

Paying for the Crime: Poison Legacy in Vietnam

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The Monsanto and Dow chemical corporations will be in court this week, finally answering for their part in the poisonous [legacy they helped create](#) with Agent Orange in Vietnam. [- {lex}](#)

[Vietnam Looks to Win Agent Orange Law Suit](#)

□ **Ho Binh Minh** □

□ **Reuters** □

Thursday 24 February 2005

Ho Chi Minh City - It is a classroom full of sunlight in Vietnam's southern city formerly known as Saigon, with Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck painted on the wall overlooking several computers. But one pupil writes with a pencil held between his toes, another cannot close her smiling mouth properly and the oldest of them, Tran Thi Hoan, wheels herself in and out as her legs have no calves. They are residents of Ho Chi Minh City's Peace Village 2, a state project set up in 1990 from a ward of Tu Du Maternity Hospital to help disabled children, mostly victims of the Vietnam War defoliant Agent Orange.

On Monday, a New York court will begin hearing a lawsuit brought by more than 100 Vietnamese seeking compensation and a clean-up of contaminated areas from more than 30 firms, among them Dow Chemical Co and Monsanto Co, the largest makers of Agent Orange. It is the first time Vietnamese have sought legal redress since the Vietnam War ended in April 1975.

□ □ □ ***"I wish the suit will end with a victory so that the life of the victims like me could be materially better," said Hoan, a 10th-grade student who came to the Peace Village from the central province of Binh Thuan.***

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She was also born with no left palm. Hoan's younger brother died at birth as he had no peritoneum, Hoan said.

Dr Nguyen Thi Phuong Tan, head of the Peace Village, said many of her patients suffered from severe physical defects, while others face chromosome disorder.

"Most of their children were born and grew up in areas sprayed with the Agent Orange defoliant during the war in Vietnam," Tan, also member of the Ho Chi Minh City's committee for Agent Orange victims, told Reuters Television.

Millions of Gallons

U.S. forces sprayed an estimated 20 million gallons of herbicides, including Agent Orange, in Vietnam between 1962 and 1971 to deny food and jungle cover to the Vietnamese communists, but the chemical remained in the water and soil decades later. Agent Orange, named after the color of its containers, is blamed for nightmarish birth defects in Vietnam where babies appeared with two heads or without eyes or arms. U.S. veterans of the war have complained for years of a variety of health problems from exposure to the herbicide.

Dioxin, the toxic compound in Agent Orange, has been shown to cause cancer, birth defects and organ dysfunction.

Vietnam has 12 peace villages and 500 clinics nationwide to help its 3 million Agent Orange victims.

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It is unclear whether the Vietnamese plaintiffs will succeed, but there are precedents in a 1984 agreement by Dow and Monsanto to pay \$180 million to U.S. veterans. The U.S. government has refused consistently to discuss compensation. A U.S. lawyer representing the Vietnamese said those rallying behind the trial included U.S. veterans made sick by the chemical.

Nguyen Duc, 25, a Peace Village patient who now works there and is among the Vietnamese bringing the New York suit, has a twin brother who has been confined to bed since the 1988 operation in which doctors separated the twins sharing two legs.

□ ***"The U.S. government should pay for their mistakes," Duc said, sitting in his wheelchair.***