



Mr. Long Pham  
Chairman  
Viet Ecology Foundation  
45272 Omak Street  
Fremont, CA 94539

April 11, 2016

Dear Mr. Pham:

I would like to extend my sincere thanks for your letter, dated March 16, in which you detail your concern for the Mekong River Basin. Your letter is especially timely in light of the severe drought that is currently impacting Vietnam. This is an emergency that requires all of us to respond while also keeping an eye on long term development choices and their impacts to the environment and economy of the Mekong River Basin. To that end, sustainable development alternatives that will satisfy socio-economic development needs within the region while at the same time addressing challenges related to the food-water-energy nexus are what we all need to work toward in partnership.

I first want to address the drought. Earlier this month, U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Ted Osius declared an emergency which has made it possible for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), in partnership with the Vietnam National Red Cross, to provide potable water and water storage assistance to the most vulnerable populations in drought-impacted provinces. This assistance is being rolled out as I write this letter and we will continue to assess the situation to identify gaps going forward. Additionally, on a national level, the Mission is implementing a number of projects funded through USAID that specifically address sustainable development issues.

Two of these programs, the Vietnam Clean Energy Program and the Vietnam Forests and Deltas Program, are designed to assist in Vietnam's transition to a climate resilient, low emission, sustainable economy and have respective budgets of \$9 million and \$25 million. Through the latter program, USAID works with partners from the Government of Vietnam, academic institutions, and the



private sector to support adoption of land use practices that address degradation of agricultural landscapes and increase resilience of people, places and livelihoods in delta areas through assistance for adaptation and disaster risk management. Their direct support to the Vietnam Red Cross helps provinces be better prepared for natural disasters and while providing humanitarian support during disasters.

Your letter also accurately states the need for United States leadership in advancing the sustainable development of the Mekong Basin, particularly in partnering with regional Mekong organizations to make them more effective. Vietnam is but one country within the interconnected Lower Mekong Basin. Thus, addressing issues that derive from actions by other countries along the Mekong River requires a coordinated, transnational response. At the same time, we must also be cognizant of the often competing development priorities among the Lower Mekong Basin countries.

From a regional perspective, our respective diplomatic missions are intimately involved in working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), foreign governments, and academia to understand the issues at hand and to attempt to find solutions that address the often competing development challenges in a way that is agreeable to the various stakeholders and countries. Our USAID Regional Development Mission to Asia also plays an important role in creating and overseeing region-wide projects that impact sustainable development. In fact, they are implementing a “Sustainable Mekong” portfolio with a budget of over \$40 million dollars that leverages the knowledge and expertise of several U.S. government agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions to work on issues related to climate resiliency, disaster prevention, and the impact of infrastructure development on the Lower Mekong Basin.

For example, USAID also plays a leading role in supporting the Asia Low Emission Development Strategies (LEDS) Partnership, which provides training, knowledge sharing, and cooperation to more effectively use LEDS tools and practices in development decision-making and financing. In addition, USAID supports research on the impacts of regional trade and investment flows on forests, and efforts to strengthen civil society networks in the Lower Mekong region to more effectively engage in forestry-related policy decisions. Finally, USAID’s Lower Mekong Public Policy Initiative develops research-driven policy analysis to support environmentally-sustainable economic development and improve livelihoods in the five countries of the Lower Mekong.

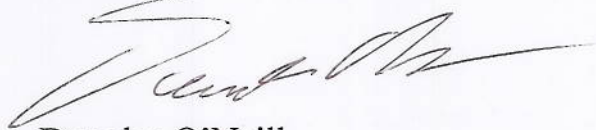


Another focused and highly effective program is our Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong which is helping to reduce the environmental impact of infrastructure construction in the region by providing engineering support to incorporate environmental impact mitigation measures into road, dam and other construction activities. Additionally, Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research, a global USAID competitive grants program, supports research partnerships between developing country scientists and U.S. National Science Foundation-funded collaborators in the Lower Mekong Region, including researchers in Vietnam's environment sector. USAID has also developed and tested innovative tools and approaches for integrating climate change considerations into planning and development decision-making and has provided land cover data generated from satellite observations to build climate resilience.

I am proud of the leadership role the United States continues to play in this region; however, our work is by no means done. The sustainable development of the Lower Mekong Basin, which includes enhancing the countries' ability to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, will continue to be a fundamental area of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Our leadership role extends from implementing President Obama's Global Climate Change Initiative to Secretary Kerry's deep, personal involvement in the region.

I want to thank you again for your concern for the well-being of this fragile ecosystem and the people who live there. We will continue to advance the sustainable development of the Lower Mekong Basin and look forward to engaging in a constructive dialogue with experts such as you to ensure we are best equipped to address this challenge. Should you have further questions about this issue, please contact Alison Davis with our Environment, Science, Technology & Health Unit at [davisae@state.gov](mailto:davisae@state.gov).

Sincerely,



Douglas O'Neill

Chief

Environment, Science, Technology & Health Unit