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The effects of Agent Orange and its consequences

1) Historical context - Decision

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

From a weaponry viewpoint, the Vietnam War is the major conflict of the twentieth century. That conflict opposes the United States of America against North Vietnamese communist Viet Minh, itself supported by Soviet Union. That conflict becomes an export of war between two world's superpowers: the USA say wanting to stop communism in Asia whereas USSR encourages it.

Vietnam is sacrificed in a dreadful human slaughter, as the laboratory of a future war.

Three or four times the tonnage of bombs, dropped during the whole Second World War, are dumped there, that is to say the equivalent of 450 Hiroshima's atomic bombs. The Vietnamese territory bears stigmata of twenty million consequent craters. Exploding bombs of new generation, fire bombs, blasting bombs, hollow bombs, scatter bombs... Nearly half one million tons of devices did not yet explode. Those remainders have already killed between 100.000 and 200.000 people, especially children, since during a long time more than half the population was under fifteen years old. In Cu Chi – whose meaning is "Iron earth" in Vietnamese – more than 10 tons of bombs per inhabitant drop.

United States of America sink.

The unseen and elusive Vietnamese fighters move around under **their** tropical forest. The records of American Army acknowledge 8.000.000 "going out" of stuffed with napalm helicopters to drive enemy out straw huts' villages.

Without results.

United States are in a hurry. American youth and youth all over the world begin to revolt against that war. To American people the Moon was promised... in Vietnam, it will be created!

DECISION

Nineteen-sixty-one, president Kennedy lives in White House and gives the green light to that huge chemical war called first "Trail Dust Operation" before coming to light as "Hades Operation" by the name of God of the Dead and Hell among the Greek ancients. Then quickly called "Ranch Hand Operation", because more trifling. It's this third military code's name of Agent orange, spraying over Vietnam and bordering areas of Laos and Cambodia, which remains in History. The "Ranch Hand Operation" aims at razing tropical forest to the ground, as well as poisoning crops, population and fighters. An epic ecocide will make numerous land species disappear for ever.

2) Methods – Quantities – Composition - Equivalences

METHODES

Ten per cent of spraying is done by hand, by land vehicles or by boats in the deltas or in the coastal mangroves' swamps. Ninety per cent of the spraying is done by air, with the help of C 123 aircrafts and helicopters. The Vietnamese have no protection but this one consisting in soaking a textile in water indeed in urine and in laying it on the nose or on the mouth.

QUANTITIES

Ten years are necessary to spray 84,000,000 litres of defoliants.

COMPOSITIONS

Among those defoliants, there is Agent blue, holding cyanide particularly efficient to poison the rice fields,

Agent green, Agent white, Agent purple, Agent pink, according to species to be destroyed, then Agent orange, so called because of coloured strips on the barrels containing the poison. Agent orange represents by only one 62% of the sprayed defoliants' mass in Vietnam.

Agent orange contains the Tetrachlorodibenzo-para-dioxin, or TCDD 2,3,7,8 on account of its molecular composition. The dioxins are made of 2 benzene nuclei, 2 chlorine, fluorine or bromine molecules (4 for the most toxic variety).

The TCDD dioxin is the strongest known poison - one million times more toxic than the most harmful natural poison – and besides the most lasting one.

EQUIVALENCES

If an equivalence is not at all scientific – since it bases on a data to make a comparative projection. – it has sometimes worth to impress our mind perceiving the extent of disaster. ...A 2002 study of University of Columbia of New York reveals that 80 grams of dioxin poured in a town's water supply would kill 8,000,000 inhabitants. On that base, 40 billions times the lethal potential for one human being would have been sprayed over Vietnam.

3) Stability, food chain, entering in cells

STABILITY

The TCDD dioxin is measured in picogram, that is to say in millionth of millionth of gram (10^{-12} gram). It has a great stability. In Vietnam, it is in soil, water, mud, sediments and so passes in the food chain.

FOOD CHAIN

In the food chain dioxin is found in large quantities in animal fat tissues, meat, milk, eggs and fish.

The scientists created a unit named TEQ – Toxic Equivalent Quantity – so as to determine a toxicity limit for food consumption. In France for instance the accepted dose is from 1 to 4 picograms per day per kilo of body weight.

In USA the accepted dose is more drastic, it is 0,0064 picogram, that is to say 160 times less than the lowest French standard.

In Vietnam that dose can reach 900 picograms per kilo of body weight per day for one person.

ENTERING IN CELLS

The cell's nucleus is protected by a "defence perimeter" which has the part to prevent the molecules not having required structure to enter the nucleus and therefore to interfere with the genetic heritage. But, within cellular cytoplasm (i.e. the whole of cell's elements except the nucleus) dioxin blends with a component, naturally present in every cell, the aryl-hydrocarbon receptor and will be able entering the cellular nucleus' defences, "passing oneself off " as a hormone. It is that complex dioxin-receptor which will mix-up the hormonal messages of our endocrinal system (the whole of glands with internal secretion, throwing in blood the produced materials called hormones) and will activate some parts of NDA, areas so-called "dioxin sensitive" and therefore involve toxic effect.

4) Unseen consequences, diseases and photographs

UNSEEN CONSEQUENCES

The Vietnamese people observe the ancestors' worship in a fervent way. They wish an offspring able carrying on that cult. If that is not the case a large guilt appears towards ancestors. We understand why families who had one, two, three children suffering from serious handicaps conceived a fourth, a fifth and a sixth ones and more sometimes ... One say that a large number of births are not listed, the children are

“hidden”. It is necessary to understand the parents’ dreadful mental torture, who see their child being born with two heads or with two faces on the same head or without arms nor legs, when it’s not with external organs.

And when TCDD dioxin does not succeed passing through the mother-to-be placenta and child was born healthy, the mother, who breastfeeds him, poisons him because the maternal milk is a major elimination way for dioxin. Again, let us think the psychological devastation of mothers.

DISEASES

Even people who look to be in good health suffer often from:

- Dermatitis (chloracne, skin disease characterized by comedos, cysts and papules; hyper-keratosis, hyper-pigmentation).
- Hepatic disorders
- Cardiovascular disorders
- Suffering of uro-genital system
- Nerve disorders (Loss of libido, migraines, peripheral neuropathies, suffering of sensorial faculties
- Psychiatric disorders (nervousness, insomnia, depersonalization, depression, suicide)

Further to industrial dioxin accident at Seveso in Italy, Professor Bertazzi and his fellow workers at the University of Milan declares: ***“We begin to discern long term strange effects.... A study reveals a full inversion of sex ratio. When in common population we find a ratio of 106 males to 100 females, in Seveso it’s 48 girls for 26 boys. Indication of a deep change in hormonal metabolisms.”*** The male sex has nearly half disappeared .

Today in Vietnam the third generation is there and people, sound in body and mind, father always monsters-babies with sometimes genital organs in the middle of the face.

5) Compensations, Scientific proofs, Constitution of United States of America, Multinational companies, Justice

COMPENSATIONS, SCIENTIFIC PROOFS

The “Stellman report”, which is the undisputed referring study about defoliants in Vietnam, values until 4,800,000 potential or silent sprayed victims. Attention, this number does not take in account victims later poisoned by food chain during more than 40 years, nor the offspring of three next generations until today. The past and present victims are millions. How many are coming along?

The use of that chemical and indelible Mass Destruction Weapon (MDW) by American Army request a “compensation”. “We need scientific proofs” answer the American authorities who admitted a fault and compensated “theirs” veterans of Vietnam War, themselves suffering from Agent orange as well as their offspring. That is a way leaving Vietnam alone to cope with it. At the time of that American answer a blood test to research dioxin cost between 3,000 and 4,000\$. Even if today that cost has gone down, how can Vietnam, which tries to find the means of its development, assume such a budget?

The link between cause and effect is admitted for some diseases and the list grow longer every year. It’s high time to admit, on the whole, diseases and malformations attributable to Agent orange. Indeed, the body of presumption is big enough : the Vietnamese victims, those ones in Laos and in Cambodia present the same disorders as the American Vietnam War’s veterans (4,200,000 GI served in Vietnam) as those ones from South Korea (300,000 were sent there), from New Zealand and Australia, having fought by their side; the same disorders as the victims, who live nearby the stoking areas in the Philippines, not to mention some persons having worked or living in spaces used before for Agent orange testing in Canada. As like for the offspring of all those ones. Of course we have to continue studying the noxious poison’s consequences, but it’s high time to admit the undeniable reality. Moreover, unlike the majority of quoted victims, the Vietnamese live and eat on the poison since more forty years.

CONSTITUTION of the UNITED STATES of AMERICA

The Constitution of the United States of America does not allow to turn against the responsible at that time officials nor against the war actions perpetrated by American Army, even if they are not "permitted" by Geneva Conventions.

MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES

As for the poison makers, they supplied the American Army for their maximum benefit, with full knowledge of the composition of its product and its destination – since June 1965, i.e. at the beginning of Agent orange spraying, an alarm on the very special toxicity of TCDD is expressed by a research in biochemistry laboratory, actually by one of the major suppliers – Among those 37 companies which made poison, the headmasters are Monsanto, Dow Chemical, Uniroyal, Diamond, Thompson, Hercules and others.

JUSTICE

On the 31st of January 2004, a few days before would fall the ten years of lifting of embargo which would thereby forbid any resort according to USA law, the Vietnam Association of Agent orange/dioxin Victims and 5 persons as individual victims lodge a complaint to First Instance Law Court of American Federal Justice in New York, located in East Brooklyn, State of New York. On September 2004, 22 other victims add themselves to the list, which may be without end...The Vietnamese complaint involves in a large and complicated procedure. Large because there are many plaintiffs, many defendants and facts taking place during a long period. There will be social, economical, and financial involvements. This trial will be complex as judicial applied viewpoint as theoretic jurisdiction. The trial of persons involved in Agent orange will be a first one in history of American justice and a trial without legal precedent.

On the 10th of March 2005, a judge, that one who defended the American veterans, themselves Agent orange victims and obtained "compensation" for them, rejects the complaint of Vietnamese victims! That judge says there is nothing in the texts of International Law which may forbid the use of herbicides. Except the fact that defoliants did not exist when some texts of International Law, in force at that time, signed by the United States of America, were not written. The real question is not to know if Agent orange sprayed over Vietnam is a poison or a defoliant, the real question is to know if that defoliant contains poison? "YES" answer the universally unanimous scientist community. A dreadfully teratogenic poison

On the 30th of September 2005, the Vietnamese victims lodged their file to the Court of Appeal.

On the 16th of January 2006, the defence of the 37 companies handed over its arguments to "its" justice.

The defence of the American chemical companies already alleged as a pretext that the use of Agent orange aimed at protecting the US troops, when they were themselves Agent orange victims as well as their offspring. That defence adds that those companies were not able to avoid an order of their government, as if every one was obliged to supply the ingredients of a Crime against humanity. The defence tries therefore to transfer responsibility on the political in that time leaders, since those ones vanished or are constitutionally inaccessible.

The Court of Appeal of New York was to make a decision on March 2006, then it moves back evoking that the chemists were not ready for oral arguments. Then it pushes back again its verdict to a few months. If the Vietnamese Agent orange victims were again dismissed, it would be a second injustice for the whole world.. An impunity which would definitely shuts the door to next plaintiffs (I think about Depleted Uranium victims) and would open largely the way to future large slaughters of this young millennium. Lastly, if the complaint of the Agent orange victims was pushed back, one would make one's way towards an appeal to the Supreme Court of the USA which has just undergone a large change.

6) Request an urgent assistance to UN

According to texts' interpretation, some jurists consider that this colossal ecocide is a genocide, doubled by a delayed genocide. For others, it's a question of crime against humanity and therefore a war crime at least. However, all agree on a point: the Agent orange spraying in Vietnam is a huge blow to physical and psychic integrity of all the Vietnamese people. That mass and flagrant violation of the human rights became the most important omission overlapping two centuries. This new Human Rights Council has to bring that great tragedy of Vietnamese nation to light. A tragedy which does not come within the scope of the past, since victims continue being born at time when I'm talking to you. Agent orange sprayed over Vietnam is not only a past cataclysm but also a present disaster. Beyond arcane mysteries and differences and other complexity of International Law, the first justice to be administered to Agent orange victims is international solidarity. Today, the Human Rights Council must be not only the bridge between the victims and international opinion, whom we warn, but also and particularly the institution which releases a support on behalf of United Nations (UN). The Secretary General of UN wrote: ***"In the same way, the Human Rights Council would help to set up voluntary funds and to obtain a support to those funds and contributions, especially to help the developing countries."***

On behalf of the *"Comité International de Soutien aux victimes vietnamiennes de l'Agent Orange" (CIS)* (International Support Committee to Agent orange Vietnamese victims), I solemnly ask UN an urgent, important and suited, financial assistance. Those victims, our fellow men, withstand particularly dreadful physical and psychological sufferings. They need financial means to make an inventory of fixtures in order to list the victims in the open country. They need the building of hundreds "Peace villages", institutions greeting the Agent orange victims in Vietnam. They need equipments, assistance to train specialized medical staff. Now one value Agent orange victims, between 150,000 and 300,000 children, If a Peace Village receives between 100 and 300 victims - that is huge, taking into account the staff's attendance night and day for severe handicaps- therefore they would need at least 1,000 Peace Villages immediately! Now, Vietnam counts eleven of them and only two may be hold as suited institutions: the "Friendship Village" in Van Canh near Ha Noi and the "Peace village" of Tu Du hospital in Ho Chi Minh City.

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of 47 countries sitting at the Human Rights Council, the Vietnamese children are smiling as many world's children but, notwithstanding the authorities' consequent efforts, more than forty years after the beginning of Agent orange spraying, those Vietnamese children *"die like dogs!"*.

They are waiting your assistance.

I thank you.

Text of André Bouny, adoptive father of Vietnamese children, founder of the association D.E.F.I. Viêt Nam and chairman of the International Support Committee (ISC) to Vietnamese Agent orange Victims and to New York Trial, in front of the Human Rights Council of United Nations (UN) in Geneva, the session 2007.

André Bouny is a frequent contributor to Global

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