

AmCham Vietnam would like to extend its sincere congratulations to Vietnam as it celebrates unification.

Last night, as part of the anniversary celebrations, Vietnamese crowds watched the army march down Le Loi Blvd; their army – all of theirs. Throughout the crowd were red shirts with yellow stars and toddlers waving the national flag. The mood was happy, prideful and carefree. I can't imagine the people asking each other what side the parents or grandparents fought on. It doesn't matter. They are all on the same side now.

Fifty years after the end of the war, Vietnam is peaceful, increasingly prosperous and unified.

It achieved this unity, by focusing on what unites rather than divides; what all in the country share: a history and culture, a country; a common desire for prosperity; and a stake in the future.

I will never forget an AmCham luncheon in 2002 featuring Le Van Bang, Vietnam's ambassador to the U.S. I told him that whenever I did a google search in English for "Vietnam", most of the results were about the war. But that when I did a Vietnam language search about the U.S, the war was almost never mentioned. I asked if it meant that the Vietnamese had largely forgotten the war. He assured me they hadn't; that it was not a question of remembering or not; it was a question of focus. Vietnam had chosen to focus on the future.

The focus on the future and the common desire for prosperity not only united those within Vietnam but also contributed to the reconciliation between Vietnam and the U.S. There is no greater example of pursuing mutual benefit than a commercial transaction.

Commerce was the wedge that opened the door for all other elements of the U.S.-VN relationship and contributed to one of the great foreign relations success stories in modern history.

AmCham Vietnam, played a significant role in this rapprochement. Even before its founding in 1994, AmCham's founders actively pushed for lifting of the embargo and normalizing relations. And once established, AmCham played a key role in negotiating various free trade agreements which served as models for Vietnam's future trade agreements that together have made a major contribution to its prosperity.

So part of this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a celebration of the cohesion Vietnam has achieved since the war. It is a story of looking forward and focusing on shared interests both domestically and internationally.

But another part of this anniversary is about looking back. And in looking back, all parties to the conflict share something as well; a common humanity; all have known what it is to grieve fallen sons, brothers, fathers and husbands; all know the feeling of pride in community and country; of respect for extreme bravery and sacrifice; All sides know the urge to honor the fallen, because that's the only currency we have to repay the debt for the ultimate sacrifice.

Over the past 50 years, recognition and respect for this shared humanity, not only on a country-to-country level, but particularly between the veterans on both sides, has been a foundation of the reconciliation journey between our two countries.

We humans are social beings; we thrive by cooperating towards mutually beneficial ends. As we reflect on the 50 years that have transpired since the end of the war, let's celebrate the peace and prosperity that blossoms by recognizing our common humanity and focusing on shared interests.

And most importantly, for this holiday, congratulate a unified Vietnam.