

Grand Prize winner

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July 11, 1995 marked a significant milestone in the relationship between Vietnam and the United States when former President William J. Clinton officially announced “normalization of relations”. Though hesitant at these early stages, the normalized relations have progressed incrementally and accelerated markedly over the past fifteen years, reflected by multi-faceted cooperation in a wide range of areas from trade to health, educational, military and cultural exchanges. Each sphere has undeniably attached itself certain significance but it is education, from my viewpoint, that plays the most pivotal role in deepening the bilateral relations as well as shaping the future of our two nations.

In a time of globalization, both Vietnam and the US are faced with challenges as well as opportunities. On the one hand, globalization enables citizens of our two nations to widen their horizons, to access socio-technological advances, to engage in multicultural and intercultural views and to share ideas and collaborative actions towards solutions to common problems. On the other hand, globalization could also lead to negative consequences such as increasing poverty within societies, a growing gap between privileged and excluded people, low standards of living, conflicts, terrorism, growing individualism and climate change, to which neither of the countries are exempt.

Under such circumstance, Vietnam and the US are confronted with pressing questions: How can we prepare our citizens to cope with such challenges? What are our positions in an ever increasingly globalized and knowledge-based world? What are our responsibilities in a world of poverty, violence, discrimination and environmental damage? The answer lies in education. It enables learners in both nations to understand the whole, diverse, complex reality and to act accordingly. It helps develop values, attitudes, knowledge and skills that enable the people of two nations to face common challenges, to be aware of individual responsibilities, to make responsible choices, and to respect each other, nature and diversity.

Looking back on the past fifteen years, cooperation in education between Vietnam and the US has been continuously broadening and deepening and successes that have been achieved are creating sufficient grounds for optimism and confidence in the future of the two nations. Firstly, it is a shared future of harmony and solidarity. Since the normalization of relations, the US government has granted a lot of scholarships to Vietnamese students. This provides them with valuable chances to interact and gain first-hand experiences in such a heterogeneous society like America, to deepen their understanding of American cultures as well as to foster cultural exchanges amongst the two nations; thereby developing attitudes that lead to constructive, non-violent resolution of conflicts. As a consequence, citizens are encouraged to work harmoniously on bilateral as well as global issues.

Secondly, it is a shared future of improvement and transformation. With the assistance from the US, Vietnam is accelerating its educational reform aimed at eradicating grave deficiencies of the current system and tailoring the quality of higher education to global standards. This is illustrated by the fact that the Ministry of Education and Training annually sends university rectors, deans and high school principals to the US on training programs for management, teaching methodology and language. More strikingly, an education task force was created by a new agreement between

Vietnam and the US in 2008 that is considered “the best path to creating a US-model higher education institution in Vietnam with the support of American universities and colleges”. It is the generous and supportive participation of the US that makes a big difference and increase the feasibility of Vietnam educational reform in the future.

Thirdly, it is a shared future of prosperity and sustainability. The expanding education cooperation between two countries has created more and more opportunities for Vietnamese students to study in the US, a model of “Global Standards”. This is represented by a number of the US government-run programs being set up to fund the studies of hundreds of outstanding young Vietnamese scholars such as the Fulbright Program, the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program, the Study of the United States Institutes Program and so on. Those students will return as the core of the nation’s political and economic elite in the decades to come who will be the major crew sailing the Vietnam-US boat towards sustainable prosperity.

Fifteen years is not so long and yet so short but looking at accomplishments through educational cooperation, the Vietnamese and American people can continue to be optimistic about our shared future, a future of deepening understanding, harmony, solidarity and sustainable prosperity. To conclude, I would like to quote a saying by the Former President John F. Kennedy: “Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.”