



PHOTO CREDIT: USAID

IDENTIFICATION OF HUMAN REMAINS

2020 - 2025 | IMPLEMENTER: INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON MISSING PERSONS (ICMP) |
PLANNED BUDGET: \$7,400,000

The United States and Vietnam have shared a remarkable journey from wartime foes to current partners on many shared priorities. Our ever more strategic relationship has been built on a commitment to overcoming the legacies of war, including accounting for the missing from the war. The United States and Vietnam have partnered for decades on locating, identifying, and repatriating missing remains of American service members. Now, the United States is a partner in the effort to identify remains of Vietnamese.

The Government of Vietnam has devoted considerable attention to locating and identifying Vietnamese remains from the war—thought to be in the millions—but progress has been limited. The U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Identification of Human Remains project adapts new DNA analysis methods to identify Vietnamese remains that have significantly degraded over the decades. This project complements U.S. Department of Defense support in Vietnam’s efforts to locate, gather, and identify remains through archival research.

APPLYING ADVANCED DNA ANALYSIS

The project is applying recent scientific advances in the analysis of ancient DNA (used in archaeology) and technical expertise from the International Commission on Missing Persons, the world’s leading international organization on locating and identifying missing persons, to

address Vietnam's massive missing persons challenge.

DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM

The project supports Vietnam to develop a comprehensive system for matching DNA from highly degraded remains with the DNA from families searching for loved ones. This system requires the collection and management of large numbers of DNA samples donated from family members, sophisticated statistical analysis of data to identify potential matches, and linkages to supporting historical information to confirm final identifications. The project engages with Vietnamese institutions to develop these non-laboratory components of a comprehensive and successful identification program.

IMPACT

In early 2023, the project demonstrated the ability of new DNA analysis techniques to successfully extract usable DNA from highly degraded Vietnamese bone samples. Attempts by Vietnam to achieve such results in the past, using older methods, had failed.

By 2024, the project expects to combine the new extraction techniques with next-generation DNA sequencing technology and apply to Vietnamese bone sample analysis. By 2025, the project will provide a Vietnamese lab with the equipment and expertise to apply this new process, establishing the foundation for a comprehensive program to identify missing Vietnamese from the war.

The project is part of the United States' and Vietnam's commitment to overcome the legacies of war, build trust, and deepen our relationship to advance many shared priorities for the future.

TARGETED LOCALITIES

The project works at the national level to support identification work that helps bring closure to families across Vietnam.