



Vietnam Today

Newsletter of the Australia Vietnam Friendship Society

Welcome back!

It has been many years since the national Australia Vietnam Society published its regular Vietnam Today newsletter. This first issue of the revived publication marks the consolidation of a national organisation in solidarity with Vietnam that promotes people-to-people contact and cultural and commercial exchange between our two countries. The Australia Vietnam Friendship Society (AVFS) – as it is known now – re-commits to the work of building links which had been left to the last surviving branch of the AVS, the South Australian branch.

The AVFS will be holding its first national conference in Adelaide in September (details to be announced soon) and we will be charting an ambitious course for our work over the next year. We already have a national website www.avfs.org.au that gives the history of the Society. We have put out calls for support for our nominated aid projects – the National Fund for Vietnamese Children and the Vietnam Association for the Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin. If you're not members of the AVFS yet, please complete the form towards the back of this newsletter and return it to the address indicated. We look forward to hearing from you and involving you in the very rewarding work of building relations at the grassroots in Australia and Vietnam.

Successful AVFS delegation to Vietnam

A delegation from AVFS visited Vietnam last month. Sydney-based Society President Paul Noack was accompanied by Society Treasurer Kim Sampson from Melbourne and Bob Briton of Adelaide. The visit was coordinated by the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisations (VUFO) and the warmth and hospitality of the reception for our delegation during the brief tour in Hanoi was overwhelming. The visit even attracted media attention. It might come as a surprise to find out that VUFO already had a reciprocal organisation for Australia under its wide-reaching umbrella. The Vietnam Australia Friendship Association has networks



throughout the country and its activities include the celebration of Australia's national day at schools. Australian songs like Waltzing Matilda are sung and quite a fuss is made of the links between our two countries. The hard work and earnestness of the Vietnamese never fails to inspire. Nguyen Ngoc Hung, who is also President of the Vietnam Australia Friendship Association, provided unerring interpreting services throughout the visit. A big thanks goes out to him and tour coordinator Thuy from VUFO.

National Fund for Vietnamese Children

Our delegation's first visit on July 18 was to the National Fund for Vietnamese Children (NFVC). Fund director Vu Anh Dao (pictured above between Kim Sampson and Paul Noack) outlined the work of the organisation throughout Vietnam as it seeks to alleviate the circumstances of the estimated three million Vietnamese children still living in poverty. Life in Vietnam has got easier in recent times but underdevelopment as a consequence of war and sanctions is still in evidence throughout the country.

NFVC provides scholarships for children and operates centres for recovery of children with health problems including the effects of Agent Orange. The Fund needs medical equipment, toys and, of course, more funds. The Director welcomed the re-establishment of our national organisation, noted several very productive

relationships with Australia and received a donation from the AVFS for the work of the Fund.



VUFO

The AVFS delegation was then received by the Vietnamese Union of Friendship Organisations which has very substantial organisation and infrastructure throughout Vietnam. Union President and member of the country's National Assembly, Vu Xuan Hong (pictured above on the right), expressed his happiness at the upsurge in people-to-people relations indicated by developments like the establishment of the AVFS.

Paul Noack explained the origins of AVFS and its ambitions in the coming period. VUFO's President offered assistance to AVFS for its undertakings and encouraged us to develop our networks of friends of Vietnam. The VUFO President, too, noted the good role being played by Australian NGOs in Vietnam. He looks forward to the development of closer economic relations and exchanges to develop and deploy technologies to combat climate change. Low-lying areas of Vietnam are some of the most vulnerable in the world to rising sea levels.



Bob, Paul, Kim and Nguyen Ngoc Hung in the grounds of the Presidential Palace, Hanoi July 2011

Victims of Agent Orange

This year marks an infamous anniversary. Fifty years ago the US began a program for the defoliation of vast tracts of Vietnamese territory that involved the spraying of 80 million litres of toxic chemicals including Agent Orange. Many millions of Vietnamese people have been impacted by that policy. In fact, the misery has now passed to a fourth generation. Vietnam is still pleading for justice and compensation from the US. While the US administration is funding some clean up (for example around its former air base at Da Nang) the main work of care for the survivors falls to agencies like the Vietnam Association for the Victims of Agent Orange.

VAVA Vice President Professor Tran Xuan Thu explained the work of the Association in building half-day care and charitable centres, providing scholarships and grants to survivors so that they can take on jobs and become relatively independent. The Vice President applauded the work already being done in support of



AVFS delegates examine a map of Agent Orange/Dioxin sites in Vietnam with VAVA Vice-President Tran Xuan Thu

victims of Agent Orange in Australia. AVFS Treasurer Kim Sampson presented a donation from the Society to VAVA. Director of External Relations Nguyen Minh Y took time out of his busy schedule to greet the AVFS delegation. VAVA is gearing up for an international conference for victims of Agent Orange next year.

A humbling visit

On the morning of Tuesday July 19, the AVFS delegation was taken to visit the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum in the centre of Hanoi. We were escorted by a soldier in full dress uniform along the length of the boulevard in front of the monument. We paused in remembrance of the great national leader while a wreath bearing the

name of our Society was placed on the steps in front of the Mausoleum. We were then escorted past the body of Bac Ho to pay our respects. We visited Ho's very modest home in the grounds of the imposing Presidential Palace inherited from colonial times and spent time at the Ho Chi Minh Museum. The reverence for the leader of the Vietnamese people's successful national liberation struggle among the throngs of visitors is still palpable.

That same afternoon State Vice President of Vietnam Madam Nguyen Thi Doan received our delegation and heard of our plans from Society President Paul Noack. During its stay, the delegation also had a dinner and discussions with VUFO leader and General Secretary of the State Council for Professor Titles, Tran Van Nhung. The respect and recognition shown to our renewed organisation was magnificent and a great encouragement to the delegates honoured to represent AVFS.



Courtesy calls

The AVFS delegation finished its program of visits with two high level courtesy calls. Bob Briton, who is also Secretary of the Communist Party of Australia's International Department, introduced the other members of the delegation to Vuong Thua Phong – Deputy Chief of the Commission for External Relations of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Bob relayed greetings from the CPA and expressed its support and enthusiasm for the reestablishment of a national Australian Vietnam Friendship Society. The sentiments of enthusiasm for growing contact were warmly reciprocated.

Please send cheques and money orders to:

AVFS
PO Box 932
South Melbourne, VIC 3205

Electronic transfers should be made to:

AVFS
Commonwealth Bank of Australia
South Melbourne Branch
BSB: 063 215
Account No: 10323739
Please be sure to identify your payment

Application for membership of the Australia Vietnam Friendship Society

Name

Address

..... Post Code

Phone Email

Fees (please circle):

Individual \$15
Concession \$10
Organisations up to 1,000 \$100
Organisations up to 5,000 \$250
Organisations over 5,000 \$400
Donation

Areas of Interest:

Australia Vietnam Relations
Health & Education
Business & Economic Development
Culture
Other

Challenge - how the National Fund for Vietnamese Children sees its role

Facts about Vietnamese children

- 3,024,608 children are living in poor families
- 1,294,939 children are disabled
- 24,745 children are Agent Orange victims, most of which come from poor families
- More than 3,000 children are expecting heart surgery
- 75,999 children are injured from accidents
- 28,528 children are homeless
- 237,302 children are orphans
- 2,415 children are infected with HIV/AIDS



NFVC Director explains Fund projects to visiting AVFS delegates

Main objectives in the National Action Program or Children (2001- 2010)

- Objective 1: Reduce the fatality rate of children under 6 to below 32%
- Objective 2: Reduce the fatality rate of mothers to below 70/100,000 of successful delivery cases
- Objective 3: Reduce the malnutrition rate of children under 5 (weight/age) to below 20%
- Objective 4: Percentage of people having access to safe water: 85% in rural areas, 95% in urban areas
- Objective 5: Percentage of households having toilet accessories: 70% in rural areas, 90% in urban areas
- Objective 6: Increase the percentage of 5-year-old children having preschool education to 95%
- Objective 7: Increase the percentage of 6-year-old children entering the 1st grade to 99%
- Objective 8: Increase the percentage of primary education graduation to 95%
- Objective 9: Increase the percentage of secondary education graduation to 75% and the percentage of children going to school at the right age to 80%
- Objective 10: Increase the percentage of homeless orphans receiving care to 100% and the percentage of children of difficult circumstances receiving care to 70%
- Objective 11: Increase the percentage of disabled children having access to orthopedic operation to 95% and functional rehabilitation to 70%. Minimize the percentage of childhood injury.
- Objective 12: Decrease the percentage of children under special categories by 90%
- Objective 13: Increase the percentage of children having their birth registered before the age of 5 to 90%
- Objective 14: Increase the percentage of communes and wards having standard playing fields to 50%.
- Objective 15: Increase the percentage of districts having well-managed children entertainment centers to 100%.

Children need to have full protection and care