry of Justice

### **Asia/Australia**

Fforde, Adam  
Economist, Australia

Urata, Kenji  
Waseda Univ. School of Law, Japan

Urata, Atsuko  
Japan

### **Europe**

Aldis, Len  
Britain-Vietnam Friendship Society

Beckett, Patrick  
Free Speech Radio News, Denmark

Bigler, Christine  
Green Cross, Switzerland

Journoud, Pierre  
Franco-Vietnamese Friendship Society

Weil, Anjuska  
Swiss-Vietnam Association, Switzerland

### **North America**

Benson, Sally  
CHEER Vietnam Fund, USA

Brown, Charles W.  
Cultural Anthropologist, USA

Constable, John  
Physician/medical researcher, USA

Dwernychuk, Leslie Joy  
Teacher of handicapped, Canada

Ensign, Tod  
Citizen Soldier, USA

Hammond, Susan  
Fund for Reconciliation & Development, USA

Hickey, Margaret  
Spectrum Enterprises, USA

Lazarus, Kate  
Oxfam America, USA

Nichols, Steve  
Attorney, USA

Smoger, Gerson  
Attorney, USA

Weisberg, Barry  
Peace Promotion Strategy, USA

### **Sweden**

Hall, Bo  
Engineer

Johansson, Annika  
Sociologist

Matthis, Sköld-Peter  
Physician

Murray, Andreas  
Psychologist

Peltola, Anna  
Reuters

Söndergaard, Hans Peter  
Medical Researcher

Theorell, Töres  
Medical Researcher

Tiroler, Gabor  
Public Health Consultant

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