

PRESS RELEASE



United Nations Development Programme

Tel: (84 4) 942 1495 Fax: (84 4) 942 2267

UNDP joins efforts to support Viet Nam to remediate dioxin contaminated hotspots

Ha Noi, August 24, 2007 – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will work with Office 33 in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), the Ministry of Defense and local authorities on a new project entitled “Capacity Building and Completion of the Overall National Plan for Environmental Remediation of Dioxin Contaminated Hotspots in Viet Nam”.

The US\$350,000 support project will strengthen the foundations for overcoming consequences of toxic chemicals used in the war by building capacities for planning, contamination assessment, and remediation of dioxin-contaminated hotspots such as those in Danang, Bien Hoa and Phu Cat. It will also help complete the Overall National Plan for dioxin hotspot remediation, including specific action plans for remediation and to ensure safe land use in and around these hotspots. It will thus help to eliminate the continued health risks of local residents and workers from pollutants that still linger in soil and sediments.

“Viet Nam is making many efforts to overcome the dioxin legacy of the war. The UN is mandated to support Viet Nam to fulfil its obligations under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, which includes dioxin contamination”, said United Nations Resident Coordinator Mr John Hendra. “A constructive dialogue between the United States and Viet Nam is currently creating the conditions for practical solutions, which are also being supported by international NGOs. UNDP will help address environmental questions, and UNICEF is initiating support to disabled children, including disabled children in dioxin affected areas. The UN is very happy to join the collective efforts and apply its knowledge and networks to these two sides of the dioxin issue, and to enable others to join as well”.

“A strong overall plan and specific action plans for remediation of the hotspots will be essential for making real progress”, said UNDP Country Director Ms Setsuko Yamazaki. “It is critical that we bring international expertise to strengthen national capacities, and to ensure that hotspot remediation will be definite.”

“We are very pleased that the UN is joining this effort”, said Vice Minister of MONRE Mr Nguyen Cong Thanh, “because we need considerable additional expertise and also financial resources in order to study, plan, and remediate all the hotspots and eliminate health risks for our citizens”.

* * *

For further information, please contact:

Ms. Nguyen Viet Lan, Tel: (84-4) 822 4383 x121 email: nguyen.viet.lan@undp.org

or

Mr. Dang Huu Cu, Tel: (84-4) 822 4383 x106 email: dang.huu.cu@undp.org

* * *

UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.

Fact Sheet

Dioxin, i.e. TCDD (Tetra Chloro dibenzo-dioxin) contamination in Viet Nam originates from the armed conflict over the period 1961-1971, when herbicides (“Agent Orange” and other herbicide mixtures) were used to defoliate terrestrial forests and mangroves, to clear perimeters of military installations, and to destroy crops. Dioxin was a by-product of the herbicide production process.

The US army sprayed over 74 million liters of herbicides over the South of Viet Nam. Dioxin is created as a by-product during the manufacturing of these herbicides. Scientific research shows that with an extremely tiny amount, dioxin may cause various diseases and reproductive failures.

The soil dioxin concentration in sprayed areas is retreating to background levels. However, sites at former military airports where large quantities of herbicides were stored or handled are still highly contaminated hotspots. The three worst contaminated hotspots (Bien Hoa, Da Nang and Phu Cat airports) are target sites of the UNDP-Office 33 project.

Decision No 67/2004/QĐ-TTg by the Prime Minister (27 April 2004), “Action plan on overcoming chemical toxic consequences used by the US in the war in Viet Nam for the period 2004-2010”, has two aims: 1. Human (provide financial, medical and health related support to the victims and affected communities). 2. Environment (isolate and treat contaminated sites particularly the identified hotspots).

Viet Nam ratified the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) in July 2002 and developed a National Implementation Plan (NIP) on POPs, which was officially approved by the Prime Minister on 10 August 2006. Dioxin is a POP that is highly toxic.

The NIP gives an early estimate of USD 50.8m for remediation of all hotspots, i.e. potentially more than the three sites identified. The Government, the USA and the Ford Foundation as well as others have committed funds, but the total falls well short of the estimated remediation needs.

Office 33 is the Secretariat of the National Steering Committee for Overcoming Consequences of Toxic Chemicals Used in the War in Viet Nam, which is also known as Committee 33. Committee 33 is supported by the Council of Science and Technology consisting of 14 experts in areas such as Medicine, Environment, Ecology, Chemistry and Toxicology who give specific technical and scientific advice.