



The Union of Vietnamese in the U.S. was founded in 1972 in response to the killing of Nguyen Thai Binh, a U.S. foreign student and anti-war activist.

The Union of Vietnamese in the United States (UVUS) was a Vietnamese American antiwar organization that began in 1972 in college and university campuses in California and grew into a national left organization with multiple chapters across the nation. After the war, UVUS called for an end to the embargo against Viet Nam and dissolved in 1995 after the United States normalized relations with Viet Nam. Ngo Thanh Nhan was a founding member of UVUS and was elected as one of its first two Standing Committee members. He continues to organize and is currently working on a campaign for reparations for victims of Agent Orange.

Tell us about yourself. What's your background?

I grew up in Saigon coming from a poor family. My father, who was a sergeant in the French army, didn't have any education. We lived in a small soldier's barrack in a *camp de mariés* with my father, my mother, my four brothers and sisters, until the French left. My father was away all the time. My mother took care of us. War was all around us. My father was on the front line, Sepon, Vientiane, the central highlands, and troops around the camp had all sorts of guns—we children were allowed to watch their activities.

We had a lot of problems when I was young. I hated to go to the makeshift French school in the camp. My father's monthly salary did not last more than ten days each month. My mother sewed to make up the rest. I was free to just run around the camp all day. I remember I usually ran to the zoo or the silkworm cherry orchard behind the house during the siesta. My childhood was not a happy one. My eldest brother had been born to my mother before she met my father. My brother was a better student than me at school, but he was abused and pushed away from the family by my father. My mother worried about us. I remember when the Americans came even before the French left, my brother took me out to see the U.S. battleship docking at the Saigon river bank.

When the French left, my father stayed home, unemployed. My mother built our first home in the outskirts of Saigon from her savings. My father started to plant vegetables, fruit trees and raised fish, chicken, ducks, pigs, geese, and sometimes

Ngo Thanh Nhan

*Union of
Vietnamese
in the
United States*

turkeys. My mother sold dry food in the makeshift market nearby. Things started to be better. My father got a job as a guard. I started studying a little bit better. I didn't do well until I got to high school, and then I was top of my class of sixty students from sixth grade on.

What was it like for you as a teenager when the Americans arrived?

My teenage years were in the middle of the most tumultuous years in the south. Nowhere was safe. The fighting was everywhere as the American G.I.s flooded Saigon and my street. The Buddhist struggle and the student movement were in full swing.

I got into Ho Ngoc Can High School in 1960. It was about three miles away in the heart of Gia Dinh province. My mother was trying to keep me busy. My older brother was away already in the young soldier's camp of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN). He had problems. For him, life was very tough. I remember every time he came home, he wanted to stay home but my parents wouldn't let him. His school reports got worse.

During the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, our high school had a student rebellion. The students demanded changes in our education and treatment. The principal was unseated, and a new principal was installed, but

nothing changed. During this time, we also watched airplanes strafing the Presidential Palace. President Diem and his brother were assassinated. My mother was part of the Buddhist movement, and my father kept me from following her to the demonstrations. But one day coming back from school, I saw the venerable Thich Quang Duc immolate himself.

My mother sent me to join the Boy Scouts. The chief of my scout troop was conscripted to the army. We had no one to lead us. On Sundays, we put on uniforms. We ran around trying to find something to do to help people. That was when the war was hitting Saigon. From time to time, we went to help people who had their houses burned down in the fighting.

One time, we went to an area on the outskirts of Saigon. I knew English. I talked to the G.I.s and they gave me some wood and tin roof sheets, so we built houses with the G.I.s' materials. We were very happy at the end of that day, but then one of the young scouts asked why people were laughing at us. We didn't know how to build houses. We tried to build houses according to the Boy Scout books. We were trying but the houses did not look

good. Later on we learned that the local people took the whole thing down and they rebuilt the houses by themselves.

This continued until I was in the ninth grade. We went to the same place, and people had their houses burned again, and we asked the G.I.s for wood and tin roof sheets again. We gave them to people there to rebuild their homes. The question always lingered in my mind—were we going to keep coming to the same place and helping the same people build houses after another

battle? And it got me to thinking. In order for people to build their own houses without our help and for them to do well, the war had to end somehow. The bigger questions started to bug us.

I had the top grades at my school when I graduated. I went to the Saigon University of Science, and the Van Hanh Buddhist University. Then I got a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) scholarship to go to the United States. I was nineteen. We were about to leave on February 6, but on February 1 the Tet Offensive broke out. I took the Boy Scout troop to try to help people, but we couldn't do much of anything. People were running everywhere and streets were blocked.

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About two months later, USAID called us again, and we left for the United States on March 23, 1968. Sixty-six students, namely the USAID Leadership Scholarship Group II, landed in Los Angeles and had one week of orientation and testing for leadership ability and mental capacity by USAID. I was sent to San Jose State College, which later became San Jose State University.

How did you first get involved in organizing in the Vietnamese American community?

I had contacts with the local Vietnamese American community right after twelve of us arrived in San Jose—the year the song “Do You Know the Way to San Jose” was in the Top 10. It was in the middle of the trial of Angela Davis. San Jose State College was one of the centers of the antiwar movement. Student protests were everywhere on the campus. The Vietnamese students and families in San Jose were eager to hear about the situation in Viet Nam and, since we were so few, people wanted to get together, eat Vietnamese food, and talk in Vietnamese. We also got together and served food and performed during international fairs. These events happened every year.

We started to get in touch with people we knew and organized the Vietnamese community when the Union of Vietnamese

in the United States (UVUS) was formed. It was the spring in 1972. In San Jose and four UC campuses (Fresno, San Diego, Long Beach, and Fullerton) where the scholarship students attended, we already knew how people were living, understood their family problems, and most of all, we were already friends. The scale of organizing then became national. My experience with the Boy Scouts and growing up in Viet Nam helped me to learn their concerns first and then their feelings toward the war. They did not like the war and the daily Vietnamese death tolls on TV, but they did not know much about the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam (NLF, or the so-called Viet Cong), the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Viet Nam (PRG), or the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRV) in the north—even though they were part of the Paris peace negotiations going on with the United States and the Republic of Viet Nam (RVN, the Saigon government). That was the beginning of the Union involvement in our community.

When we organized the Union in 1972, we worked hard to win over the community and got people to join the Union. We had people who were married to American G.I.s, USAID students from Group I, Group III, other students in colleges and universities, and Vietnamese soldiers who went to the United States for training.

They had problems, and we got in touch with them. That was when we started to have Vietnamese classes, tried to find jobs, tried to share everything together.

We always organized demonstrations against the war and many of us got interviewed on TV. A lot of people were listening to us, from the Vietnamese American community in San Jose, Milpitas, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz, to Monterey, Berkeley, and around Oakland. Vietnamese people were also living in San Francisco, San Diego, and Los Angeles. We also had chapters in Oregon, Seattle, San Antonio, Houston, New York, and other areas where a lot of Vietnamese were staying. We went to many places where there were Vietnamese students.

There was no report of Vietnamese in the U.S. census then. There were only about a total of two thousand Vietnamese in the entire United States, and we started to study the Vietnamese community. The list was compiled by the Vietnamese student associations. We found a group of older Vietnamese people who were “coolies” on French ships who had landed in the United States in the 1940s when France was occupied by the Germans. The French sent all their ships to New York in order not to be captured by the Nazis. I also met a few Vietnamese who came to the United States in 1918 during the First World War, and they also had the same story of working on



Newsletter of the Union of Vietnamese in the U.S. July 1974.

French ships. They didn't have any education, but they really loved Ho Chi Minh. When they heard about us, they immediately agreed to join the Union.

How did the formation of the Union of Vietnamese come about?

The Union came about after four years of individual actions against the war and the assassination of an antiwar student, Nguyen Thai Binh. USAID recruited us to their leadership scholarship programs, which meant that we, Vietnamese students, would come back home as "good" Viet-

namese graduating from U.S. universities, who could explain American policies to the people in Viet Nam when the current RVN government and armies could not do this. That was part of the "Vietnamization" promoted by the Nixon presidency.

The first USAID Group was chosen from among the ARVN. Our USAID Group II was chosen for high educational achievement and social activities. By the time we got to the United States, we started to oppose the war, immediately after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. We participated in antiwar activities locally, and exchanged ideas through zines in Vietnamese. By 1972, many of us had started to discuss how to coordinate actions to help end the war. Many of us indeed had occupied the Saigon Consulate office in New York and in San Francisco, and we had participated in many mass demonstrations, radio and TV programs. We lived in many cities across the United States. There was a need to defend each other. The Union did not come about, however, until one of us, our friend Nguyen Thai Binh was assassinated on July 2, 1972.

About twenty of us in the USAID Group II scholarship program got together in Fullerton, California to join forces in an organization. None of us knew how to form an organization from several smaller groups, so negotiations seemed to drag on. As soon as we learned Nguyen Thai

Binh was secretly extradited and later on killed on the tarmac of Tan Son Nhat airport, all the groups joined together to form the Union of Vietnamese in the United States. We took up Binh's position to support the seven-point peace plan of the NLF—basically, that the United States should be out of Viet Nam, to set a date to withdraw all its troops from Viet Nam, and that the internal affairs of Viet Nam be resolved by the Vietnamese. We organized a commemoration of Nguyen Thai Binh as our first joint action, and many Asian American groups also joined in.

What happened after the Union was founded?

The Union grew very fast in strength, membership, and activities—and faced extreme challenges. To the antiwar movement, the Union advocated self-determination for Vietnamese people. In the Vietnamese community, the Union took a patriotic stand for an independent and free Viet Nam.

The Union was formed by Vietnamese USAID II students. We knew each other well. We met with each other many times and discussed how to end the war. At each of our campuses there were antiwar groups, and they asked us the same questions about how to deal with the war in Viet Nam. That's how we started. All of us were students at that time. We were almost

at the same age and at same education level. Within a month about thirty of us agreed to join the Union. Then we invited the Vietnamese “coolies” from French ships during World War II; army trainees who were in the ARVN, trained in the United States, and opposed the war; and Vietnamese women who were married to G.I.s who were antiwar—and they all joined us. Our ranks grew very fast.

The founding members got together in a private home in Fullerton for three months during the summer of 1972 to study Vietnamese history, culture, art, and revolutionary theory. In the case of Viet Nam, studying revolutionary theory has to go together with studying Vietnamese history, especially the contemporary history of Viet Nam.

With the support of African and Asian Americans from the start, we quickly organized a national office in Berkeley, and a central committee, consisting of members leading different chapters. We first combined small local groups and formed three major chapters—the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and New York—to respond to the needs of the national antiwar efforts. Other Vietnamese students also joined us from Rochester, Vermont, and Boston, down to Washington D.C., in the east, and Seattle, Portland, and Corvallis down to San Diego, Oklahoma, Chicago, and Texas.

We organized a cultural troupe in each chapter which performed a one-and-a-half-hour long script with songs and poetry along with a slide show. We used the film *The Battle of Dien Bien Phu* and slide shows about Viet Nam, the history, and the people’s yearning for independence and freedom. We joined with other Asian and other international progressive groups to have joint cultural events, including with Palestinians, Iranians, Filipinos, Thais, and Indonesians.

Thanks to the formation of the Union, we were able to defend other Vietnamese who were harassed and who faced deportation because of their opinions. Seven Union members were brought to the immigration court in Los Angeles for deportation, and the trial dragged on until April 1975. All our activities were monitored by the FBI, and we faced infiltration by the U.S. government. We turned the court case and the media around our deportation into a condemnation of the U.S. war in Viet Nam.

What were some of the dynamics that the Union faced within the Vietnamese American community? What sectors were supportive and who was opposed?

Actually, the biggest threat to the Union came from the U.S. government, the FBI, and the Saigon Embassy in the United States. Many of us were tried in South Viet

Nam for treason in absentia. The RVN government revoked our passports, and supposedly for that reason, the United States withdrew our visas. We were declared undesirable, and seven of us were brought to trial in immigration court in Los Angeles. The rest of us—more than twenty—waited for the same treatment.

We also had problems with Vietnamese anti-communists in the United States, who were here for military training and to attend college. They, with the encouragement from the RVN embassy in the United States, called us traitors and “VC.” It was a policy that those who came to the United States had to be selected by both the United States and by the RVN government, assuring their support of the war and their anti-communism. They didn’t allow any people who were opposing the war to come here. So Vietnamese only turned against the war after we got to the United States. At that time, we had a lot of debate with the pro-war students both in private and on TV programs. They were very respectful of us. We always knew more than they did about Vietnamese history and culture, especially about current events, because we organized studies inside the Union. We discussed with them why we opposed the war.

I remember I was tracked by the FBI and they tried to arrest me several times. Some Vietnamese students who were

supposedly pro-war tried to shield me from them. Most of them did not trust the U.S. government at that time either. The relationship was friendly in most cases until 1975 at the end of the war. Then we were actually targeted for assassination.

Before you talk more about that time, can you share about the organizing strategies that were effective for you all?

Consistent with the support for the right to self-determination of nations, and patriotic to compatriots, the Union changed names and strategies four times. Each time, the membership served as core to the new organization, which expanded:

The Union supported the seven-point peace plan of the NLF and PRG, 1972–1973, before the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement, January 27, 1973.

The Union supported the implementation of the Paris Peace Agreement and called for an end to U.S. aid to RVN, 1973–April 30, 1975.

The Union defended peace and opposed the return of the United States and the end to the U.S. embargo, 1975–1977, and became the Association of Patriotic Vietnamese in the United States (APVUS).

The APVUS called for an end to the U.S. embargo against Viet Nam, 1980–1985, and turned into the Association of Vietnamese

in the United States (AVUS). The AVUS dissolved after the United States normalized relations with Viet Nam.

The biggest strategic advantage was the formation of a left organization among Vietnamese in the United States. This was not only true during the war, but also after 1975. The existence of a left Vietnamese organization allowed the community to be versatile in its political and social tendencies. So assassination was the right-wing's major strategy to erase our existence. But we did not die—we succeeded in stopping their violence and mobilizing the American population for normalization, which ultimately ended U.S. support for the right-wing Vietnamese.

We had a two-pronged approach to the struggle to end the war. One was the large antiwar movement, because it was important that we be heard as much as possible about the rights of nations to self-determination. We were the first Vietnamese organization with a left theoretical base, that had many chapters, and that could participate in many of the antiwar activities at the same time with groups of different political tendencies, from liberal to religious to national liberation to revolutionary. That was one of our advantages. We had the same priorities. It was pretty easy for the antiwar movement to ask us to join. The politics of the antiwar movement was progressive in many ways, so

it was easier for the movement to include us. That was for the larger public, and our main job was to add our voices against the war together with Viet Nam veterans and the antiwar movement.

Our second approach was to have discussions within the Vietnamese American community. As Vietnamese, the Union was a genuine patriotic movement, supporting independence and freedom from foreign aggression. We started publishing *Thai Binh* [peace] magazine, which we produced every month. The magazine raised a lot of questions and discussions within the Vietnamese community and tried to report what the situation in Viet Nam really was, because in the United States we were shielded from that reality. We used the magazine as a means for organizing. We got a lot of good responses from the readers. We discussed what was happening in the war, the real history of the war. Many articles were written by our membership and readership. We had a lot of discussions on that issue and other issues related to it. We discussed it with the public and the Vietnamese American community here, and a lot of them agreed and joined us. Obviously there wouldn't be this kind of writing in mainstream newspapers, particularly in the U.S. media.

We didn't need to change a lot of people's minds. Reality did it for us. People joined

us because coverage about the war was increasingly flooded with facts about the situation in Viet Nam. Even the press was starting to report on the antiwar movement, Martin Luther King Jr., and the civil rights movement. The American press was talking about the ills of the war, the NLF, the PRG, the DRV, and the peace negotiations in Paris. And we just had to put all of those facts together. For us, to use that information in discussions with the Vietnamese community was not difficult because justice was on our side.

I was surprised that I was elected to be one of the first two Standing Committee members, similar to an executive director, of the Union. There were two of us, Bui Van Dao and I. We were elected and served until 1975.

We were surprised by the number of people of different backgrounds supporting us. Several children who were victims of the war and were brought to the United States by the peace movement wanted to join us. They had been living in the NLF area when they were injured during the war, and when they came to the United States they were already antiwar. There were also Vietnamese women who were

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married to American G.I.s who wanted to join us, to participate in cultural activities and have a support system. We had events that they could join and help with. As a progressive organization we treated every woman with respect, with no differentiation because of their backgrounds. Our organization was the first one that admitted members who were wives of veterans, and they helped us organize and work with their husbands. They helped us talk about the war from their experience and perspectives. Some of them wrote for us, for one of our poetry books. Some people who had Vietnamese wives helped us put together books, wrote articles, and also helped with the radio program. There was a lot to do, and so practically speaking, whenever they wanted to help we welcomed them.

Our ranks grew because people wanted to help. They began to play major roles in our activities, organization, and plans. That was a big surprise to me. I thought at the beginning that we would be alone, but we were not. And I was surprised even more so, by the fact that even though we were very Left—being Left did not seem to matter to those who were supporting us.

This was an incredibly challenging time. Talk about some of the major obstacles you all faced, especially the repression from the U.S. and South Vietnamese governments.

Our ranks increased very fast, and the demand for speakers and for events around the country flooded us. We needed to find people in different areas who could speak. Some of them didn't know how to give a speech in public. The movement was helping us at the same time. It was overwhelming and there was a lot of work to do. We worked every day from dawn to dusk, and we were busy all the time. The politics were ripe. We learned how to be on top of the movement, to organize national demonstrations against the mining of Hai Phong Harbor by Nixon in May and then to push for the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement in August, September, and October 1972. By December, we were demonstrating again because the United States unleashed the B52 carpet bombing over Ha Noi. We were all on top of this.

When we opposed the war, our visas were cancelled and the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] had an order to arrest and deport us, even before we formed the Union. But we didn't find out about this until after we formed the Union in July and became public. The immigration department and FBI knew where

we were. We were represented by prominent antiwar lawyers, Frank Pestana and Leonard Weinglass. Because our passports and visas were cancelled, so were our scholarships, and we had no money. That was toughest. We didn't care at that time about income because we lived collectively, and one person would go to work to feed the rest of us. But when the whole group couldn't work, that was very hard.

Some in the community were only really nasty to us when we had an event linked to criticizing or calling out the officials of the RVN government. In Viet Nam, the National Assembly (in the South) got together and sentenced some of us to life imprisonment and execution in absentia. The news broke. We didn't care about ourselves, but the backlash affected our families in Viet Nam. My father was brought to the police station and questioned and interrogated time and again, and all the other members had the same problem. So the hardest part was losing contact totally with our families in Viet Nam. Later after the war in 1985, my father told me that it was tough, but he did not care and supported me.

In the United States, we had to stay together with the support of the lawyers—otherwise the FBI would arrest someone, and put them on an airplane, and send them back to Viet Nam. We had rescued several members, two or three, who were

in that situation. Some of them did military training in the United States, and we rescued them by getting them a lawyer. When they were taken to the airport or train station for deportation or detention, we got them away from the agents and they were able to stay here. Those were some of the things we had to worry about.

A lot of people in the movement were worried about the government planting drugs where we stayed and about them making false claims that we were doing drugs. Or that they would plant guns and would try to arrest us because they would claim we were violent. We had policies that none of us could have guns and also that when we were with people in the movement, we would tell them no drugs, no marijuana or guns, or anything like that while we were with them. So when we hung around with antiwar G.I.s or other folks, we asked them not to smoke grass.

At that time, the violence did not come from the community. We had no such problems. We only had problems with the FBI and the immigration department. After the war, in the first year we had no problems. We started to have problems at the end of the first year of 1975 with the

new Vietnamese arrivals. They started to attack our events. They started to organize against us. At that time, the FBI “feared” that among the refugees who came to the United States, there were people who were embedded by the Viet Cong to go with the refugees. So they had a

political campaign to attack us and started to try to target us as communists. The Chieu Hoi II office was in San Jose from 1975 to 1985. In 1985, it was closed because they couldn't find any infiltrators. At that time, they had already implanted organized right-wing groups in the Vietnamese community. They had already pointed to us as communists. They targeted us and dissidents in the community with violence from 1975 until 1995. The darkest period was from 1976 until 1985–1986, when the Vietnamese community was targeted with assassinations, but we won support from the movement. Then the FBI started to tell the Vietnamese right-wing groups to stop the assassinations.

How did the organization deal with the growing attacks and acts of violence?

First, we did not waver in our principles—being Left, pro-socialist, and pro-

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national liberation. It always creates a moral pole in the community, leaving spaces for a rainbow of expressions.

We continued to organize. Our membership grew by three or four times. After 1975, we had about three hundred members around the country. Every time we had an event, the Vietnamese right wing would come out and start attacking us. There were assassinations and assassination attempts in California and around the country.

Later, by 1983 or 1984, we knew these actions must have been coordinated, so we printed the *Dossier on the Acts of Terrorism Committed by Vietnamese Right-Wing Groups in the United States* in 1984 during the Reagan presidency. We then hired an ex-CIA agent in Washington, D.C., who looked into the matter and wrote a report as part of the Christic Institute. In that report, he laid out that the FBI and CIA were meeting with the top right-wing Vietnamese leaders. We also knew that they were training at U.S. military bases. When the investigator saw the list of those who had been targeted by the right wing, he saw the name of Nguyen Van Luy, the president of the Association at that time. Mr. Luy had been shot and wounded and his wife, Nguyen Thi Luu, killed in front of their house in San Francisco. Mr. Van Luy survived but Mrs. Luu died on the spot. We lost about six members to right-wing death squads from 1975 to 1985.

We were able to present the dossier to Congress with the support of progressive Latin, African, and Asian American groups, so that it was received in the Congressional Record. We were supported by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark. He brought two of the surviving victims named in our white paper to Washington, and they met with FBI Director William Webster. Webster promised to stop the assassinations among Vietnamese Americans, and admitted that there was a violent group within the anti-communist movement. After that, assassinations were stopped in the Vietnamese American community, but violent attempts against Vietnamese government officials continued.

What were other organizing challenges for the Union?

The support for the NLF's seven-point peace proposal by the Union, after MLK's "Beyond Vietnam" speech, has several underlining principles that changed the way antiwar movement worked: the U.S. peace movement must support the voice of the national liberation movements, and support self-determination for countries, victims of the U.S. aggression. The NLF's seven-point peace proposal was the only solution. Toward this end, the anti-U.S. war in Viet Nam movement must include people of color, most of all, the African American movement.

For the Union, the biggest challenge was to understand the national work of an organization, and its dialectic transformation when situations changed, such as the Union before and after 1973, the APVUS after 1975, and the AVUS after 1980. We were students, and suddenly we were put onto a national stage in the United States. The pressing issue was not just trying to understand what was going on, but also a host of other issues that came at the same time: how to build a national organization, and how to keep the Vietnamese voice present in the anti-war and progressive movement, and being heard in the national dialogue.

We needed to have a common study process for the entire organization. Every chapter had to study about Vietnamese land and people, about the process to peace, about the history of Viet Nam, about some of the immediate problems of anti-communism, and to understand what the NLF, PRG, and DRV were about, and what was achieved in the 1973 Paris Peace Agreement. Thanks to these studies, we were able to formulate the next strategic steps for the peace movement after the Peace Agreement.

The second problem was how to form an organization that understood the nuances of racism in the movement at that time. We came to understand it thanks to people of color contingents that showed us very



Ngo Thanh Nhan with Vietnamese Agent Orange victims at Folley Square in New York, where they attended appeal court hearings. June 2007.

early what kinds of problems they had in the U.S. liberal antiwar organizations insisted on calling us “students” to mean we were just “kids.” At one time, one man told one of our sisters in a coalition meeting that our support for the NLF peace proposal was too Left, and “how much do you students understand the Paris Peace Agreement.” Of course, she gave it to

him, and was cheered by everybody in the room.

The third thing was about the international situation. What happened in the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and other Asian countries, and all the liberation movements in the world helped us to see how important the struggle for national

liberation was. And thus, we learned more about the issue of Israeli occupation of Palestine and the U.S. support of the brutal Shah of Iran. We did a lot of study, and we had a lot of coordinated actions with the African and Asian contingents, and we had many cultural events with them.

In the end, the principle of self-determination has been the key to us—Vietnamese American community organizers.

You remain politically active today. Talk about your current work with those impacted by Agent Orange.

I met Tran Thi Hoan for the first time in New York in 2008. She was touring the United States to raise awareness about the devastation caused by Agent Orange to human lives and the environment in Viet Nam. It was a joy for me, taking her around the city. She was cheerful, running the streets on her short wooden stumps. She said she was faster that way and less prone to falling. She truly shone with such a love for people. The congressman who chaired the congressional hearing in Washington where she testified was amazed at the way she spoke for the Vietnamese victims. The young students

at an Oakland high school just fell in love with her in class. She is an example of resilience in the face of the nasty war machinery that intended to sow long-term suffering upon a heroic people.

Hoan was born into a peasant family. Her parents and her two older siblings had moved to a new area and cleared the land for farming. One day, her mother drove a shovel into the ground, and she hit a metal drum. It exploded. She fainted. It was an Agent Orange drum buried in the ground. She gave birth to Hoan, without two legs and one partially missing hand.

I was also fortunate to meet Mrs. Đang Hong Nhut and Mrs. Nguyen Thi Hong—two plaintiffs in the Vietnamese lawsuit against the thirty-seven corporate manufacturers of Agent Orange—in U.S. federal court in 2004. Mrs. Nhut was a liaison of the National Liberation Front and was caught many times in the spraying. She thought she would die right afterward, but she did not. She gave birth to several deformed fetuses, one of which is now displayed in the Agent Orange wing of Tu Du Hospital in Viet Nam. Mrs. Hong, now deceased, was a treasurer at an NLF base. She was ambushed but escaped with several fingers of her left hand shot off. She only contracted cancer after the war, when she moved to live by Bien Hung Lake near Bien Hoa airbase near Saigon, an area severely contaminated with the

buried Agent Orange drums leaking into the water and sediment.

Today, the United States still denies that the Vietnamese (and Vietnamese Americans, Southeast Asian Americans, or any U.S. veterans) got sick from Agent Orange. They deny that the disabilities of their children and grandchildren, like Hoan, were caused by Agent Orange. The United States sprayed over twenty million gallons of herbicides of all types, 17 times on average, over 15 percent of the land in South Viet Nam, from 1962 to 1971, exposing 4.8 million Vietnamese. Today, three million survivors and a few hundred thousand children are dying from this poison. There are 28 hotspots where Agent Orange drums were buried, which have been leaking into the environment.

An international movement is fighting for justice for the victims. In the United States, I am a co-coordinator of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief & Responsibility Campaign. The campaign is leading efforts in the United States to assure that the government and corporations that manufactured Agent Orange compensate the victims of Agent Orange and clean up the toxic hot spots. A bill sponsored by Congresswoman Barbara Lee in the House of Representatives, the Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act, would mandate that the government meet this responsibility.