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## The earth beneath our feet was toxic

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NCR Today

### Vietnam: Day Three

On day three of this incredible journey, our interfaith delegation flew to DaNang on the central coast of Vietnam, site of the largest of the U.S. air base during the Vietnam War. This was the storage spot for barrels of Agent Orange, the herbicide sprayed by U.S. planes over a large part of Vietnam in an effort to defoliate the countryside during the war, and deny the Viet Cong the shelter and cover of the jungle.

But much of that herbicide contained "dioxin," a highly poisonous chemical that has caused innumerable health problems for our veterans, and for the civilians of Vietnam. It has been linked to birth defects in children, and we have seen dozens of those children on this visit in just two days. This poison was literally passed from generation to generation, and no one knows how many generations will feel the effects.

But dioxin has also poisoned the earth itself. We visited one of the "hot spots" near the DaNang airport where the concentration of this toxin is still thousands of times greater than acceptable scientific limits. In one spot, you can -- *literally* -- still *smell* the herbicide. This was also where our soldiers used the empty barrels for bathing? even BBQ's -- because no one had informed them of the dangers.

Nearby are a stream and a lake that were used (and some say, still are) by the Vietnamese for bathing and fishing. But all that water is contaminated because of the decades-long runoff from the dioxin site.

Today, thanks to funding from the Ford Foundation, the worst contaminated area has a cement cap to prevent further runoff, and tests are being run to find the most effective means for a clean-up, once and for all. But that definitive clean-up has yet to be started.

No one doubts that the U.S. government is responsible for this mess, but it has never accepted responsibility for the clean-up or the human costs.

Yet here, the earth itself cries out for justice! Every fiber of one's being cries out for the day when God ? and we ? will look at creation once again in Vietnam and ? to paraphrase Genesis 1 ? ?see that it is good.?

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