

**REMARKS BY VEF CHAIRMAN FRANK JAO
AT THE 2005 FELLOWS' CONFERENCE IN IRVINE, CALIFORNIA
DECEMBER 27, 2006**

Good morning VEF Fellows and Honored Guests:

On behalf of the Vietnam Education Foundation and its Board, I would like to welcome you to Orange County. Your presence here brings joy and honor to us. And we thank you.

I remember very well exactly 3 years ago when the newly appointed Board of VEF came together for our first visit to Vietnam. It was Christmas 2002. At that point, VEF existed only on paper. There was no office, no staff – certainly no Kien Pham, and no program. There were just 13 Board Members and a big dream.

You know the rest of the story because you are a part of this success story. Today, VEF is publicly recognized as a major player in Vietnam. We serve as an important component of the U.S.-Vietnam relationship. In June, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai came to the White House to meet with President Bush. After their meeting, the two national leaders issued a joint statement. VEF was the only organization mentioned by name for its success.

To me and other Board Members, the proudest accomplishment is YOU, VEF Fellows. You are now more than 150 strong and being educated at the best U.S. universities. Your selection and performance in school renewed hopes for talented young people inside Vietnam. They, too, can become a VEF Fellow in a process that is open, transparent and competitive.

As we look ahead, Members of the Board and I have high expectations for you. You were chosen not because you are just intelligent and promising, but also you have characteristics of an unselfish and courageous leader. Many of you have displayed that trait in school as well as in life. We want to encourage you to live up to the highest of your potential and help transform Vietnam's education and science. By doing so, you will serve as an enduring bridge between Vietnam and the U.S.

I hope you will have time during your stay in Orange County to explore and make friends in the largest Vietnamese community outside of Vietnam. This community has been our home for the last 30 years and I can confirm that “pho” here is as good as “pho” in Vietnam.

My wife and I will host a New Year's Eve party for all of you and many local guests on Saturday in the heart of Little Saigon. We hope you can join us because next year we will meet at a different location.

Lastly, enjoy the conference and the friendships you have for each other. Respect other hotel guests because you represent Vietnam and VEF here and at the Beckman Center.

On behalf of the Board, I want to publicly thank Dr. Ray Gamble, his staff and the National Academies for their generous support. Without their help, VEF would not be as successful as it has been.

Thank you and I will see you at dinner time.