



Remarks for the A-Ngo Kindergarten Hand-over

By Thao Nguyen, Country Director, VVAF, September, 18th, 2009

Mr. Le Van Anh, Chairman of the Hue Union of Friendship Organizations, Mr Ho Chi Thoi of the A Luoi District People's Committee, Representatives of the A-Ngo Commune, Teachers and students of the A-Ngo Kindergarten, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and gentlemen

Today we celebrate and share hope and happiness with children, families, and teachers of the A-Ngo Kindergarten.

Ta Oi, Van Kieu and all other ethnic minority children now have new class rooms, kitchen, bathrooms, and playground built by the sweat of United States veterans from the Veterans Vietnam Restoration Project (VVRP) and the LOTUS Humanitarian Aid Foundation in partnership with Boeing Company and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAF).

To the children of A-Ngo Kindergarten, I hope you like your new class rooms, and particularly the new play ground. You now can play outside in both rain and sunshine because the playground is no longer muddy and it has a shade to protect you from the sun. I also have two children similar to your age. Everyday they would come home, telling me how much they like their school, they like to play with their friends at school, learning new songs, new games, and new words. I hope you do too. And one day you can realize your dreams to become whoever you want to become and be a good citizen.

This project to build A-Ngo Kindergarten brings a special meaning to us. It's a wonderful story of three Vietnam veterans organizations VVRP, LOTUS, and VVAF working together in an area which used to be fierce battlefield with famous names such as Hamburger Hill, A-So Valley.

Three years ago, John Ward, founder and president of the LOTUS Humanitarian Aid Foundation, pioneered construction of kindergartens in A Luoi District. John is veteran who served in this same area during the war. John approached me in 2007 about having veterans organizations working together to build schools in A-Luoi. It took him no time to convince me, because for veterans it is satisfying to return to a former war zone for peaceful and beneficial endeavors.

John introduced me to Charles Wishart, who is president of VVRP. Charles is veteran, and has tirelessly led 24 delegations of veterans to return to Vietnam to build schools throughout Vietnam. I was particularly moved to hear the happiness in the voice of 10 returning veterans when they talked about how wonderful it was to be able to join hands with families in A Ngo, to pick up hammers, shovel dirt and mix concrete so that they could make small improvements to the lives of the grandchildren of the Vietnamese soldiers they fought.

This happy-ending story is reinforced by a partnership between VVAF and the Boeing Company. Over the years, Boeing has lent its support to a number of education programs involving good corporate citizenship. I am grateful for Boeing's commitment to improve education in Vietnam, especially in remote areas like A-Luoi. On behalf of VVAF, I thank Mr Kevin Heise of Boeing for your encouragement of our work, and for taking your time to visit A-Luoi several times with us.

This project would not possible if it was not for the close cooperation of the Hue Union of Friendship Organizations, particularly Mr Chairman Le Van Anh and his key staffer Vo Dinh Anh Tuan. In addition, I thank the district, commune authorities and the A-Ngo School for their close cooperation and warm hospitality extended to our veterans groups and various visits by VVAF.

Finally, I thank all our distinguished guests for having come this far to A-Luoi to celebrate with us on this happy day. We trust that you will continue to stand by us as we commit ourselves to the construction of schools, and bridges of peace and friendship throughout Vietnam.

We dedicate this school to all the students, teachers, and families in A-Ngo who have suffered the consequence of war in many ways. This is a small gift of the Vietnam veterans and the Boeing Company to all of you who have extended so much warmth and friendship to all of us.