

PROPOSAL  
AMERICAN WAR  
EDUCATION AND  
RECONSTRUCTION  
PROJECT

PROPOSAL FOR AN  
**AMERICAN WAR  
EDUCATION & RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

*“Before, in the United States, people said, ‘Remember Pearl Harbor’.  
Now, I say, ‘Remember Vietnam’. For always.”*

— *Ly Van Sau, 1973*

THIS PROPOSAL is based on the recommendations of an international conference on the long-term consequences of the Vietnam War.\* As noted in a conference report entitled *Ethical, Legal & Policy Issues*: “The most urgent need is to invest in the post-war reconstruction of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, at a level that is in reasonable proportion to the suffering and destruction inflicted upon them. This, in turn, requires increased awareness and recognition of the Vietnam War’s devastating impact— past, present and future.”

It may be and has been argued, of course, that there are many needs which are far more urgent. Since the formal conclusion of the Vietnam War— known to the people of that country as the American War— numerous other disasters and crimes against humanity have occurred which all have a rightful claim on the attention and solidarity of the world community. Some of them are currently in progress, and it may be assumed that there will be no shortage of tragic events in the future.

Nevertheless, there are some very good reasons to refresh humanity’s collective memory of the Vietnam War, convey its lessons to future generations, and finally begin to deal effectively with its terrible consequences. Among those reasons are the following:

### *The war continues*

As pointed out by the conference declaration, “Wars do not end when the bombs stop falling and the fighting stops. The devastation continues long after, in the land and in the minds and bodies of the people. Years have passed since the conclusion of the wars that for decades tormented Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam; but throughout the region, innocent victims are still suffering.”

The main purpose of the Stockholm conference was to make a start at documenting the nature and extent of the environmental damage and human suffering resulting from

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\*The Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam was held in Stockholm in July of 2002. The conference reports and related information are available at: [www.nnn.se/vietnam/environ.htm](http://www.nnn.se/vietnam/environ.htm)

the war. The findings are contained in three reports that are available on the conference web site: [www.nnn.se/vietnam/environ.htm](http://www.nnn.se/vietnam/environ.htm) Those findings are far from complete, but

they make clear that the assault on Vietnam and the other two countries of Indochina was exceptional in its duration and ferocity. For all their horrors, the more recent wars of aggression by the United States and its allies have been far less devastating. This is a crucial aspect of the Vietnam War which has been receding from awareness due to factors noted in the conference report on *Ethical, Legal & Policy Issues* (abbreviation: ELP report). That, in itself, is a phenomenon that needs to be more widely known and understood.

It is not only in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam that the war lives on. Veterans of U.S. and allied military forces have inevitably suffered various kinds of long-term consequences, as well. The medical effects of contamination by Agent Orange and other toxic chemicals continue to be a subject of debate and adjudication, for example.

More generally, the Vietnam War continues to exert a strong influence on U.S. political life. This was clearly demonstrated during the 2004 presidential campaign when George W. Bush, who had exploited his family connections to avoid active duty and (apparently) to shirk his duties in the reserves, was pitted against John F. Kerry who had served in Vietnam with military distinction and, upon returning home, with even greater distinction by eloquently denouncing the war.

Such is the political climate in the United States that Kerry and his advisors chose to emphasize his military rather than his anti-war heroics, but to no avail. According to most political analysts, Kerry's anti-war past was one of the key factors that cost him the election. This was because Bush's henchmen launched a massive smear campaign which portrayed Kerry as a liar who did not deserve his military honours and, much worse, had falsely accused his comrades-in-arms of war crimes.

Everything about the Bush smear campaign was a lie. But it was effective— because the history of the Vietnam War, including massive crimes committed by the United States against the peoples of Indochina, has been obscured and falsified to such an extent that a large segment of the voting public was easily misled.

Thus, a malignant complex of lies, myths and delusions about the Vietnam War has played a significant, perhaps decisive, role in determining the outcome of the presidential election. Given the current standing of the

United States as the sole global superpower, that outcome obviously has ramifications for the entire planet.

All of this serves to confirm that, "Wars do not end when the bombs stop falling and the fighting stops." To illustrate what that means—in terms of human, environmental, economic and political consequences— there is no more telling example than the Vietnam War.

### *Well-documented*

One of the main reasons that the Vietnam War provides a useful example is that it is exceptionally well-documented. Apart from being "the first TV war", with a degree of public scrutiny that has not been permitted since, it was the subject of a unique historical review that was conducted by the U.S. government while the shooting war was still in progress. Both the government minister who commissioned the review, known as *The Pentagon Papers*, and the well-informed official who leaked it to the press have since published memoirs with supplementary and confirmatory details.

A great deal of other valuable information has also come to light in the years since the United States withdrew its troops from Vietnam. Among other things, a number of revelations emerged from the Senate-House hearings on the Central Intelligence Agency, which were made possible by the political climate that the war engendered.

In short, the passage of time and the accumulation of evidence— much of it supplied by the U.S. government and its officials— make the Vietnam War a more suitable subject of public education than more recent catastrophes. Further, an understanding of that well-documented war provides a useful framework within which to interpret similar events in the present and future.

Violations of international law, destabilization campaigns, the use of client regimes as instruments of imperialistic policies, the exploitation of fear to induce public support for war, distortion of the purpose and principles of the United Nations— these and related issues are as relevant today as they were a half-century ago.

Scare tactics and other propaganda techniques, for example, have scarcely changed since the days when U.S. officials warned of

an inevitable “bloodbath” and a terrifying “domino effect” stretching from Vietnam to Australia and India. In fact, many of those who share responsibility for the Vietnam War are currently exercising their war-mongering skills as officials of the U.S. government.

Given the nature and extent of the accumulated evidence, there are no rational grounds for serious dispute over the history and consequences of the Vietnam War. But due to various political, psychological and cultural forces (which are analysed in the ELP report), the war has been subjected to an intense campaign of distortion and falsification. That and related issues also need to be addressed, of course.

### *Marshalling the past*

“We learn from history that we do not learn from history,” observed Hegel, and there is no clearer illustration of that wisdom than the U.S. conquest and occupation of Iraq. The parallels with the Vietnam War are many and significant, as numerous analysts have pointed out. It is possible that the ongoing catastrophe in Iraq would have occurred even if the U.S. population and the world in general had been equipped to foresee those parallels and grasp their implications. But it would almost certainly have been more difficult, and the resistance would likely have been more unrelenting than it has been to date.

That is something of what George Orwell appears to have had in mind when he wrote: “Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.” History has significant political uses and, conversely, politics have a powerful impact on historical knowledge and awareness, as the recent U.S. presidential election so dismayingly demonstrated.

For a nation bent on aggression, it is useful and perhaps even necessary to create widespread confusion or amnesia about its past crimes. Such a condition can never be, nor need it be, imposed on all the people of the world. It is enough to prevent the formation of a critical mass of worldwide opposition that might jeopardize the project. Thus, burying the Vietnam War in some obscure and distorted past has been essential to the imperial ambitions of the world’s only superpower. For, if people can be

made to forget such a colossal crime against humanity and international law, they can be made to forget just about anything.

Perversely, the commission of new crimes contributes to the process of forgetting, as the current occupants of the White House seem to be aware. “We’re an empire now,” a senior presidential adviser recently declared, “and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality . . . we’ll act again, creating other new realities.” (Quoted in *The Guardian*, 17 February 2005).

In addition to the countries of Indochina, such realities have been imposed on Chile, Grenada, Ecuador, Uruguay, Nicaragua, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc. In this way, a great power can deflect attention from past crimes by perpetrating new ones. When that happens, a proposed education campaign on the history and consequences of the Vietnam War may be greeted with a response like: “Why spend time and other resources on that? After all, it happened long ago and there are more urgent problems to deal with today.”

The problem is that there are always more urgent problems. Until a critical mass of the world community learns not to forget the great crimes of the past and their relevance for the present, it is fairly certain that they will continue *ad infinitum* into the future— and that, as a result, it will never be possible to deal properly with any of them.

Just a few years ago, for example, Afghanistan was “liberated” amidst a rain of bombs and promises. Today, that devastated land is yesterday’s news, rapidly disappearing from general awareness in the uranium-contaminated dust and budget deficits of the war against Iraq. Before long, it will likely be Iraq’s turn to recede into obscurity, as some new designated threat is subjected to the blessings of U.S. *blitzkrieg* (“shock and awe” in Newspeak), occupation and “democracy”.

In short, forgetting or neglecting the lessons of past crimes increases the likelihood of new ones. This is especially true of criminal acts whose perpetration depends on the consent, inaction or indifference of the world community, which in turn is linked to the formation of public opinion.

Hence, the current and future significance of an informed historical perspective. Public opinion is a force that can be subdued or mis-

directed, or marshalled so that political leaders are emboldened to oppose aggression and are provided with essential support if and when they dare to do so.

### *Common humanity*

The trials of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam did not end with the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 1975, nor was there any significant effort by the international community to help them recover from the enormous destruction that had been inflicted upon them. In fact, their suffering was prolonged and intensified by punishing embargoes imposed by the United States, isolating Indochina from most of the world and causing great hardship. (See ELP report for details.)

This may be contrasted with the lavishly financed post-World War II reconstruction of Europe and Asia, including the two nations condemned as the principal aggressors, or with more recent economic assistance to victims of U.S. wars in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The reason for this disparity, of course, is that the Vietnamese defeated the superpower on the battlefield that was made of their country—although at inhuman cost. For that reason, the victims of the American War have been uniquely abused and neglected. Simple justice and common humanity compel remembrance of their suffering and, however long delayed, a concentrated effort to assist the survivors and their descendants. To do less is to accord them less human value than victims of similar or lesser catastrophes who have received far more attention and support.

To redress that wrong is crucial not only for the victims but also for the perpetrators, for a variety of reasons. One of them was noted in the ELP report: "It is dangerous for any nation to live a lie, both for itself and for the surrounding world; and that danger is obviously compounded if the nation in question is the planet's only superpower."

A related theme was developed in 1967 by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his famous speech against the Vietnam War in New York's Riverside Church: "If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read Vietnam. It can never be saved so long as it destroys the deepest hopes of men the world over. . . . The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit.

. . . History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate."

Of course, the dominant forces in the United States did not heed Rev. King's wisdom then; and they appear no more inclined to do so today. This sorry state of affairs was noted in the ELP report: "Clearly, there are powerful psychological and political forces in the United States which have impeded the long-overdue reconstruction of Indochina, and are likely to do so for the foreseeable future. . . . Until such time as the United States can bring itself to accept its responsibility, it would be appropriate for other nations — less tormented by the humiliation of defeat and the demons it arouses — to compensate for the lack of action. This applies especially to the developed countries of the West, most of which actively or passively supported the American War. . . . Others did little or nothing to shorten it, and nearly the entire developed world supported the punishing embargoes instigated by the United States against Vietnam and Cambodia."

The report also noted that a number of developed countries have, at long last, begun to provide a modicum of assistance. But the response thus far has been nowhere in proportion to the level of suffering and destruction caused by the American War; and in many cases, the support provided appears to be motivated as much or more by commercial interests as by concern for the victims.

### *Model of reconciliation*

In our time, as in probably no other, there are two extraordinary examples of peaceful, conciliatory response to great injustice. One is taking place in South Africa, where Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and others have led the way in healing the wounds of *apartheid*.

The other is taking place in Vietnam, as noted in the ELP report: "Throughout their 2000-year history, the people of Vietnam have had many occasions to deal with invaders, and they have developed a fairly unique habit of forgiveness that is expressed in the ancient proverb, 'Do not hack at the heels of the enemy when he flees. Let him slip away if he promises to cease warring against you. Strew roses in his path — without thorns.'

"Such an attitude is consistent with the



deeply-held Buddhist beliefs shared by the vast majority of the population. . . . U.S. veterans who return to the scenes of their war-making in Vietnam are often astonished and deeply moved by the open friendliness with which their former targets greet them. . . .

“I feel great respect for the deep mourning that the American people have shown for their 50,000 dead. It is a sign of great humanism,” says [author and veteran] Bao Ninh. ‘But we lost a hundred times more in the war, possibly as many as five million. The mountains, beaches and rivers were filled with the dead. But when the war was over, the country was so poor and life was so hard that we who survived never had time to mourn.’ Nevertheless: ‘Anyone who thinks that we hate Americans knows nothing about the Vietnamese people.’”

Learning this about the Vietnamese people would surely be of great value to others; and the contrast with the behaviour of the United States, as reflected in the recent presidential election, would no doubt also be enlightening.

To sum up:

- The Vietnam War will continue to have profound human, environmental, economic and political consequences long into the future.
- Its origins and process are exceptionally well-documented, not least by the aggressor nation.
- By providing a frame of reference within which to understand present and future catastrophes of a similar nature, the Vietnam War continues to be relevant.
- In contrast to the aftermath of other wars, the victims have been woefully neglected— due mainly to the vengefulness of the superpower whose unprovoked aggression was repelled.
- The Vietnamese are providing an example of forgiveness and conciliation that is of obvious interest and potentially great value to the rest of the world.

For these and possibly other reasons, the time is more than ripe to properly remember Vietnam— even though the war “happened long ago” and there are so many urgent problems of more recent origin crying for attention.

### *Public education campaign*

The ELP report argues for a worldwide public education campaign on the history and consequences of the Vietnam War, which could serve a number of useful purposes:

“For one thing, it could be expected to engender public support for a suitable program of reconstruction. It would also provide an alternative to the ongoing process of historical revision, as well as training in the analysis of such methods— training which could be usefully applied to other events of a similar nature.

“In addition, it would overcome the tendency to neglect and/or forget tragedies such as the Vietnam War as time passes and attention is diverted to fresh disasters. It is in everyone’s interest to put all great powers on notice that great crimes cannot be covered up or consigned to oblivion by committing new ones somewhere else.

“At the most basic human level, it is essential to remember all those afflicted by the war and to reassure survivors that they have not been forgotten. To do less is to suggest that their lives were/are of little or no value. . . .

“Of course, younger generations will have nothing of importance to forget if they are never properly informed. Providing young people with an accurate account of the Vietnam War and its aftermath is an obvious priority. Given the current political climate of the United States, it may not be possible to systematically convey such knowledge in that country, and any attempt to do so would almost certainly set off a violent reaction. But in most other parts of the world, it should be possible to incorporate the Vietnam War and its lessons into the basic education of all young people. At least some of that acquired knowledge could then be expected to seep into the United States.” (See page 9 for additional excerpts.)

A potentially useful model has been provided by the Swedish government. The “Living History” project on the Nazi Holocaust has reached a large proportion of Swedish youth and their families via the schools, and has expanded into a number of other countries and related issues (details on page 10).

In the present context, the Living History project is useful primarily as a practical example of how to organize and implement

such a project. Otherwise, there are crucial differences between the Nazi Holocaust and the Vietnam War as subjects of public discourse. Probably the most daunting is that, while the Nazi empire was destroyed more than a half-century ago, the great power responsible for the Vietnam War is now even more powerful, due to an absence (for the moment) of counter-vailing forces. That hard fact of global politics goes a long way to explaining why, for example, the Swedish government's project has yet to address the Vietnam War and is unlikely ever to do so.

The entire world is afraid of the United States, and with good reason. That, in itself, is sufficient cause to "speak truth to power". But it is unlikely to the point of unthinkable that any national leader might take the same kind of initiative concerning the Vietnam War that Sweden's prime minister has done with regard to the Nazi Holocaust.

Accordingly, if the thing is to be done, and done well, it must be a citizens' initiative. That inevitably poses a problem of legitimacy, of course. It will therefore be essential to enlist the support of respected national and international figures in order to confer the necessary dignity.

Even assuming that a suitable roster of prominent citizens can be persuaded to endorse the project, a strong reaction may be anticipated— not only from the United States, but also from its many allies and admirers in the affected countries. The reaction will be all the stronger if the project is conducted— as it must be— in the proper spirit of unflinching candour. "It is important to call things by their right names," noted Olof Palme forty years ago with reference to the U.S. war against Vietnam. "A crime is still a crime, and terror is still terror, even if it is committed in the name of lofty goals and principles."

While strong, and in some cases perhaps even violent, resistance to the spread of the relevant knowledge may be expected, such resistance could also turn out to be useful in at least two ways— by calling attention to the project, and by generating at least some opportunities for dialogue with people who have been affected by the falsified history of the war. Accordingly, the public education campaign should include ample provision for dealing with the questions and criticisms that it will surely stimulate or provoke.

As presently conceived, the initial stage of the project will be limited to Canada and to European countries whose primary languages are English, French and German. The materials will be made available to any other individual, organization or country that wants them. But for both practical reasons and the political considerations noted above, the indicated limits are necessary during the initial phase. What happens after that depends on how the project is received and developed.

As regards the information to be conveyed, the ELP report can serve as an indication of the general perspective and contents. Exactly which media and formats are best-suited to the task is an issue to be addressed during the research and planning stages (see below). Separate strategies may be required for each of the various countries involved. But at a minimum, it may be assumed that there will be an illustrated booklet along the lines of the one published by Sweden's Living History project, and that the Internet will play an important role.

Other options include the production and distribution of an annual desk calendar, like those of the U.S. Sierra Club and War Resisters League, which would provide an attractive and informative daily reminder of the war and its consequences. One might organize public events to commemorate important occurrences such as the My Lai Massacre or the reunification of Vietnam, etc., etc. To the extent that the campaign succeeds, the possibilities are likely to increase in both number and feasibility.

To guarantee the validity and accuracy of all information conveyed, an editorial committee of acknowledged experts will be assembled. Most or all of them will be drawn from the United States, partly because that is where much of the best available expertise resides, and partly to negate eventual accusations that the project is "anti-American".

It is of course true that the focus of the project will be on the behaviour of the United States, for several reasons: it is primarily responsible for the Vietnam War; its great power and influence have hindered an appropriate response to the consequences of the war; and that power threatens to produce similar catastrophes in other parts of the world, as recent events have clearly indicated. But the United States is not the first empire to behave in this way, and is unlikely to be the last.

Inasmuch as the challenges posed by great power and its abuse will doubtless be as great or even greater in the future, it is in everyone's interest to develop effective means of confronting them now.

### ***Reconstruction***

Experience indicates that, when people learn or are reminded of the terrible consequences of the Vietnam War, the usual response is one of sympathy and solidarity. "What can we do to help?" is a common reaction.

That sort of question is almost certain to arise from the proposed education campaign, and it will be necessary to prepare a suitable response to those who wish to express their solidarity. A few suggestions are offered in the "Policy Recommendations" section of the ELP report. But given the great diversity and extent of the need, the possibilities are as unlimited as the problem of co-ordination is obvious.

An effort will be made to address the problem of co-ordination during the planning phase. Aid agencies, solidarity organizations and other interested parties will be invited to discuss suitable alternatives for effectively channelling any interest in reconstruction efforts which may arise from the public education campaign. But it is a complex and sensitive matter, as noted in the *Project Review* of the Stockholm conference:

"NGOs in general are subject to various pressures and conflicts which tend to limit the potential for joint strategy and action (see 'NGO politics', p. 26). Among other things, they often compete with each other for scarce financial resources; and some of them have had direct or indirect links with the C.I.A. and other U.S. agencies. . . . The need for improved co-ordination is urgent, and the obvious way to start is by bringing the issue into the open." (From *Project Review* on the conference web site: [www.nnn.se/vietnam/report.pdf](http://www.nnn.se/vietnam/report.pdf))

In connection with the planning of the public education campaign, an effort will be made to address such problems and to seek solutions. Needless to say, the peoples and governments of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam must play a central role in any such process.

### ***Reconciliation***

Although the initial reaction to the public education campaign by the United States and its allies is likely to be negative, it is not impossible that the end result may be positive. As pointed out in the ELP report:

"There are few obstacles [to reconciliation] as far as most Vietnamese are concerned; and a small but dedicated segment of the U.S. population has been working to improve relations between the two countries.

"The task now is to encourage and facilitate a substantial increase in human contacts that can lead to friendly relations and mutual understanding. . . . One essential component of such a process already exists: The Vietnamese have demonstrated a willingness to forgive, even while under ferocious attack. What remains is for the people and government of the United States to acknowledge the criminal nature of the Vietnam War and the awful consequences that are still being suffered by all the peoples of Indochina.

"That will not be easy, of course. The humiliation of defeat and the psychology of denial—reinforced by decades of indoctrination and historical falsification—remain evident throughout much of U.S. society. . . .

"As long as such denial and distortion predominate in the United States, as they appear to do at present, it will obviously be very difficult or impossible to achieve any sort of reconciliation worth the name. But it is essential to keep working toward that objective for several reasons. One of them has been explained by the South African 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.'

"A similar notion has been expressed by Isabel Allende, daughter of Chilean president Salvador Allende who was eliminated in a vicious military coup on 9/11/1973 which was sponsored by the United States. Now a member of Chile's legislature, she noted on the thirtieth



anniversary of the coup that, 'It is not by forgetting or the granting of amnesty that a country cleanses its wounds, reclaims its history and builds its future, but by confronting the truth, administering justice, compensating victims, and ensuring that what happened thirty years ago will never happen again.' . . .

"There is already a minority of the U.S. population which has an undistorted view of the Vietnam War, understands the consequences, and is prepared to do something about them. To transform that minority into a majority is an urgent priority, and the obvious place to start is with those who are most receptive. . . .

"Of course, given the strength of the negative emotions involved, any serious effort at reconciliation would almost certainly meet resistance and provoke conflict. But resistance and conflict are inevitable with any attempt to redress an injustice on the scale of the Vietnam War. What is the alternative, other than the triumph of ignorance and brutality over knowledge and wisdom?"

It is to be hoped that the proposed education campaign can contribute to a process of reconciliation—initially by providing the enlightened U.S. minority with moral support and useful materials, and eventually by extending the campaign to the entire United States if and when circumstances permit.

### *Project development*

It is expected that the three main stages of development will be as follows:

#### I. Research

This will involve broad discussions with as many interested parties as available resources permit. The contacts developed in connection with the Stockholm conference comprise a network that can be, and is being, expanded. Among the issues to be discussed are: methods and strategies for implementing the project; likely institutional and organizational collaborators; recruitment of distinguished citizens as official patrons; financing, anticipated problems and preventive/preparatory measures; composition of the editorial board; and other relevant

issues, including those referred to above.

The results of these discussions will be presented in a report that will provide a basis for the next stage. Although the details cannot be specified in advance, the report will presumably include a preliminary budget, a proposed organizational structure, suggestions regarding implementation of the project, and an analysis of obstacles to be overcome.

#### II. Planning

On the basis of the report that emerges from the first stage, an organizational structure and working plan will be developed. The educational and related materials will be prepared, the details of co-operation with project partners will be worked out, issues surrounding the question of reconstruction programmes will be discussed and if possible resolved, etc. Again, it is not possible to be more specific until the first phase is completed.

#### III. Implementation

Launching of the public education campaign on as large a scale and with as much publicity as possible. Monitoring and analysis of the results, and planning for further development.

Obviously, it is a very ambitious project that is being proposed here. But the aim must be high in order to achieve meaningful results. The outcome will, of course, depend on the nature and extent of support which the project receives. It should be stressed that the intention is not to create a cumbersome new organization to implement the project. Rather, the objective is to mobilize and co-ordinate existing institutional and organizational resources.

Finally, I will note the obvious—that this is a very general and preliminary outline of the proposed project. Comments and suggestions are most welcome.

— Al Burke  
Stockholm

# EDUCATION & RECONSTRUCTION

Excerpt from *Ethical, Legal & Policy Issues*

Report to Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam

THE FOREGOING ANALYSIS suggests a number of measures that are much needed and long overdue. The most urgent need, of course, is to invest in the post-war reconstruction of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, at a level that is in reasonable proportion to the suffering and destruction inflicted upon them. This, in turn, requires increased awareness and recognition of the Vietnam War's devastating impact— past, present and future.

As previously noted, a large number and variety of initiatives have already been taken. But there has been little apparent co-ordination among them, and the resources thus far allocated are far from adequate. For the clearing of landmines and other ordinance, for example, mere "peanuts" have been made available (see p. 47). Likewise, only a token amount of funding has been provided to deal with the medical problems that are known or believed to be connected with Agent Orange.

What is needed is a comprehensive, sustained and adequately financed program of reconstruction, and it is clear that the United States is primarily responsible for providing the necessary resources. However, it is equally clear that the government of the United States and the majority of its citizens are not yet prepared to assume that responsibility.

In the meantime, millions of people throughout Indochina continue to suffer the consequences of a war which officially ended before many of them were born. Large numbers have already died, or been condemned to lives of misery and pain. Any serious effort to deal with that reality will require a major commitment by the world community— most appropriately by the developed countries which actively or passively supported the U.S. war and the harmful embargoes that followed it. . . .

The fact remains that there has never been any large-scale, comprehensive program of post-war reconstruction. There has not even been a systematic effort to document and analyze the consequences of the war. The first attempt to do so was the Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, from which this report has emerged. But that event was poorly financed, and hampered by a number of obstacles, including an apparently widespread

reluctance to address issues that might give offense to the United States.

## *Global education*

. . . A worldwide public education campaign on the true history and consequences of the Vietnam War might serve a number of useful purposes. For one thing, it could be expected to engender public support for a suitable program of reconstruction. It would also provide an alternative to the ongoing process of historical revision (see "The Propaganda War", p. 11), as well as training in the analysis of such methods— training which could be usefully applied to other events of a similar nature.

In addition, it would overcome the tendency to neglect and/or forget tragedies such as the Vietnam War as time passes and attention is diverted to fresh disasters. It is in everyone's interest to put all great powers on notice that great crimes cannot be covered up or consigned to oblivion by committing new ones somewhere else.

At the most basic human level, it is essential to remember all those afflicted by the war and to reassure survivors that they have not been forgotten. To do less is to suggest that their lives were/are of little or no value. . . .

As for the particular knowledge to be conveyed, much of it is reviewed in this and other reports of the Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. There is also a conference declaration in several languages which is suitable for use in educational settings, and as a basis for legislative motions and other forms of support (see conference web site at [www.nnn.se/vietnam/environ.htm](http://www.nnn.se/vietnam/environ.htm)).

The conference reports also provide a frame of reference within which to evaluate other accounts of the war and its consequences. . . .



*Illustrated book on the Nazi Holocaust*

## SWEDEN'S LIVING HISTORY FORUM

The Living History Forum began as an initiative of Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson in 1997. Its original purpose was to spread knowledge and understanding of the Nazi Holocaust, but has since expanded "to encourage discussion and reflection on issues concerning democracy, tolerance and the equal worth of all people with the Holocaust as a starting point, but also to take up other crimes against humanity in a historical and contemporary perspective." As one might expect, the crimes of current Western powers have not been included in that perspective— an omission that has occasioned some criticism.

Among the project's stated objectives are to:

- spread knowledge about the Holocaust and contribute to a deeper understanding
- achieve the greatest possible geographical spread and support
- reach out to groups that do not traditionally take part in activities of this kind
- increase knowledge of democracy, tolerance and human rights through broad collaboration based on research
- seek to strengthen knowledge where existing knowledge is lacking or deficient
- promote annual commemoration of the Holocaust Day of Remembrance on 27 January
- continue distribution of the book "Tell ye your children. . .".

The book is available free of charge to pupils at the middle- and secondary-school levels upon request. Since the start of the project in 1998, some 1.1 million copies have been distributed.

The book is currently available in several languages, including English, Swedish, Spanish, Finnish, Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and Serbo-Croatian. PDF versions in the first six of these languages are downloadable from the Forum's web site (see below).

In addition to the book on the Holocaust and related educational materials, the Forum also arranges international conferences and teachers' seminars, promotes research, organizes public meetings, etc. Co-operating on various activities are working groups from sixteen nations, including Argentina, Austria, France, Italy, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, Germany and the U.S.A.

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May 11, 2004

**To whom it may concern:**

I have known Mr. Al Burke for over four years. My initial contacts were related to the planning and implementation of the Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos & Vietnam, which was held in Stockholm in July of 2002.

It became obvious during the planning stage of the conference that Mr. Burke's skills in attracting supporters, qualified delegates, and financial sponsors were exceptional. The complexity of organization and the logistical constraints were managed, in my estimation, with exceptional competence.

Diplomacy, untiring dedication, and genuine concern for a successful program — these describe my assessment of Mr. Burke's ability to organize and administer a project of such importance and magnitude. I have also noted that his communication skills, both written and verbal, are exceptional, as are his talents in the design of written materials, visual displays, etc.

His easy-going nature stood out during the proceedings in Stockholm, putting the delegates at ease and encouraging dialogue on the many topics at issue.

I would be an unconditional supporter of Mr. Burke if he were again to take on such a conference, or any project of a similar nature.

Please feel free to contact me directly for confirmation and/or additional observations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. W. Dwernychuk", with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

L. W. Dwernychuk, Ph.D.  
Snr. Vice President & Principal  
**HATFIELD CONSULTANTS LTD**

LWD/jl

**THE VIETNAM ASSOCIATION FOR VICTIMS OF AGENT ORANGE (VAVA)**

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21 September 2004

To whom it may concern:

I first had contact with Mr. Al Burke during the organization of the Environmental Conference on Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, which was held in Stockholm in July of 2002. During our initial conversation, I was moved by his empathy for the people of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and by his knowledge and understanding of their situation.

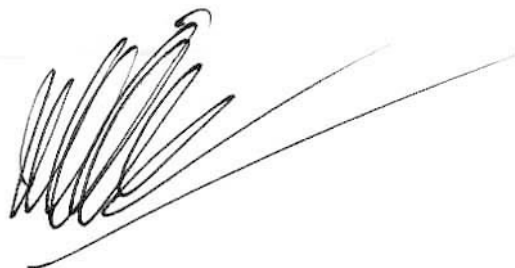
Mr. Burke was the initiator and co-ordinator of the Environmental Conference in Stockholm and, upon meeting him in person, I was further impressed with his knowledge and professionalism. The success of the Environmental Conference testified to his ability to organize an international event on this scale. I spoke with a number of the sponsors at the conference, and they were unanimous in their praise for the way in which the conference had been organized and conducted. There can be no higher praise for the efforts of Mr. Burke than the approval of such international sponsors.

Mr. Burke is also the principal author of the report by the conference subcommittee on Ethical, Legal and Policy Issues. I consider that report to be a landmark account of the ethical, legal and policy issues associated with the widespread and prolonged human suffering that directly resulted from the war in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

I have a high regard for the level of professionalism that Mr. Burke demonstrates in his work, and the genuine humanitarianism he shows toward all people. I admire the humility that he shows when in the company of other people, his warmth of character and good nature.

I wish him well in all his future pursuits, and he will always be warmly welcomed in our country, both in his professional capacity and as a friend.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping, fluid strokes that form a cursive name. The signature is positioned above a thin, horizontal line that extends to the right.

**Prof. Nguyen Trong Nhan MD PhD**  
Vice President of VAVA



JOHN D. CONSTABLE, M.D.  
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To whom it may Concern:

I am writing this letter in order to offer my testimony in respect to Mr Al Burke with whom I have had the opportunity to work recently.

I was very glad to be able to join the Stockholm meeting on the long-term toxicity of herbicides used in the Indochina war that was held in the summer of 2002. I did so rather at the last moment at the invitation of Al Burke and was especially glad that he was able to fit me in as an essential member of the core contributors.

I found that he had enlisted a very appropriate and varied group of participants many of whom were meeting together for the first time. They represented a very wide diversity of opinions. At first it appeared that it would be impossible on a summary document that would be at least acceptable to all. Very largely due to Al's persistent diplomacy we were successful in reaching a consensus. This was, importantly, because of Mr Burke's not trying to impose his personal beliefs and of his willingness to become better informed.

The conference finished with the final report agreed upon but not written. Al Burke was very effective as an editor in polishing my contribution on the medical aspects of herbicide toxicity and he was able to help mediate any residual controversies.

I would be happy another appropriate congress or meeting under his guidance.

Yours sincerely

  
John Constable

Aug 14 2004