



Photo Credit: United Nations in Viet Nam

Why We Care - 15 April 2021

If, as Suzanne Nossel [writes](#), "the United Nations remains the closest thing to a system of global governance that the world has ever known and may ever achieve," much is owed to its unique convening capacity in bringing together erstwhile adversaries, even combatants, to a shared sense of participatory purpose which, at its finest, is reflected in the unanimity of resolutions consciously conceived in common cause. We [spoke](#) last week of the My Lai massacre in Viet Nam; fifty years after the verdict in that case was consummated, the United States, President of the United Nations Security Council in March 2021, was looking to hand over its leadership of that body in a matter of days to Viet Nam, next in line of alphabetical rotation. This some 44 years after Viet Nam (which could well have been a founding member of the United Nations in 1945) was admitted to the world body, its then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Nguyen Duy Trinh, affirming his country's readiness to "continue negotiations for a satisfactory solution to the problems still outstanding with a view to normalizing relations between" Viet Nam and the United States.

Those negotiations, facilitated by the commonality of United Nations membership, succeeded; as United States Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said at a UN Security Council Ministerial Open Debate on Mine Action, chaired by Viet Nam on April 3, "our two countries now sit together as partners in this Council – and that has not always been the case. However, in the 26 years since our countries normalized diplomatic relations, the United States and Viet Nam have developed a thriving partnership, which includes jointly addressing war legacies and unexploded ordnance. This collaboration has allowed Viet Nam and the United States to make enormous efforts to ensure that the Vietnamese people can be safe from explosive remnants of war." It was particularly heart-warming to see instance of that "trusted partnership" in the "soft power" of shared [music](#) featuring the outgoing United States ambassador in Ha Noi, Daniel Kritenbrink, with references to Viet Nam's "hot spots and hot pots." ("They don't teach you that at the UN" the narrator suggests, but don't be too sure.)

On April 1, the day Viet Nam assumed the presidency of the Security Council, the country [received](#) at its National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology, its first shipment of 811,200 COVID-19 vaccine doses shipped via the COVAX Facility, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance and Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI); the photograph above shows the welcoming assembly of Vietnamese officials, foreign diplomats and the United Nations family led by Resident Coordinator Kamal Malhotra who spoke of this yet another "[gamechanger](#)" being "a step in the direction of a kinder, more considerate and generous world, a world that does not build back but builds forward." And just last week, on April 9, it was [announced](#) that Viet Nam could start mass production of its own Covid-19 vaccine in August if a three-phase human trial is completed in May. Viet Nam currently has four possible COVID-19 vaccines under development and trial; when the United Nations General Assembly decided in 2017 to [observe](#) 21 April each year as "World Creativity and Innovation Day" it would not have foreseen how lifesaving those attributes would prove to be, as that fact demonstrates. When the United Nations General Assembly decided in 2017 to [observe](#) 21 April each year as "World Creativity and Innovation Day" it would not have foreseen how lifesaving those attributes would prove to be, as that fact demonstrates. (We in UNAI are particularly proud that Amy Malcolm of the University of Auckland, our hub for SDG 4 on education, has been named the Oceania [Ambassador](#) for World Creativity and Innovation Week/Day.)

Another area receptive to creativity and innovation is that of land mines, the focus of the first week of Viet Nam's Security Council presidency which saw the observance of the "International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action", [marked](#) on April 4 each year. We have cited the US ambassador's remarks in that discussion where Bui Thanh Son, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, [noted](#) that every year, these explosive devices claim nearly 10,000 casualties – mostly civilians and children in conflict areas such as Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen, as well as in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and his own country, where wars ended decades ago. "The wounds old deep in the aftermath." The Council also [heard](#) from Nguyen Thi Dieu Linh, Provincial Programme Manager and Manager of the all-women "Project Renewal" Demining Team in Viet Nam, who was born and raised in Quang Tri province, where the former demilitarized zone divided North and South Viet Nam for twenty years; today, 600 villages have been surveyed, 21 million square metres of land cleared, 748,000 explosive items destroyed and 900,000 people supported. And all by women alone.

The United Nations hosted a powerful virtual [exhibit](#) (with many thanks to Jayashri Wyatt, secretary of the United Nations Exhibits Committee who has since moved to new responsibilities) which, among other locations, portrayed demining efforts in Iraq which hosts a project financed by the [United Nations Mine Action Service](#) where Frazer Macdonald Hay has [designed](#) "Al Jamhorya Park" in response to HALO's progressive 'Explosive Hazard Risk Mitigation and Education' initiative in the region and the valuable research done in the community by HALO and Al Ghad. The layout of the park has been informed by the surrounding built environment, with an emphasis on re-use, shade, light, access, and interaction. The park will layer the site's past so that new and old can be read, thus offering recognition and acknowledging the past and present social challenges whilst embracing an engaging narrative of reconciliation and growth." The link Frazer makes between demining and education was vividly [captured](#) almost a quarter of a century ago by the "Schools De-Mining Schools" project, sponsored in part by the United Nations. "When I tell people that schoolyards are mined, their reaction is 'Why? That's stupid. But you want to intimidate and control the population,'" said Abouali Farmanfarman, the then coordinator of the CyberSchoolbus, a United Nations educational programme (and a cherished friend.) "It's basically a weapon of terror," he said.

While the CyberSchoolbus no longer exists, the Academic Impact is proud to continue the process of educational engagement, albeit at the college, university and research institution level. And, as I was writing that last paragraph, I was overwhelmed by how swiftly the almost 25 years since Abou and I worked together have passed, just as surely, I dare say, will the years culminating in a project with which we are now engaged; UNAI is working with BGF, the [Boston Global Forum](#) on a series of roundtables leading up to the United Nations centennial in 2045. I was privileged to join a conversation in this series, in mid-March, which included a number of friends from Viet Nam. The event was led by Governor Michael Dukakis, who recently co-founded Artificial Intelligence World Society (AIWS), "a project that aims to bring scientists, academics, government officials and industry leaders together to keep AI a benign force serving humanity's best interests." The idea of an AIWS struck a particular chord since this column immediately [preceding](#) that event had looked at the idea of a "world society" in the first years of the United

the virtual, digital AIWS City and a real city", the model being Phan Thiet in Viet Nam, developed by the Nova Group in that country whose Chairman, Bui Thanh Nhon, described it as "the place for the World Leadership Alliance-Club de Madrid and the Michael Dukakis Institute to hold important annual events marked by the theme of 'Building a New Economy' for the world in the digital and artificial intelligence era, a venue to announce new achievements in the history of artificial intelligence and the digital economy."

Nguyen Anh Tuan, co-founder and CEO of BGF, speaking at the Riga Conference 2019 in Latvia, referred to the "need for a new social contract, one that is suited to a world of artificial intelligence, big data, and high-speed computation and that will protect the rights and interests of citizens individually and society generally. A fundamental assumption of the social contract is that the five centres of power - government, citizens, business firms, civil society organizations, and AI assistants - are interconnected and each needs to check and balance the power of the others. Citizens should have access to education pertaining to the use and impact of AI," a thought reflective of what Governor Dukakis said at the March event, of the possibilities of "new ideas, initiatives, and solutions by thinkers and creators in an effort to build a civilized, prosperous, peaceful, and happy world," a reference that also brought to mind Viet Nam's youthful academic energy; I thought back to the event organized by the Association of Korean Universities in Support of the United Nations Academic Impact Korea ("UNAI Korea") four years ago, a 'Global Entrepreneurship' workshop in Viet Nam (Ha Noi, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh cities) in which about 150 Vietnamese university students, businessmen and entrepreneurs joined to identify the problems of these three major cities and to suggest workable solutions through business plans that would draw upon, and integrate, the SDGs. Three selected finalists received an initial investment capital of \$5,000 and an opportunity to incubate business plans that could be realized over the next six months.

Tuan's convergence between education, creativity and innovation was summed up in the "social contract" between government and people **cited** by Nguyen Thi Xiem in his paper "Special Features in Ho Chi Minh's Thought about Human Rights", published in the American Journal of Educational Research in 2018 where he quotes the founder of today's Viet Nam to say "I have only one desire, one ultimate desire which is how our country is completely independent, our people are completely free and all people have clothes to wear, food to eat and chances to study," evocative of Viet Nam's national motto of "independence, freedom, and happiness"; the last going beyond "clothes to wear and food to eat" to educational opportunity.

It was at a place of study, on the United States Memorial Day seven years ago, that President Robert A. Scott of Adelphi University, who himself served in the navy during the "Vietnam era", **shared** an elegiac "prosepoem" he had composed, two verses of which are so compelling to our conversation today.

*I am a spiritual person
who believes in tolerance
and knows that you can
be right without my being wrong;*

*I am a mourner
who grieves for all those
we honor today, those
of the North and those of
the South;*

And yes, the "all" that transcends north and south, whether in the Vietnam of twentieth century conflict, or the United States during its nineteenth century civil war, or a twenty first century world and nation at peace, the negation of the necessity of one person's truth being another person's lie, the "all" that transcends each one of us and, in the words of Whitney Houston, allows that each to be "more than I thought I could be," here **rendered** by Dana Winner,

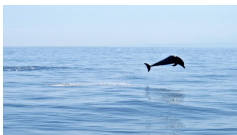
*Give me one moment in time
When I'm more than I thought I could be
When all of my dreams are a heartbeat away
And the answers are all up to me.*

That last line summoning, and summing up, the promise and the possibilities of creativity and innovation, the possibilities and the promise of an Organization that can yet define the human mind of its subterranean ordnance of grasp and greed, hostility and hate, inequities and intolerance, just as surely and safely, if slowly, as it defined the furtive physical furrows of fear in far flung fields, foreign or familiar.

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One minute challenge: Shoot a video about groundwater



United Nations - The Nippon Foundation Fellowship Programme



Diplomacy Provides Indonesian Youth with Growth Opportunities

UNITED NATIONS

- UN Charter
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Sustainable Development Goals
- UN Agencies
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- Lazy Person's Guide
- Internships
- UN Volunteers
- Youth Engagement
- Contests and Scholarships
- Model UN
- Request a Speaker
- Visit the UN

NEWS AND MEDIA

- UN News Centre
- Press Releases
- Briefings
- Office of the Spokesperson
- UN Photo
- UNifeed
- UN Web TV
- UN in Action
- UN Social Media
- The Essential UN

ISSUES AND CAMPAIGNS

- COVID-19
- SDG of the Month
- Observances and Commemorations
- Celebrity Advocates for the UN

