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13 October 2001

Kerry ---

My recent stay at Girasol was short but sweet, and it has led to some thoughts about our ongoing involvement with old and new friends in Kontum. As for the philosophical question of whether we might possibly be doing more harm than good by intervening in health and welfare activities aimed at the Montagnard population, my simple response is that their needs are great, it's better to do something than to do nothing, and those of us fortunate enough to have surplus resources are benefiting ourselves along with our needy clients in sharing these resources. We have made errors of judgment in the past and will no doubt continue to do so in the future; but hopefully we'll make fewer mistakes as time goes by, and I think it's worth the effort. And I want to add that I'm deeply grateful to you and Hilary for your collaboration and support in setting up Asia Connection Inc.

Taking a closer look at 'Friends of the Viet Nam Highlands' --- which morphed into 'Friends of Kontum' --- I think you deserve much credit for pulling it together in the first place. I remember how deeply moved you were after your return visit to Kontum in 1994. The Minh Quy reunion that you organized the following year was a huge success in my opinion, and even though active participation in Friends of Kontum has fallen off over the years there's still a core of concerned people hoping to carry on the outreach to our Montagnard friends.

As you know, Asia Connection Inc. was set up partly with this in mind. In the Articles of Incorporation that we submitted to the Florida Department of State we presented our purpose as follows:

'To provide financial assistance for agencies and individuals involved in emergency relief and health and welfare projects in needy areas of the world, with a particular focus on Asia.'

In a later statement to the Internal Revenue Service we enlarged on this:

'Asia Connection Inc. had its genesis in a reunion of a band of former former volunteers who had worked at Dr. Patricia Smith's Minh Quy Hospital, located in the Central Highlands of Viet Nam, during the wartime years. The hospital, funded mainly by a support group in Seattle, Washington, functioned primarily to serve the medical needs of tribal minorities in Kontum Province. The 'Liberation' government that succeeded the Government of South Viet Nam upon termination of the war in 1975 continued a policy of neglect toward the tribal minorities, and we formed a group called 'Friends of Kontum' to try and extend a helping hand to our old friends and colleagues in the Highlands. After numerous postwar visits to Kontum by members of the group it was determined that the local Catholic Church was clearly the only agency genuinely interested in the Montagnards' health and welfare, and the perpetuation of their unique culture. Working as best they can with limited resources, the priests and nuns of the Kontum Diocese have initiated numerous projects to promote Montagnard welfare --- clinics, water wells, orphanages, classes in sewing and hygiene for girls from Montagnard villages. Asia Connection Inc. was established partly to help fund projects initiated by the Diocese. The other programs that we are supporting elsewhere in Asia have all passed muster for integrity and efficiency, either through on-site inspection or through our personal familiarity with the leaders, some of whom were our colleagues during the wartime years in Viet Nam. Asia Connection Inc. is an all-volunteer operation, with no salaries or financial benefits accruing to the directors and no paid staff. All contributions are designated for our overseas beneficiaries, and to date our only operating costs have been banking fees and processing fees to the Internal Revenue Service. We fully realize that our

humanitarian efforts represent only a very small drop in a large bucket of human need; but we operate on the principle that 'it's better to light a candle than curse the darkness'.

On April 24th of this year we were finally granted 501(c)3 status by the Internal Revenue Service. We are classified as a 'Private Foundation' (as opposed to a 'Public Charity') which means in effect that we don't solicit contributions from the general public, but that we generate our own funds. The I.R.S. however has confirmed that even though we don't do public fund-raising we're entitled to accept donations from any source whatsoever. So that anyone wanting to help support a specific clinic or orphanage for example, could use Asia Connection as a vehicle for this, and could get a tax deduction of up to 30% of his or her adjusted gross income.

The statement of purpose is intentionally vague, because I wanted to allow enough latitude to support other worthy causes outside of Viet Nam and Southeast Asia. I'll enclose a breakdown of our contributions to date. As you can see most of the transfers have gone to Kontum, but there are other points of need in Bangladesh (Dr. Edric Baker's health center), Cambodia (Indradevi clinic in Phnom Penh), and India. And I don't think it's stretching the point to declare the migrant labor camps in Central Florida as a 'needy area' --- hence the grant to Good Samaritan Mission which helped them to continue operating a daycare program for farmworkers' children during the summer months.

As you know, Father Lien has served as our unofficial 'point man' in Kontum, and since our meeting here in Tampa during his recent visit to the U.S.A. I'm even more convinced that he's doing a good job getting Asia Connection donations into the proper hands. We transmitted a sizeable sum (U.S.\$3000) via a connection that Father Lien arranged here in Tampa (a Vietnamese priest who was a classmate of his in seminary), and a number of thank-you letters have already been received from Kontum. So I have a feeling that we're on the right track, even though our efforts to date have been pitifully small in comparison to the Montagnards' overall needs.

In the first circular that was issued to probe the possibilities of a Minh Quy reunion back in 1995 you expressed the idea of re-establishing contact with the Highland people who had made us feel so welcome while we were guests in their country, and possibly to help them out in any small way we could. Well, I think that's what is happening...

As for the future of Friends of Kontum: as you are the person who brought it into being and who has faithfully cranked out newsletters over the years, it seems to me that it's your call as to whether we stay afloat ---even though there's only a handful of active participants at this point ---or fade into the sunset. If you choose the latter, I hope you'll share the current mailing list because I imagine there are a number of Friends of Kontum who would remain interested in progress reports from Asia Connection Inc. In any case, whether we continue to exist as an informal group or not I think that all of us Minh Quy alumni will continue to be 'friends of Kontum' in one form or another.

Thanks for your role in setting up Friends of the Viet Nam Highlands, and also for being part of Asia Connection Inc.---

Abrazos,

Bill R.