

**Ronald L. Haeberle**

The Honorable Ambassador Ha Kim Ngoc  
Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam  
In the United States of America

May 11, 2020

Dear Ambassador Ha Kim Ngoc,

Thank you for informing me about the discussion held this past week in Quang Ngai. I was promised a copy of the report that was sent to the Ministry from this meeting. I asked for it in written form, in both English and Vietnamese. I have not received this report.

As I see it, even if the Son Mỹ Legacy Site museum finally includes my name and copyright information on the labels of my photographs, they will still be disrespecting me, in both their words and deeds. Their refusal to honor my request to change the caption violates my rights.

I have traveled to Son Mỹ a number of times in the past to press the case for changing the caption, to reflect the new information that I have verified: that the two children on the path are indeed Duc and his younger sister.

During these visits I was met with ridicule, resistance and slander. You need not initiate an investigation to find the authors of the slander. All you need to do is review this [video](#), taken on May 9, 2013, to see and hear for yourself the false and defamatory presentation by Ms. Phan Thị Vân Kiều, who was then a docent and is now effectively the director of the museum.

Following are the relevant excerpts of the video with the time markings. My Vietnamese friends tell me, however, that the translation doesn't capture the insulting and derogatory words Ms Kiều used when referring to me.

From the beginning of the video to 00:43:

“Haeberle was sent here to take official photos so he was assigned by the army to two cameras fitted with black and white film. He took 40 photos and returned them to the US military. A personal camera he brought with him was color-film and he took 18 photos and kept them absolutely confidential as an asset to make money.”

“A year and two months later, the story of the massacre of civilians here has not been publicized yet. The photographer who took the series of photos sold it to a Japanese reporter living in the US and earned \$ 45,000. To make more money, he produced the original film and sold it to Life magazine and collected another \$ 30,000.”

From 01:50 to 02:07:

“When the Government of Vietnam knew that the massacre in this village has documented evidence, whatever the cost, that evidence must be bought. In 1971, the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spent \$ 11,000 to buy 11 color photographs that you will see today.”

In addition, you only need to review the defamatory lawsuit filed this past year by Mr. Phạm Thành Công, the former director of the Son Mỹ museum, in an effort to force the War Remnants Museum to use Son Mỹ’s discredited caption, which wrongly identifies the two children on the path as two brothers.

In the video, Ms. Phan Thị Vân Kiều fabricates that the only reason I retained the photographs that I took with my camera was to enrich myself. She inaccurately inflates the amount of money that I obtained for the photographs. She asserts that I sold the photographs to a Japanese reporter, which is a blatant lie. And she refers to me in derogatory terms in the video. She does this verbally, on camera, not in writing. Perhaps she did not realize she was being filmed.

I originally met with Mr. Phạm Thành Công while he was director of this museum. He refused to change the caption to the one I have determined is correct. Furthermore, he has given many different and false explanations of how he obtained the photographs.

If the government of Vietnam wants to be helpful and investigate something, you might start with determining how the museum acquired the photographs.

Mr. Phạm Thành Công, and Ms. Phan Thị Vân Kiều have, over the years, given five different and conflicting stories. **And when I have asked, they have been unable to show any evidence that they rightfully own these photographs or have any right to display them.**

1. Mr. Cong, prior to the opening of his museum, said he obtained my photographs from the UK (see attached news article).
2. He later changed his story and claimed to have purchased the photographs and copyright from someone in Japan for \$11,000 USD.
3. In the video from May 9, 2013, Ms. Phan Thị Vân Kiều says that the Ministry of Culture bought the photographs for the museum.
4. Recently, Mr. Cong has been saying that he obtained the photographs from a Japanese journalist.
5. Last year in his lawsuit against the War Remnants Museum, Mr. Cong said that a person named Mr. Lê Trung Việt bought the photographs.

Numerous residents of Quang Ngai Province even question whether Mr. Cong has concocted his own story of being a survivor of the massacre. Perhaps that is a worthy of investigation, as it may shed light on his other falsehoods.

I have already met with the Peoples Committee of Quang Ngai Province and received no satisfaction. In fact, the Peoples Committee, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports

and Tourism, launched a campaign last year to force the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism to instruct the War Remnants Museum in HCMC to revert to the former, inaccurate and discredited caption.

We do not need a meeting to further discuss this matter with museum and provincial leaders, who have proven themselves to be completely biased and who are intent, for whatever reason, on propagating this discredited narrative. I see the request for such a meeting as simply an effort to stall and deflect attention from my right to insist on an accurate caption.

Most importantly, there already has been an independent investigation to determine the historic truth of the identity of the two children on the path. This was conducted by the Scientific Council of the War Remnants Museum in the early part of 2019. The results were publicly announced in April 2019.

But in March of this year, the HCMC Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism bowed to the pressure of the Quang Ngai Peoples Committee, the Quang Ngai Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to instruct the War Remnants Museum to withdraw and renounce the findings of its Scientific Council and to refrain from discussing these matters with the media or anyone from the United States.

The War Remnants Museum was forced to withdraw their findings in March of this year.

If the government of Vietnam wishes to be helpful in resolving this matter, you must recognize the work of the War Remnants Museum's Scientific Council on its investigation and report, allow the War Remnants Museum to again display my photograph with the historically accurate caption, and lift the gag order imposed by the government upon the War Remnants Museum. This would allow the War Remnants Museum to make their conclusions public and let the historic truth be known.

Since the Son Mỹ museum cannot show that they have lawfully obtained my photographs, I insist that they remove them from public display. I also request that the Son Mỹ museum remove the two photographs of me that they have on display. It was while pausing in front of these photographs that Ms. Phan Thị Vân Kiều let loose a tirade of insulting remarks.

As you can see from this letter, I am not at all pleased with the outcome of the Embassy's efforts. I believe the time has come for me to find other means, through legal action and a public information outreach campaign, to resolve the outstanding issues by myself.

With kind regards,  
Ronald L. Haeberle