

Transcript: The U.S. – Vietnam Relationship and War Legacies: 25 Years into Normalization

The Stimson Center

Zoom Webinar

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Courtney Weatherby: Thank you all for joining us for today's event on the US – Vietnam Relationship and War Legacies. Before we begin, I just want to make a brief logistical note to inform all of you that we have simultaneous translation available between English and Vietnamese for today's discussion. If you need to hear translation of comments, please go to the bottom of your screen to access the translation, which is labeled as the "German" channel for everyone. So if you are listening in English but would like to hear Vietnamese, please go into the German channel; if you are listening to the main audio and there are remarks provided in Vietnamese and you need to hear the English translation, please go into the German channel. It is an option at the bottom of your Zoom screen; it's an easy transition, and I will also include logistical notes on how to do this in the chat box for everyone's reference. And with that announcement, I am going to go ahead and turn everything over to our CEO, Brian Finlay.

Brian Finlay: Courtney, thank you so much for helping to put all this together. We're very grateful to you, my colleague, Courtney Weatherby. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to what is, for us, going to be a very special event at Stimson. Obviously, we wish we could be welcoming you all in person to the Stimson Center, but we're really grateful for this opportunity to reach so many of you across the country and really around the world. My name is Brian Finlay. I'm the president and CEO here at Stimson. For those of you that know Stimson well, you know that the Center has a long history of working to address the impacts of conflict on civilians around the world and build practical and creative solutions for a more sustainable and peaceful future, and nowhere is that more true in our work than it is in Southeast Asia. In 2018, our team, ably led by my friend and colleague Brian Eyer, began work on the War Legacies Working Group which builds partnerships between organizations individuals throughout the United States and really across Southeast Asia to address the consequences of the Vietnam war. Now, addressing the consequences of war, of course, is not just a humanitarian thing to do. It creates fundamentally new opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships among erstwhile enemies. This year we mark the 25th anniversary, of course, of the normalization of relations between the United States and Vietnam. Now despite the shared history of war and its tragic legacies, Vietnam really has become I think we can all agree a key American partner in the Indo-Pacific region. From his earliest days in the United States Senate, Patrick Leahy worked to make right America's relationship with Vietnam. I think the naming of the Leahy War Victims Fund is just one recognition of what has been a series of — and really a career of remarkable contributions that the Senator has made to bilateral relations, whether working on the issue of American service members missing in action, working to address the enduring scourge of landmines and unexploded ordnance in the country and more broadly across the region. I really can think of no other American that has been more responsible for addressing the consequences of the Vietnam War and for the betterment of relations between our two countries than has Senator Patrick Leahy. So, Senator, we know that there are a couple of other things I understand happening in Washington right now. Your presence, though, here with us is an honor for us but I think it's also indicative, sir, of the seriousness and the respect with which you continue to

afford this relationship, and the respect you give as well to the people of Vietnam. So, sir, I'm very grateful to you for making the time to be here and the floor is yours, Senator.

Senator Patrick Leahy: Well, thank you very, very much for those kind words and I appreciate what you've done. I'm talking with Tim Reiser — the tremendous work all of you have done and I know Ambassador Kritenbrink is on here, and Dan, I'm delighted you're there, and my friend Ambassador Ngoc. Charles Bailey has given us so much information, good advice. Susan Hammond was a fellow Vermonter. But especially to thank the Stimson Center. I appreciate the kind words toward me but I think I'll turn them right back to the Stimson Center. You've been an indispensable advocate and supporter of reconciliation between the United States and Vietnam for so many years and I don't use the word indispensable lightly. Like John McCain, John Kerry, Bobby Muller, other Vietnam veterans who led the campaign for reconciliation, you provide the vision and the advice that contributed to progress we've achieved so far. Compare the relations between the United States and Vietnam to what they were 25 years ago. You look at them today: it is remarkable. Normalization was a big step forward, but back then I don't think any of us could have predicted or even imagined we'd be at this point today. Many of us know people who served in the war on both sides. I think all of us recognize that the war was a disaster for both countries, and the tragic consequences remain with us 45 years later. But we also share a recognition that we want the future to be different, and that has meant dealing honestly with the past. Ambassador Ngoc has been a real partner in this effort starting even before he was posted to Washington. Having good ambassadors in Washington and Vietnam for both countries helped us so much and we would never have gotten to where we are if it were not for the willingness of the government of Vietnam over the past 40 years to help locate the remains of American MIAs. The importance of that cooperation can't be overstated. And while it's taken far too long, I'm very pleased that this year, we're starting on a new five-year partnership between the U.S. Department of Defense, USAID, Vietnam's Ministry of Defense to help the Vietnamese recover the remains of MIAs. I think of all the ways we've worked together to address the legacies of the war. This may turn out to be the most meaningful, certainly for the families of the missing, but also for our two governments. While we know that the remains of many of the hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese who died will never be found, we're going to help in ways that can make a real difference. We'll continue to assist the many thousands of disabled Vietnamese victims of landmines and other unexploded bombs, which began with the Legacy War Victims Fund 30 years ago. Vietnam remains heavily contaminated with these hidden killers. We have to continue to work to get rid of them, will continue to help Vietnamese with severe cognitive and physical disabilities, and to clean up the sites contaminated with dioxin from Agent Orange. The Bien Hoa air-based project is of a scale and complexity unlike anything we've done before. It speaks to the confidence of both governments and what we can achieve together in a time of great uncertainty in the world. We're fortunate that we have worked together over the past 25 years on reconciliation by focusing on war legacy issues. Now we know it has not always been easy, but despite our differences, it is because of these touring efforts that Vietnam today is one of our closest partners in East Asia. We both need each other and we'll work together. As we commemorate the 25th anniversary of normalization, I think not only of how far we've progressed during these years, but the next generation who were born long after the war ended. What will the next 25 years be like for them? Will they carry on and expand what we started, not just on war legacies, but addressing the challenges of climate change, the growing demand for clean energy, competition for scarce resources, and regional threats to peace and security? I have a lot of hope for Vietnam, because like many of you, I've met some of the next generation in Hanoi, Danang, and Ho Chi Minh City. They're as smart, as enthusiastic and as determined to succeed as young people anywhere and they want Vietnam to play an active and positive role in the international community. We can all be proud of how far two countries have come in overcoming the tragic legacies of the war in building a

comprehensive partnership. If we continue on the path we're on, I think we can be optimistic about the years ahead, so I thank you and I'll continue to work with you.

Finlay: Senator, thank you so much, sir, for those remarks but more importantly for your service to the bilateral relationship between the United States and Vietnam. I know, sir, that you have a couple of other things on your schedule here and you're going to have to rig off shortly. We're grateful for your service in the Senate, and thank you, sir, for making a couple of minutes to join this virtual celebration of the U.S.-Vietnam relationship. Thank you. Ambassador Ngoc arrived in Washington back in 2018 as Vietnam's ambassador to the United States, and clearly Vietnam has sent their very best, which is perhaps a testament to the importance for Vietnam of its relationship with the United States as well. Ambassador Ngoc's appointment came after what has been a truly remarkable foreign service career that includes services not just to the deputy minister, multiple appointments throughout the ministry, service to the embassy in Tokyo as Vice Council, Council in San Francisco, and a host of other responsibilities. He has served in the diplomatic corps in Vietnam since 1988, and on a more personal note, Ambassador, he has become a great friend of the Stimson Center in his time here in Washington as well. Ambassador, you'll recall, I think, that you delivered your very first public remarks as ambassador at the Stimson Center to kick off the activities of our War Legacies Working Group. Progress obviously on the war legacy issue as the Senator referenced really is the cornerstone of the U.S. Vietnam relationship and, Ambassador, we here at Stimson and I will say are deeply committed to furthering progress on that and really want to apply ourselves in service to that objective. The foreign ministry of Vietnam is a core supporter and even donor to the War Legacies Working Group and, Ambassador, we're deeply honored to have you join us today. The floor is yours, sir.

Ambassador Ha Kim Ngoc: Thank you, Brian Finlay, for your kind introduction. The Honorable Senator Patrick Leahy, Ambassador Dan Kritenbrink, colleagues, and friends, the keynote speech of Senator Leahy is so impressive and I completely agree with Mr. Senator that the vision, the determination, and goodwill by both sides have helped us to reconcile and become close partners today. I very much appreciate the initiative by the Stimson Center, especially the world legacy working group and thanks for inviting me to attend this webinar. This is a meaningful event to highlight the 25th anniversary of our diplomatic relations given the complex development of COVID-19, and I'm very happy to see so many American friends, including my special friend and counterpart Ambassador Kritenbrink from the other side of the Pacific. Ladies and gentlemen, in few bilateral relationships do we see the addressing of war legacy issues playing as important a role and contributing as substantively to the diplomatic normalization process the improvement of overall ties and the deepening of trust as in the relationship between the United States and Vietnam. It seems that the vicious war with its catastrophic consequences could divide our two nations forever, but addressing war legacy issues has become glue, connecting our two people closer. After all, the game changer is the determination by both sides to leave the past behind and look forward to the future. It is also the responsibility, the morality, the compassion and the deepest sympathy that we have shared with each other. All those have helped us to overcome our own limits to reach out and work with the other side in the spirit of reconciliation healing and building trust between our two nations, as Mr. Senator just said, and the process of cooperation in addressing world legacies has shown the best of the American people this has made profound changes in the mindset of the Vietnamese people about the United States and American people after the war. We could be proud of what we have achieved during the past 25 years. It is worth mentioning the accounting for American MIAs that was started quite soon after the war and paved the way for the normalization process later on. And then the United States has helped us in helping the world victims in Vietnam remediated dioxin in Danang and now Bien Hoa airports clearing UXO. And most recently, the U.S. side has

accelerated the assistance to recover the remains of Vietnamese soldiers. The tireless and great efforts by the government, Congress, NGOs, and people of our two countries have been helping to heal the wounds left by the war. We can see the smiles and hope in the eyes of Agent Orange victims who have never enjoyed true peace, though the war ended 45 years ago, and the dead lands and deserted areas have been revived after UXO clearing and dioxin remediation and turned into populous areas covered with green trees flowers and fruit full of life. Many American and Vietnamese families welcomed home the remains of their loved ones, and many were victims and their families have received medical treatment and assistance for developing the household economy. On behalf of the government and people of Vietnam, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to all American friends who are present here today and those who do not attend this webinar. You have made possible the impossible. We wish to pay our tribute to Senator Patrick Leahy, a great friend of Vietnam; former Senator John Kerry; and late Senator John McCain, and many many other distinguished individuals who have been champions in the process of normalization and development of our bilateral ties, including addressing world legacies. With your deep passion, strategic vision, and political will, you all have helped our two countries overcome their bitter past and start a new era of friendship and cooperation. Thank you so much, Senator Patrick Leahy, for your strong support for world legacy assistance projects including dioxin remediation and accounting for Vietnamese soldiers missing in actions, and you are a real fighter to defend those projects at the Congress. And with this in mind, we also very much appreciate our close and dear friend, Tim Rieser, advisor to Senator Leahy, for his long time and consistent and invaluable contribution on this occasion. Please show our gratitude to our peacetime heroes. They are Vietnamese and Americans who devoted their lives to address war legacies. Some of them never came back and some of them have been suffering the injuries while searching for the remains of the soldiers missing in action or clearing UXO. I would like to honor NGOs who have helped to make the difference in this normal mission. It was the war legacy project of Susan Hammond to help victims of Agent Orange, Operation Smile of Dr. William and Kathleen Maggie to bring smiles to thousands of Vietnamese children who have cleft palette due to the effect of Agent Orange, Peace Tree Vietnam with Ha Farm, and with very effective UXO project in Quang Tri, or Root the Peace of Heidi Kuhn to turn my fields into green fields of pepper and grapes, or Children of Vietnam of Nancy Letteri to bring clean water and school sanitation for children in Vietnamese schools. And there are many, many other organizations and individuals that I cannot name them all today. Last but not least, our thanks also go to the War Legacies Working Group at Stimson for your great efforts to advocate the world legacy issue for the attention of the administration and Congress and mobilizing resources among donors in the United States. I really hope that the group will help the younger generation in the U.S. administration and Congress understand more about the history of our two countries' relations and join our efforts or even expand our works of healing and reconciliation. You have us, the embassy of Vietnam, in this process. Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot rewrite the history, but with our common efforts, we are creating a brighter future of our bilateral partnership in the next 25 years, or even 100 years. Why not? To deal with the common challenges that Senator Leahy just mentioned, we build the future based on our meaningful and effective cooperation and addressing world legacies is our success story. This is not only the model of reconciliation between two former foes becoming friends and now comprehensive partners — it could also serve as an example of solutions for many regional and international conflicts nowadays. Thank you for your attention.

Finlay: Ambassador, thank you, sir, for those remarks and again your commitment. Certainly, for our part at Stimson and the broader War Legacies Working Group, we will take your charge on and we really look forward to working with you, sir, and the embassy, and the people of Vietnam on this relationship. I also understand that you can't stay, unfortunately, through the Q&A session, but we will welcome your colleague, Miss Nguyen, to participate in your stead.

Thank you, Ambassador, for joining us this morning. Last and certainly not least, we are deeply honored to be joined by Ambassador Daniel Kritenbrink. Ambassador Kritenbrink joined the career foreign service in 1994. He has completed multiple assignments focused on Asia, including as Senior Advisor on North Korea policy at the Department of State, as Senior Director for Asian Affairs on the National Security Council. He has served in posts in China, in Japan, in Kuwait. He was confirmed as U.S. ambassador to Vietnam in 2017 and is joining us virtually from Vietnam today. Ambassador, it's got to be past your bedtime there. I'm really deeply grateful to you for making the time to do this, and, sir, the floor is yours.

Ambassador Daniel Kritenbrink: Well, Brian, thank you for that very kind introduction and most importantly, thank you for giving me the honor of participating in this very important event. I'm very grateful to you, to the Stimson Center for all the work that you've done on these issues and it's just again a tremendous honor and privilege to be here with all of you this evening — or, rather, this morning your time. I have the privilege of getting paid for a living to talk about the U.S.-Vietnam partnership and it's my great honor to do so. We're coming off the high of celebrating the formal anniversary — the 25th anniversary — this past weekend on July 11 and 12 here in Hanoi, and I think it's really momentous to reflect on just how far we've come together in the last quarter century. And I think perhaps the most significant thing that we've achieved is that we have built a partnership and a friendship and I think have come farther than maybe anyone could have ever dreamed. So, again, I'm very grateful to you, Brian, and to the Stimson Center, but I'm also profoundly grateful to the leadership of Senator Patrick Leahy, to Tim Rieser, and other friends here in tonight's event. We wouldn't be here this evening without Senator Leahy. I had the great privilege of helping to support his visit to Vietnam last year in which he led a Senate delegation of nine U.S. Senators who visited sites across Vietnam. During that visit, he helped launch our official dioxin remediation efforts at the DNY air base near Ho Chi Minh City, so we're deeply grateful to Senator Leahy for his leadership and his support that has made today's partnership and friendship with Vietnam possible. I'm also honored to see my good friend ambassador Ha Kim Ngoc on the line, one of the world's great diplomats, a good friend, someone who's dedicated his life to growing the U.S.-Vietnam partnership. And thank you, Ambassador Ngoc, for those eloquent remarks. And it's also humbling to be joined here by so many other speakers and participants who similarly have dedicated their lives to improving this partnership. It was extraordinary over this past weekend when we officially celebrated the 25th anniversary of the relationship. That celebration coincided with the signing of a new implementing agreement to bring the Peace Corps to Vietnam for the first time after many years of work, and I can think of no better way to symbolize our strengthening friendship than the idea of having Peace Corps volunteers on the ground in Vietnam helping to teach English here, which I think will only further strengthen our partnership going forward. Obviously, as noted by Senator Leahy and Ngoc, over the last 25 years, we've come a long way together. It really is extraordinary that today as partners and friends, the United States and Vietnam are cooperating in virtually every way imaginable, in a diverse array of sectors ranging from trade, development, education, health care, energy, and security. We're working towards our shared commitment to peace and prosperity. I believe wholeheartedly in the U.S.-Vietnam comprehensive partnership. As the United States often states, we are committed to supporting the development of a strong, prosperous, and independent Vietnam that contributes to international security, engages in free fare and reciprocal trade, and respects human rights and the rule of law. We further remain committed to strengthening our partnership and friendship based on a shared vision of a stable and peaceful Indo-Pacific, as well as our mutual respect for international law and one another's independent sovereignty, territorial integrity, and respective political systems. But as we reflect on everything that we have achieved in the last 25 years and as we celebrate the tremendous growth in this partnership and friendship, we should never forget that what we enjoy today is built on a foundation of trust —

trust and mutual understanding. And I think the central pillar in that foundation is our work over the last 30 plus years on humanitarian and war legacy issues. As my friend, the first American ambassador to Vietnam, Pete Peterson, told me two years ago, what the United States and Vietnam have achieved together is remarkable, but it is not a miracle and it is not an accident; it's the result of hard work, courage, and goodwill by leaders and people in both of our countries that's brought us here today. And I think nowhere has that work been more important than, again, on humanitarian and legacy of war issues. Initially, of course, it was those most deeply touched by our past tragic conflict, especially our veterans, but also bereaved family members and civilians on both sides who decided to face squarely the pain of our history while setting aside old enmity to create a new brighter future for our children. Even as our partnership and friendship today remains squarely focused on the future and maintaining the peace and security and stability that will benefit our children for decades to come, we know that we must continue to responsibly address issues of the past. I think nothing has done more to build mutual trust and understanding than our work on these critical issues. Again, it forms a foundational element of the relationship. For example, the humanitarian issues related to accounting for America's missing, this issue is what we've, of course, referred to as the bridge to normalization and that first brought us back together, and we remain deeply grateful to the sincere efforts of our Vietnamese partners in helping us to account for 727 missing Americans in Vietnam over the last three decades. But this work, as well, I think, has helped to promote reconciliation and also has practical benefits as well. I think as we continue to build strategic trust by addressing issues of the past, we open the door to greater strategic cooperation in the future. As Senator Leahy and Ambassador Ngoc so eloquently stated, as grateful as we are to our Vietnamese partners for the work that they have done to help us account for our own missing, we feel privileged and honored to be able to increase our efforts to assist Vietnam in locating its missing as well, and as Secretary of Defense Esper mentioned during his trip, last November 2019, the United States intends to increase its efforts in this area building on prior decades of work that has assisted Vietnam in locating its missing. We're also deeply grateful to Senator Leahy and others for their tremendous support, of course, Tim Riese, and others in Congress for all their leadership and support on these many humanitarian and legacy of war issues, including now this newly energized area of assisting Vietnam with locating its own missing. Here at the embassy in Hanoi, we have formed an interagency team led by the Department of Defense, in which we're supporting the collection of relevant information from our archives in the United States and those of Vietnam so that that information can be used to locate the remains of fallen Vietnamese here in Vietnam. We also are working to build the technological capacity of Vietnamese laboratories to positively identify remains which are located in Vietnam. Just last week, I participated in a ceremony to highlight a \$2.4 million USAID grant that will upgrade Vietnam's DNA analysis capacity toward this end. I think, as Ambassador Ngoc and Senator Leahy also outlined, our work on legacy of war issues has extended to many other important areas. For example, in terms of clearing unexploded ordnance, particularly in central Vietnam, I'm happy to see friends like Ha Pham from Peace Trees on the line, and others. The United States has been honored since 1994 to have invested more than \$130 million in unexploded ordnance clearance activities in central Vietnam. We've removed around 700,000 unexploded items, educated more than 500,000 of the most vulnerable residents in Vietnam about the risks of disturbing ordnance they may find in the forest or their fields. Perhaps the most powerful statistic I can share is that over the last three years, there have been zero injuries and zero accidents in Quangxi province due to the heroic UXO work carried out there. We remain confident that, by 2025, we will achieve our goal of making Quangxi province impact free from UXO. We're also excited that we have expanded our work to other provinces in Vietnam as well, including Quangxi province and also Thua Thien-Hue province as well. As Senator and the Ambassador also noted, our important work on war legacies extends to remediating dioxin. I was honored to participate in the completion ceremony in 2018 at Da Nang International Airport,

in which we handed over to the government of Vietnam the completed docs and remediation work that had been done on a section of the airport that greatly expanded the usable area of the airport and removed a health threat from the Vietnamese public. And, of course, as I mentioned, last year Senator Leahy and eight other Senators helped us launch the new much larger and more complex project at Bien Hoa air base outside of Ho Chi Minh City. Our work on more legacy issues also extends to assistance to Vietnamese with disabilities, especially in the eight provinces most heavily sprayed during the war by Agent Orange. And again, we remain deeply grateful to Senator Leahy and his colleagues for support in this vitally important work. I think it's also important to note that our work on war legacy and reconciliation issues extends to our people-to-people engagement as well. Just during my time as ambassador, we've increased significantly our engagement with the Vietnam Veterans Association. I've also had the honor over the last year of becoming the first U.S. ambassador to visit North Vietnamese martyr cemeteries both at Chung Sun and Quangxi province, and just a couple weeks ago at the Ho Chi Minh City Martyr Cemetery outside of Ho Chi Minh City. I was deeply moved to have the privilege of going to these cemeteries, just as I was moved to have the opportunity to visit the bing on or the biennial cemetery also outside of Ho Chi Minh City. And through these activities, our goal has been to demonstrate that we have tremendous respect and we honor greatly the sacrifice in the name of patriotism that was made on all sides. I think you can see that through these activities, we build a foundation of trust and mutual understanding upon which we've built this partnership and friendship. I'm tremendously optimistic for the future growth of our partnership with Vietnam. I think the sky is the limit. I think you'll continue to see our partnership and our friendship expand, but the United States of America remains committed to just addressing responsibly humanitarian and legacy of war issues, because we know through doing so, we will sustain the growth that I've described here. Thank you again, Brian, for including me. I'm deeply honored to be here and I look forward to the discussion.

Finlay: Thank you so much, Ambassador. It should be encouraging to all of us that our countries have exchanged senior diplomats that are so deeply passionate about improving the bilateral relationship. Thank you to both of you. So here's what's going to happen now: we're going to turn to our panel for an in-depth discussion and that will be moderated by Mike Cerre. Mike is a special correspondent for PBS NewsHour. He's also founder of Globe TV — I really recommend you take a look at that if you have not have not seen it already. This guy is a rock star. Mike served as a marine officer in Vietnam from 1970 to 1971. He's returned to the country multiple times since then in his work as an award-winning correspondent and documentary producer. Mike, thanks so much for doing this and I'm going to turn the dice over to you, sir, for the rest of the session.

Mike Cerre: Well, thank you, Brian, and the Stimson Center for including me in this very important discussion. The Vietnam War — or the American War, depending on your perspective — might have ended decades ago for American veterans like myself, but the casualties of that war continue for a new generation of Vietnamese. The U.S. and Vietnam have been working together to reduce these dangerous legacies of war, and hopefully someday eliminate them entirely. Our distinguished panelists today have been on the front lines of this good fight for the past 25 years since normalization and reconciliation between the two countries and are joining us from Hanoi, Dong Ha, Washington, and Chester, Vermont. Thank you for all being here. Their full bios are posted on the Stimson Center organization website to find out more about them. Let's start out in Hanoi with Colonel Le Dinh Vu, who is the chief of office of the standing board of the national steering committee on overcoming post-war consequences of unexploded ordnance and toxic chemicals in Vietnam, better known as Standing Committee 701. Prior to assuming his role, he spent nine years working on science technology and environmental issues with the Vietnam Ministry of National Defense. He's also been a university lecturer for the

past 20 years. Please switch to your German translation channel to hear Colonel Vu's opening remarks on our bilateral efforts in jointly dealing with the war legacy issues. Colonel Vu, welcome and thanks for being here today.

Colonel Le Dinh Vu: It is my pleasure today to represent the standing board of the national steering committee on overcoming post-war consequences of unexploded ordinances and toxic chemical in Vietnam (or Office 701), to speak at the online conference on the Vietnam war consequences on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of normalization of US-Vietnam relations; organized by Stimpson Center.

July 11th, 1995 is a special day in our two countries relations; it is the day of normalization of U.S.- Vietnam relations. However, few people could have expected that the cooperation in overcoming the war's consequences was the foundation for the normalization of Vietnam-US relations. Over the past 25 years, the two countries have implemented many cooperation and development activities; from searching for missing soldiers to today, we have expanded into bomb and mine detection and clearance, and especially cleaning up the dioxin-contaminated environment in Vietnam. The U.S. and Vietnam leaders have always paid special attention to this area of cooperation, directing the organization's execution plan and have achieved significant outcomes, contributing to the promotion of cooperation relations for the benefit of both countries' citizens.

Some outstanding outcomes are as follows:

Firstly: With the morale of closing the past and looking to the future, between 1973 and 1988, Vietnam has actively sought and handed over to the US 302 soldier remains. In 32 Years of the joint operation, nearly 1,000 more solid remains have been returned, and the U.S. has been able to identify DNA of more than 700 cases. (This is an image returning ceremony of the missing U.S. soldiers during the Vietnam war)

Recently, the U.S. International Development Agency and the Vietnamese Agency for searching for missing foreigners have signed a memorandum of intent to receive the assistance package to enhance the capability of assessing the soldier remains from the war. In particular, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the joint operation was interrupted, however, the Vietnam side unilaterally has been able to unearth some difficult cases and found one set of remains on a high mountain in Quang Binh Province and expected to hold returning ceremony of the U.S. soldiers on July 16th, 2020

Secondly: The organization was able to successfully implement the dioxin-contaminated environment treatment project at Da Nang airport; this is one of the three dioxin-contaminated discovered hotspots so far in Vietnam. The total project investment capital is nearly USD 2.7 million of the Vietnamese government, handling 90,000 cubic meters of dioxin-contaminated mud and soil, and safely isolated about 50,000 cubic meters of underground mud; timely handed over the first phase land in 2017 to implement the expanding project of Da Nang International Airport to service the high-level leaders that come to the week of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO Summit. President Trump was at the summit. (This is an image of Lieutenant General Nguyen Chi Vinh, Deputy Minister of Defense of Vietnam and Mr. Ted Osius, witnessing dioxin treated soil at Da Nang airport; and the photo of the projection completion ceremony in 2018)

Next, the two countries' authorities continue to implement phase 1 of the dioxin treatment project in the Bien Hoa airport area, which is expected to be implemented in 7 years, starting in

2019, with the ODA nonrefundable capital from U.S. government of 183 million USD. Vietnam's government reciprocal capital is about 4.7 million USD. The project objective is to treat approximately 300,000 cubic meters of contaminated soil and sediment. (This is an image of Mr. Patrick Leahy attending the Commencement Ceremony of dioxin treatment project at Bien Hoa airport, phase 1 in April 2019)

Thirdly: the organization implemented projects that support Vietnamese with disabilities in the provinces that were sprayed with Agent Orange/dioxin. Currently, the United States International Development Agency is working with the National Action Center to overcome the consequences of toxic chemicals and the Vietnam environment to develop the project to support the improvement of the people with disability quality of life in the heavily Agent Orange sprayed provinces, with the non-refundable capital of \$65 million from the U.S. government. The project is expected to start in 2020. The implemented project will significantly improve health care, medical treatment, rehabilitation, orthopedic, social services, improving the quality of life, and ensuring social inclusion for people with disabilities in the Agent-Orange sprayed provinces in Vietnam. (This is an image of the signing ceremony of the memorandum of intent between office 701 and the United States International Development Agency to assist Vietnamese with disabilities in the sprayed Agent Orange provinces)

Fourthly: Organize cooperation activities to overcome the consequences of the bombs and mines after the Vietnam war; the implementation highlights are: A memorandum of understanding signed by the state steering committee on the national action plan on overcoming post-war consequences of unexploded ordnances after the war and the U.S. Department of state in 2012. And 09 cooperation contents submitted by the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam to the Vietnam Ministry of Defense in 2015. (This is an image of General Ngo Xuan Lich, Vietnam Minister of Defense visiting the bomb display area at the Vietnam National Mine Action Center)

The above achievement is thanks to the guidance of the senior leaders, the national assembly, the government, ministry of defense of the two countries. Incidentally, I would like to express my gratitude to the government, congress, the ministry of defense, and the American people for helping and securing resources for the remedy of Vietnam war consequences. In today's conference, I would like to express my thanks to Senator Patrick Leahy for his contributions to the work of overcoming the Vietnam war consequences.

Regarding the cooperation direction in the future regarding the war's consequences remedy, Office 701 wishes that the authorities of the two countries continue to organize the content implementation granted by the leaders. The two countries stated in the joint statement, especially the Vietnam – U.S. joint statement on the occasion of President Donald Trump's visit to Vietnam in November 2017. Specifically:

Firstly, continue cooperating in implementing the dioxin treatment project in Bien Hoa airport area, aiming to completely treat the contaminated soil and sediment in this area (estimated at 500,000 cubic meters). Secondly, continue cooperating in the implementation of the projects to support Vietnamese people with disabilities in the provinces sprayed with Agent Orange/dioxin, improve the quality of life, and ensure social inclusion for people with disabilities in these areas. Thirdly, continue the cooperation to organize the implementation of the Memorandum of the Understanding and 9 points of the collaboration on mine and UXO remediation that was agreed between the two countries. Fourthly, continue to cooperate in organizing the search for missing soldiers during the Vietnam war to bring them back to reunite with their family and homeland.

Sincerely thank you for listening!

Cerre: Thank you, Colonel. Thank you for the briefing and the update on what's Vietnam. It's quite extensive. The projects are quite large and growing. It's quite optimistic for the cause. We'll ask you to come back for some Q&A later on in the program. Next, we're going to switch to Washington, D.C., and Tim Rieser, who is the Senior Foreign Policy Aide to Senator Patrick Leahy as well as a Democratic Clerk for the Senate Subcommittee on the Department of State and Foreign Operations. Tim joined Senator Leahy's team in 1985, initially working on judiciary issues and then foreign affairs. Since Senator Leahy became Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee in 1989, he and the Senator have used their inestimable personal and professional skills to launch finance and manage most of the most significant accomplishments the U.S. has had in this area. And as Senator Leahy said, Tim, it hasn't been easy over the years, but is it getting easier?

Tim Rieser: It is definitely getting easier and I'm not going to speak for long. Senator Leahy spoke and he's far better than I to describe the work that he's been doing over the last 30 years on U.S.-Vietnam relations. But there were times when it was not easy, and that was the result of a lack of trust, and a lack of understanding, and just resentment dating to the war on both sides. And so, I think of all the things that are the most meaningful that have been achieved over the last 25 years as a result of Senator Leahy's trips to Vietnam and countless meetings with Vietnamese government officials as well as officials in our government over the years, [it] was to change the way we talk to each other and to turn what had been issues of real anger and resentment into ones where we have now cooperated and joined together to solve problems. And I think you've heard that it's transformed the relationship and has led to many other areas in which we are now working together, so overcoming that initial reluctance and resistance and antagonism that resulted from the war on both sides was the critical thing and that was really a function of personal engagement. Senator Leahy meeting over and over with counterparts in Vietnam and in this country, and I think you've heard the results. Obviously, we have still a distance to go, but we're clearly working as partners, and as he said, both countries need each other at this time and there's so many ways that we can benefit from this relationship. And it was really as the ambassador — both ambassadors — said: it was these legacy issues that opened the door for that to be possible.

Cerre: Tim, Colonel Vu mentioned the completion of the project. For our viewers, just to give you an idea of the scope and scale, this five-year \$120 million project is pretty symbolic of the United States finally getting involved in Agent Orange remediation at the Da Nang International Airport.

Rieser: That was an amazing project unlike anything that I had ever seen. You know, on the appropriations committee, our job is to get the money. Obviously, it required vision and taking the initiative. If Senator Leahy had not decided that this was something that we needed to do, it would not have happened, but it was really the work of our embassy, of USAID, and of the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense really figuring out how to deal with a very difficult problem that we had never taken on before, and so to see that huge structure — and Senator Leahy went there with Lieutenant General Vinh when it was operating — was really, I think, illustrative of how far we had progressed and Bien Hoa certainly is orders of magnitude bigger than that, so as the Senator said, I think, having succeeded at da nang and at the time we started we didn't know whether we would achieve the results that we hoped to, but it was in the end it exceeded our expectations at Bien Hoa. I think the fact that we have Da Nang behind us gives us confidence that while there will undoubtedly be unexpected issues that come up, you never

know quite what's under the surface and it will take, you know, significantly larger amounts of money and time. But there's no reason to think that we can't be successful there, too.

Cerre: Tim, I'm sure we'll talk more about Bien Hoa, the latest reclamation project that is underway, but let's switch back to Vietnam and the other war legacy issue, and that is UXO: unexploded ordnance. Ha Pham is with us today. She's the in-country director for Peace Trees Vietnam, one of the major NGOs working on UXO issues in Quang Tri, and, just to refresh people's memories, that area up by formerly what's called the DMZ in the northern part of South Vietnam — the original South Vietnam-North Vietnam — but it's believed that there's more ordinance that was dropped there during the war that were dropped in world war II in the Pacific, so a huge amount of explosives and they say, even by the Defense Department estimates, 10 percent of them didn't explode, and so it's quite a problem. So, thank you for being with us today and give us a quick update on your activities and how they've changed over the years.

Ha Pham: Thank you so much, Mike. Good evening from Vietnam, distinguished guests, my name is Ha Pham, and I'm in-country director of Peace Trees Vietnam in Vietnam, and it's such a great honor for me to join this event and share about the journeys of 25 years of Peace Trees Vietnam, working alongside Vietnamese people to reverse the legacy of war in this country, especially in the central Vietnam and Quang Tri province. And it's more meaningful for me personally because I, myself, was born in Quang Tri Province, and I have been working for Peace Trees for 18 years, so I feel something very connected to share with you about the ongoing impact of war legacies and about Peace Trees Vietnam. [We have] been working in this province for 25 years. Some of you may know that Peace Trees was born right after the diplomatic normalization between the U.S. and Vietnam in 1995. And soon after that, our founder came to Vietnam and was immediately introduced to Guangxi province, the most affected province in Vietnam by war aftermath. And Mike already mentioned that, with the geographic location of the provinces where the country [was divided] into two parts in wartime at the 17th parallel, DMZ, Quang Tri suffered the the most serious fightings in wartime, and by the end of the war, 100 percent of villages were damaged and destroyed. And, like Mike mentioned, also the amount of weapons using in Guangxi province during wartime is higher than total amount of weapons using on the whole European areas during World War II, and 10 percent of them [are] believed unexploded and remain dangerous, and that's the reason why Peace Trees, with the missions of healing the land and building safe and and successful communities, came to this province and stayed that long with this area. We are very proud to be the very first U.S. organization permitted by Vietnamese government to conduct humanitarian demining in Vietnam. There was a survey in 2009 showing that 83 percent of the Quang Tri province was contaminated from UXO, and since the war ended in 1975, over 8,500 people were either killed or injured because of the unexploded ordnance, and 30, 31 percent of them are children, so that's also a reason to bring peace to this province. And with the financial support from the U.S. Department of State, I have some photos to share, also to show you how we — I don't know whether we can share this or not. This should be it, should be back to this. So, to show you how contaminated the province is, these are the two districts that we are working on and, yeah, a huge amount of weapons are still found 45 years after the war's end. And thanks to the support from the U.S. Department of State, Peace Trees has destroyed over 122,000, 123,000 new UXO and cleared over 2,300 acres of land, of safe land. And we are very proud that we joined efforts with other organizations, other mine action organizations in Quang Tri province to make Quang Tri become a very good and successful model in mine action. Quang Tri is the very first province in Vietnam to establish and operate a successful mine action coordination center and database units. We also applied very successful new methodologies of click survey and clearance, which brought the very significant progress in clearance. The areas cleared in Quang Tri province within the last five years, from 2015 to 2020, make 80 percent of total areas clear

from 15 years before that period. So, a huge progress is made, yes, but still many challenges — big challenges and difficulties — for the province, for Vietnam in general, and Quang Tri province in particular. Quang Tri is still among the poorest provinces in Vietnam because of the legacy of war — still about 60-70 percent of land contaminated and still a lot of work to do.

Cerre: Ha, if I may interrupt for a second, for people who have not had the opportunity to see the type of work that your organization does and some of the other UXO remediation groups up there, I think it's important to note that we're never going to find — and you guys will readily admit this — you'll never find all the unexploded ordnance.

Pham: Oh, yeah.

Cerre: But how do you still make it the area safe, which is the ultimate goal?

Pham: To mention the very ambitious goals of making Quang Tri become the very first province in Vietnam free from impact, like ambassador Kritenbrink mentioned before, is the way that we apply the new methodologies in clearance by tracking cluster munition and then frame the areas that are most contaminated and prioritize our effort — our resources and efforts — to clear those areas. So, free from impact here doesn't mean that we clear all of the UXO left from the war, but making it free from impact makes the most areas where they need to be cleared, clear and safe for people to use.

Cerre: One of the most impressive things I saw over there were the billboards that alerted villagers, young people, with the telephone number where they could call to get assistance to remove unexploded ordnance. So the fact that I know you can detect a lot of them, but the idea is for the people to know how to identify them and alert the property authorities to get them removed

Pham: Yeah, that belongs to what we call the risk education program, which integrates into the clearance operation also. So, we in Quang Tri, we have the hotline number where people can call whenever they find the suspected items or UXO, and the pro, the coordination unit, okay we'll send the EOD team to deal with that. So, each and every person in Quang Tri province, they learned about that hotline number to call whenever they have issues with the landmines or yourself.

Cerre: Thank you for your update and, most importantly, for your work. We'll have more questions for you from our audience in a few moments. Let's switch back to the other key war legacy issue: Agent Orange. Susan Hammond is the Executive Director and Founder of the War Legacies project and she'll update us on what's being done in this area. Quick background: Susan is the daughter of an American Vietnam veteran. She has first-hand experience with the consequences of Agent Orange from her extensive work in Vietnam. She is a leading expert on Agent Orange and the need to help those with disabilities caused by the presumed illnesses caused by Agent Orange. Susan, welcome. Thank you for all your work and bring us up to date on what has been the major accomplishments on the Agent Orange front

Susan Hammond: Thank you, Mike. First, I need to echo my thanks to Senator Leahy and Tim for their hard work to address four legacy issues, not only just in Vietnam, but also Cambodia and Laos. We would not be where we are today without their commitment or the commitment of people like Charles Bailey, formerly at the Ford Foundation Chuck Cersei of Project Renew and Hatfield Consultants in Canada who really led the charge in helping us get to the point where we

are today. Much has been accomplished over the past 25 years. As has been mentioned earlier, we have a lot to celebrate. However, I believe that until the U.S. finds a way to acknowledge that harm has been done to potentially generations of Vietnamese that has been caused by the dioxins and contaminated herbicides, this last significant ghost of the war, as former Ambassador Ray Burkhardt called it, will not be put to rest and relations will not be completely normalized. Stresses that support for people with disabilities in Vietnam is done regardless of cause and what this means in practice is that much of the funding has gone to programs that supported people that would not be considered by the Vietnamese as Agent Orange victims — worthy beneficiaries without a doubt, but not the population that has been most impacted by Agent Orange. I am hopeful that this new round of funding will find a way to reach those with severe physical and often cognitive disabilities for those children some of which are now adults. Medical industry intervention is too little and too late. These children need 24/7 care. I want to give you a little of an example of what that care looks like and tell you about a typical family that I work with. Vy lives in Tien Phuoc, about an hour by bus from the provincial center. Vy has no control over arms and legs, is unable to walk — and never mind sit up or stand. She's not able to communicate with her mother other than with her eyes. Her mother wakes up before dawn to prepare the cooking fire. It makes a very thin rice porridge for Vy's breakfast. For about an hour, her mother cradles Vy in her arms and carefully, lovingly spoon feeds her daughter the porridge. Vy's siblings are scrambling around the house getting themselves ready for the two kilometer walk to school. As a single mother, she cannot work in her nearby fields or go to the market because it's not safe to leave her 12 year old daughter alone in the house. Vy's bed is next to the drain and the wall that leads to the cistern. Several times a day, Vy's mother throws water across the tiled floor under Vy's bed as they cannot afford diapers. She then gives Vy one of her several sponge baths for the day. Lunch is another hour-long process, but this time, Vy's mother first chews her food into small enough and soft enough pieces that Vy will not choke on it. She has to prop her up just right on the bed, which is difficult with arms and legs flailing. More often than not, Vy is in pain and may have several seizures before the day is over. Vy does receive a stipend from the Vietnamese government and her mother also receives a caregiver stipend, totaling about fifty dollars. Many, many, if not all, people with disabilities in Vietnam at this time do receive support from the government. This is the only income that the family reliably has, but is quickly spent on protein powder, rice, vegetables, medication, and other necessities. For Vy's care, dinner is another hour-long process to feed Vy and her mother, then make sure all the other children have done their schoolwork. Finally, she prepares her daughter for bed, but since they sleep in the same bed, she hopes that Vy will get a few hours of sleep so that she can sleep as well. One can sometimes feel helpless when meeting families such as these but what I've learned over the years is that there are things that can be done, if not for the child, then for the family. But you must work directly with the families and work within the existing system. In our case, we work with the local Red Cross. Less than a thousand dollars per family can go a long way. You can help fix the roof so the rain does not pour in during the monsoon, or at a bathroom, you can help dig a well or buy a pump and pipes to bring water to the house, provide a scholarship for their children who are able to go to school so they do not drop out in the sixth grade and hope that they're able to get a job so that they can take care of their siblings when their parents die. You can help buy the family a cow to breed so that when they face an unexpected expense, they can sell the calf for several hundred dollars, often more than their yearly income. You can also help the mother set up a small business she can run from her home. For Vy's family we worked with the Red Cross to send volunteers several times a week so that her mother could go into the fields and shop in the market. We also purchased them a cow. The families we work with rarely ask for help. They're so used to the routine of caring for their loved ones that they often have a hard time imagining what will help them. However, they're so grateful that the Red Cross has come to visit them to learn about their situation, and they're grateful that I, as an American, wanted to learn about their lives and hear from them

about what can make a small difference. I tell the families that the funding that the Red Cross will use to support them is coming from the widowed family and friends of a U.S. veteran named Bob Feldman, who died of his own exposure to Agent Orange. They are touched when we explain that this American family wanted them to know that they understand at least a little bit about what it meant to be impacted by Agent Orange that their pain was acknowledged. I can only do this on a small scale, but if this one man and his family through my small organization and the local Red Cross can acknowledge the pain from Agent Orange and provide support to over 500 families, imagine how powerful the acknowledgement of the U.S. government would be to the hundreds and thousands of families impacted. Imagine if, working with local Vietnamese partners, the U.S. can provide direct support to all of these families that are believed to be the most heavily impacted by Agent Orange. Then this last ghost of war can be put to rest over the next decade, at least in Vietnam — for Laos and the children of American veterans, that's a whole other story in another webinar.

Cerre: Thank you, Susan. Thank you for that update. You mentioned, at the very beginning, this lack of acknowledgement — formal acknowledgement — by the United States on the cause and effects of the Agent Orange problem and Tim Rieser, everybody in Washington has to do this balancing act of mediation and also victims assistance. At the end of the day, the Vietnamese people that you work with — which do you think is more important: the remediation or the victim's assistance?

Hammond: Oh, definitely the victim assistance. I mean, they certainly appreciate the remediation, but for most of the families I work with, they're never going to get to — being, they're never going to get to the Da Nang Airport. They are trying to struggle day by day just to help care for their family members. Definitely, I would say support to the people who are believed to be affected and of course we cannot prove 100 percent one way or the other, but the sense is that that these herbicides have caused dramatic harm to hundreds of thousands of families and until those families are reached, I don't think we can completely end this problem.

Cerre: Thank you, Susan. We're going to open it up for questions now that people can use the Q&A chat aspect on this on the zoom here. And to start it off, we're going to start with Charles Bailey from the War Legacies Working Group, former Ford Foundation represented in Vietnam in 1997, and also with the Aspen Institute's Agent Orange and Vietnam Program. Colonel Vu, this is the first question being addressed to you directly, sir. And I remind people again to go to the translation section to the German section, but Colonel Vu, the question is: what is your personal long-term vision for Vietnam's victims of Agent Orange and how would you like to see them living in the future compared to today and finally what more can the U.S. do to help achieve this vision?

Colonel Vu: [Translation of Colonel Vu's remarks are unavailable]

Cerre: Thank you, Colonel Vu. We're going to extend the session a little bit here, so please bear with us a little bit. We have a lot more information to go through. The second question is from Charles Bailey. It's directed to Tim Rieser, and Tim, as things stand now, the U.S. has committed \$30 million a year over the next 10 years to clean up the dioxin at Bien Hoa, and it intends to provide \$13 million a year over the next five years to assist Agent Orange victims. The question is: what would need to happen before the U.S. could make a greater commitment to the several hundred thousand Agent Orange victims? Example: double the annual allocation

and make it run for 10 years rather than five. And I know we've talked about this before, that is the difficult balancing act you have in trying to fund these projects.

Rieser: First of all, I really want to acknowledge Ha Pham and Peace Trees International. I mean, what an amazing accomplishment to have largely eliminated the threat from unexploded landmines and bombs in Quang Tri province. I mean, I don't think people have any idea how difficult and dangerous that work is and that, I think, has given us reason to be hopeful that we can, over time, eliminate for all practical purposes the threat of UXO in Vietnam. It obviously is an immense task but the fact that they have achieved what they have in Quang Tri is just incredible to me.

Cerre: Tim, if I might add something that re-emphasizes what Ambassador Kritenbrink said at the very beginning, it's that they've gone almost three years now without an incident up in Quang Tri province, which is quite extraordinary.

Rieser: It's absolutely amazing to me when you consider what it was like not that long ago, and so they have shown that you know we can do this together. And there's a lot more to do, and Susan mentioned Laos. That's a whole other conversation that we're working on, but Peace Trees and others, Norwegian People's Aid etc project manu have done an incredible job to show what's possible in dealing with the UXO problem. And also, Susan's comments, I just think, were so on point. I've met some of these families and seen the kind of situation that she described and it's just heartbreaking and overwhelming to see.

Cerre: As you speak here, I'll show a little bit of video from a recent trip I had over there doing a story with some of the victims of Agent Orange.

Rieser: To see what this requires of parents and siblings to provide just the basic necessities to those who have been so severely disabled — I mean, it's hard to imagine that they can keep going day after day, so I think Susan, you know, put her finger on the really real crux of this, because ultimately, this is about people and about trying to improve the lives of those who were most affected. There are many people with disabilities in Vietnam as there are in other countries from all kinds of causes: motorcycle accidents, you name it. But we're talking about people who through no fault of their own were exposed either directly or through passage on by generation to terrible cognitive and physical disabilities that have made them entirely dependent on their families, who are often extremely poor and have nothing and no — as Susan said — no real idea beyond just what they've been able to undertake themselves of how they could do better for their children. And so in answer to your question, Mike, first of all, you know, I've never really felt that the dollar amounts tell the whole picture. It costs a lot more to, for example, build a structure like was shown in Da Nang than it does to train someone, or to provide basic assistance to a family of a disabled person. It's a little bit like the cost of a helicopter versus some other type of expense, but there's no question that while carrying out these programs, setting up these programs involves working with local organizations — some of them are government organizations, some of them are sort of quasi government civil society organizations — that takes a lot of work to build the relationships and to ultimately help them have the capacity to carry out these types of of disability programs.

Cerre: From a funding perspective, is it more difficult to get money for victims assistance than it is for major remediation projects?

Rieser: I don't think so. It should not be more difficult for us. It's more a question of where can we do more. And we have expanded from one province to eight in not that much time, and we've gone from \$1 million to \$13 million, and if you know, obviously, it's a zero's game for us on the appropriations staff. If we put money into one thing, it means we don't do something else, so we have to obviously make choices. But if we were presented with a request for additional funding for victims assistance, for disability programs in additional provinces, or to expand what we're doing in the provinces where USAID is currently working, we would certainly give that very serious consideration. We just know that these programs are not easy to implement. A little money, as Susan said, can go a long way for a family like the one she described. And so, the dollar amounts don't necessarily tell the whole story, but we've shown that we can do more because we've expanded over the years and we intend to increase the number of provinces where these programs are being carried out, so I don't see any reason why we can't do more, but ultimately, you know, our job is to help the Vietnamese take care of their own people. We can't kind of take on that whole responsibility, so to the extent that we have good partners at the local level who we can provide training to and other types of assistance, then I think you will find a lot of willingness to do so.

Cerre: Thanks, Tim. Ambassador Kritenbrink, since I know you're still on the line — thank you for staying with us on this call — one of the questions has come up about wanting an update on the Bien Hoa project that has been approved. I think the United States is going to put up \$300 million in the Vietnamese \$200 million, and some question the United States' ability to — you know, Tim and Senator Leahy have done a great job making this a bipartisan issue and getting great bipartisan support. Can you tell us what the kind of status is on the Bien Hoa project? And, also in kind of the context of being able to deliver on the promise here given the the political climate

Kritenbrink: Thank you, Mike. I'm happy to report that, as I noted, it was moving to be together with Senator Leahy and eight other Senators in the spring of 2019. I believe it was April when we formally launched the biennial project on the air base there. Then, in December of 2019, we had a ceremony to commence the actual work being launched where we were actually moving dirt and had equipment on the ground and the like. And so, we're on schedule. COVID has presented some challenges, as you might imagine, in terms of bringing personnel in and the like, but the work is underway. We're generally on schedule. We hope that this will be done and this will obviously be done in a systematic piece-by-piece, step-by-step fashion. We hope to have some concrete results to demonstrate in the not too distant future, but as you've outlined, it's a 10-year project. We believe it's underway and, you know, I think there's one point that's really worth underscoring here at Da Nang Airport while all of our work was of course completely dependent on the cooperation and support of our Vietnamese partners Da Nang was largely a USAID led project that we completed and handed back over to our Vietnamese partners. I think what's interesting and encouraging about Bien Hoa is that the government of Vietnam is in the lead on the project there, and USAID and the U.S. government are in support of their activities there and again we do this in a piece-by-piece fashion, but our cooperation couldn't be better with the central government, the Ministry of National Defense, Committee 701, and all the many entities that are involved, but also with the authorities of Dong Nai province, because the project involves both the base and some surrounding areas. So I think the good news is we're on track. We are, in fact, moving dirt and conducting remediation work as we speak. And as I said, we hope to have some concrete outcomes to announce soon. Over, thank you.

Cerre: Thank you, and Tim, I've asked you this before in the context of my reporting. You've gotten the money approved, the appropriation has been approved — is there any question that the money can be delivered and continued, or is that a fight that you have to keep making on Capitol Hill?

Rieser: It's an annual appropriations process, so we always have to be sure. Senator Leahy, he's the vice chairman of the appropriations committee. He has to be sure that the funds are included each year, but as vice chairman, that's, I think, a fairly easy job for him to do. You know, I think — the funding, I'm not concerned about as long as we see, you know, continued progress, and we have every reason to think that we will. So my own view is that we're in a good position to carry out the project and to ensure that every year, both the Department of Defense and USAID contribute, in each case, \$15 million for a total of \$30 million to ensure that it continues as planned. And the fact that DoD is involved, I think, is really an important factor because it's opened up opportunities for them and the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense to work together on something that is very meaningful to the Vietnamese government. And obviously that relationship is important to us, so the money for the Bien Hoa project, I'm not worried about.

Cerre: Alright, thank you.

Kritenbrink: I had just one additional comment to really underscore. I think Tim's outstanding remarks — I think, as ambassador, it's been really gratifying to me to see bipartisan support for the work that's being done at Bien Hoa, on other war legacy issues. And a point that I think we often make — and that I know many of the Senators who have traveled here to Vietnam have made, of course — this work is about dealing responsibly with the past, of course. It's the right thing to do, but it's also a key element in our current and future partnership and friendship with Vietnam, and it's a key investment in growing this key strategic partnership we have with the Vietnamese. And I think we should recognize that as well, and I think that recognition has just added additional support for this important work over.

Cerre: Thank you, Ambassador, and I guess that is the driving issue. The relationship between the United States and Vietnam has never been more important than it is now: huge trading partners, strategic partners. That is what is really giving the momentum to get maybe more progress in the next 25 years than in the first 25 years.

Kritenbrink: Well, I'd certainly like to think so, Mike. I think there is a building moment in the relationship and, you know, to be joined on this call by so many people who have been present at the creation and involved for the entire 25 years, I think many of them would tell you that they wouldn't have dreamt we would have achieved so much in 25 years. It does make me optimistic for the next quarter century together. I do think it's extraordinary we built a partnership and friendship, that we refer to one another in that way, and as I remarked to my colleague and friend Ambassador Ha Kim Ngoc, I was quite struck over the weekend as both of us were talking about the formal anniversary of the relationship. We use almost identical language to describe one another and our partnership and our interests together in the region, and again, I think the work on war legacy issues has really helped build the foundation that makes that possible, and I think it's critical that we keep doing it going forward. But you're right. There is momentum growing and I think our cooperation will expand even more dramatically in the next 25 years.

Cerre: Well, having been stationed at the Da Nang air base and seeing that contaminated area, and seeing what's been done to reclaim it was very moving for me. And I guess my final question to all of you here is: what do we think we're going to see in our lifetime? Maybe starting with Ha, can you tell us: do you think in your lifetime the UXO problem can be handled in Quang Tri province, in most of Vietnam?

Pham: So, from history's perspective, I mean, as the grassroots organization, we also believe that each individual can make a difference, so within Peace Trees Vietnam, besides the support from the government, we also receive generous support from the individual donors. And two, I mean, we believe that the war legacy can also be sold by the people and people [?], besides the many efforts made in the clearances of mine action. And yes, the big challenge is that for Quang Tri to meet the goals of being the first province in Vietnam to be free from impact, but I believe that with the joint efforts — with the strong support from the local and international communities — it's possible to have the a safer and brighter future, and to not only Quang Tri province, but the whole Vietnam.

Cerre: Susan, you've been at this a long time. Do you share the ambassador's optimism?

Hammond: I do, yeah, I really do. I remember that the language and the two countries talking past each other on this Agent Orange issue, not being able to even have common language to discuss it, and that was only about 15, 16 years ago. It wasn't that long ago. It took many years into normalization of relations for the two sides to be able to talk to each other. And now, we are working very close together with the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese partners. I mean, who would have thought even five years ago that sailors from the USS Roosevelt would come to the Vietnam Association of Victims of Agent Orange Center in Da Nang and sing and dance with these children? That was unimaginable to me, so I think the next 25 years — I'm hoping as much as 25 years — that the funding will be available that we can really reach out to many more families who are affected. And, ideally, we'll see — we haven't talked yet about problems in some of the other smaller air bases that the U.S. franchise use, and whether we can approach that as another thing to address, but I am optimistic and I appreciate Ambassador Kritenbrink's language that he uses when he discusses these issues of war legacies.

Cerre: Colonel Vu, a final question, sir, if you can still hear us. And that is: Vietnam has demonstrated its ability in containing the COVID crisis probably better than most countries around the world. Now, with what Vietnam is doing in the area of UXO remediation, do you think once again Vietnam will become a world leader in solving a crisis like this and maybe be able to help other countries as well with their problems?

Vu: [Translation is unavailable.]

Cerre: Thank you, Colonel Vu, and thank you, Senator Leahy, for getting our Department of Defense on board here — a major accomplishment. After all these years, the Department of Defense is participating in the funding of these projects. And, Tim, I guess the biggest question maybe all of us have is: what can we do to keep Senator Leahy on the job for the next 25 years?

Rieser: Yes, that would be — if we could figure that one out, our lives would be a lot easier. But, you know, there are others who Senator Leahy has taken to Vietnam — Republicans and Democrats — who are, to some extent, the next generation in a sense. Senator Whitehouse, he actually, as a child, spent time in Southeast Asia because of his father, who was a diplomat.

Senator Murkowski and others and — you know, as Senator Leahy said, they were all very deeply affected by that trip and have not stopped talking about it. And so, you know, I think there will be new people who will carry on, and obviously the Vietnamese, the next generation. Senator Leahy, he always saw the war legacies issues as about people and about trying to get to a different place with Vietnam. In order to do that, it meant we had to deal with the past, and that has been the focus. But ultimately, it was in order to be able to work together on other issues as the ambassador has talked about: security cooperation, climate change, you name it. I mean, our relations are now comprehensive in ways that — war legacies was only really kind of the door that opened that opportunity for us, and there's still a lot to be done, as Susan described, as Peace Trees is doing, and others. But we have, I think, shown that, going forward, there are new people who will carry on. We've tried to show what's possible. We've tried to change the relationship to one that is cooperative rather than antagonistic. No one can predict the future, but I think that what we've heard today illustrates that there's every reason to be optimistic, and that both countries will benefit from that.

Cerre: Well, I'd like to thank all of you for not only joining us today, but more importantly for your incredible work on trying to resolve these very difficult situations in Vietnam. And we're very appreciative of it, and hopefully we can make that more progress in the next 25 years and continue to keep this high on the United States foreign agenda. A copy of this program will be listed on the Stimson website about where you can see on YouTube, replay this, share it with your friends, and share with others who might want to get involved in either the policy issues or the fundraising issues. I'd personally like to thank — in addition to Stimson Center, for allowing me to participate in this — a couple of people who have really educated me over the years in Vietnam and the United States about these problems: Charles Bailey, Chuck Circe, Heidi Kuhn, Dick Hughes, Larry Vetter. I've learned so much and really am overwhelmed by the work that all these NGOs are doing over there for the people of Vietnam, and we really appreciate it. So, thank you all for joining us today and may we have more continued success the next 25 years in resolving the war legacies issue. Thank you all.