

Distinguished Guests; VEF Board of Directors, VEF staff, Fellows, Visiting Scholars, and U.S. Faculty Scholars; the National Academies staff; and Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 6th Annual Vietnam Education Foundation Fellows and Scholars Conference. As usual, this year's Conference is organized in cooperation with the National Academies. This conference is an opportunity for everyone associated with VEF to be together to share ideas and experiences. Based on the success of last year's experience, this year we continue with the theme, "All the Ways Home (Duong Ve To Quoc)," focusing on the initiatives related to our Fellows and Visiting Scholars returning to Vietnam.

At this year's Conference, VEF is honored to host Mr. Le Cong Phung, Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States, to host the Vietnamese government delegation, led by the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Science and Technology, Prof. Le Dinh Tien, and to host numerous presidents and vice presidents of different universities in Vietnam, such as Prof. Vu Dinh Thanh, President of the University of Technology Ho Chi Minh City; Prof. Ho Thanh Phong, President of International University Ho Chi Minh City; Prof. Pham Hoang Luong, Vice President of Hanoi University of Technology; Prof. Do van Xe, Vice president of Can Tho University; and Dr. Dang Xuan Cu, Vice-Director of the National Center for Technological Progress or Nacentech. In addition, for the first time we have the privilege to have the participation of Mr. Keith Luse, Senior Professional Staff member of the office of Senator Richard Lugar, who is the Republican leader of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Mr. Cliff Stammerman, Staff Director of the office of Congressman William Delahunt, who is the Chairman of the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight. We also have the honor to host many American, Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American friends and supporters. Welcome to all of you! Your presence testifies the strong growth and success of VEF and the impact of VEF in both the United States and in Vietnam. On behalf of VEF, I would like to thank you for your trust. We hope that this Annual Conference will give you the opportunity to engage in dialogue with everyone associated with VEF and to appreciate the real value of the VEF community.

Before declaring the Opening of the Annual Conference, I would like to review some of the major successes that VEF has achieved since last year's Annual Conference in January 2008. First of all, VEF welcomes into its Board of Directors 4 new Presidential Board members and is honored to have the first woman chair of the VEF Board, Dr. Marilyn Pattillo. The VEF leadership through the Board of Directors will certainly continue to aim for the highest goals for VEF during the years to come.

In terms of numbers, this year we brought to the United States 38 new Fellows and 7 new Visiting Scholars to bring the total number to 267 Fellows and to 19 Visiting Scholars since VEF began operations more than five years ago in 2003. Let's give a very warm welcome to the new Fellows and Visiting Scholars of cohort 2008. For the first time this year, we selected 4 U.S. professors to teach in Vietnam either in person or via videoconferencing. Two of them are here with us today, Prof. Ben Kelley and Prof. Alain Montegut.

We are also pleased to announce that 3 weeks ago, on December 12, we organized in Hanoi our first Alumni Conference. This event poses a landmark for yet one more outstanding achievement of VEF. Indeed, at this point in time, 42 Fellows have graduated, with 11 doctorates, 30 master's degrees, and 1 professional degree. Among them, 27 have returned to Vietnam, while the remaining are mostly in post-graduate Academic Training in the United States. In addition, 11 Visiting Scholars have also returned to Vietnam after completing their professional development program of up to one year in the United States.

Regarding our relationship with the Vietnamese government, VEF has developed excellent relationships with both the Ministry of Education and Training (or MOET), and the Ministry of Science and Technology (or MOST). VEF is working with MOET to send more Vietnamese nationals to the United States, and with MOST to provide incentives for VEF graduates returning to Vietnam.

The details of these activities as well as other activities have been summarized in the "VEF Achievements 2003-2008" brochure that you all have now. As you know, the mission of VEF is to improve the relationship between the United States and Vietnam through educational exchange programs in science and technology. The main stakeholders of this mission are the Fellows, Visiting Scholars, and U.S. Faculty Scholars. Allow me to take a few minutes to address these stakeholders.

My Dear Fellows and Visiting Scholars, during the last five years, first as a Board member and then as the Executive Director, I have followed your growth. You have reached a certain maturity, just as VEF has reached an important landmark. Together over these years, we have successfully transformed this Annual Conference into a place of solidarity and mutual trust. You have answered positively to my confidence. You have taken the initiative to transform the Annual Conference into a place for your own development. You have successfully proven that you can take your own destiny into your hands as seen in your organization of the scientific sessions, in your development of the Book Drive Project and its famous Bus Tour, and in your very pro-active involvement in the *All the Ways Home* Initiative. You have taken everything into your hands to succeed. You are on the right tract. We are very proud of you. Congratulations.

My Dear U.S. Faculty Scholars, you are the newest link of the VEF community. As you know, Vietnam needs high quality faculty and, most importantly, Vietnam needs sustainable solutions for this issue. Therefore, together we are engaging in this enterprise. You will teach in Vietnam either face-to-face or via videoconferencing. With your impressive experience, your use of new technology, and our common enthusiastic commitments, I wish you all the best to be successful.

Ladies and gentlemen, during the next two days you will witness the enthusiasm and professionalism of VEF Fellows, Visiting Scholars, and U.S. Faculty Scholars. On behalf of VEF and the National Academies, I invite you to participate fully in the Conference, and enjoy all the events and activities. Dr. Lynne McNamara, VEF Deputy Executive Director, will keep you updated with the agenda as we move from event to event.

At this point, I officially declare the Opening of the 6th Annual Vietnam Education Foundation Fellows and Scholars Conference.

Now, let me introduce our good friend and colleague, Dr. Ray Gamble, Director of the Fellowship Office of the National Research Council of the National Academies.