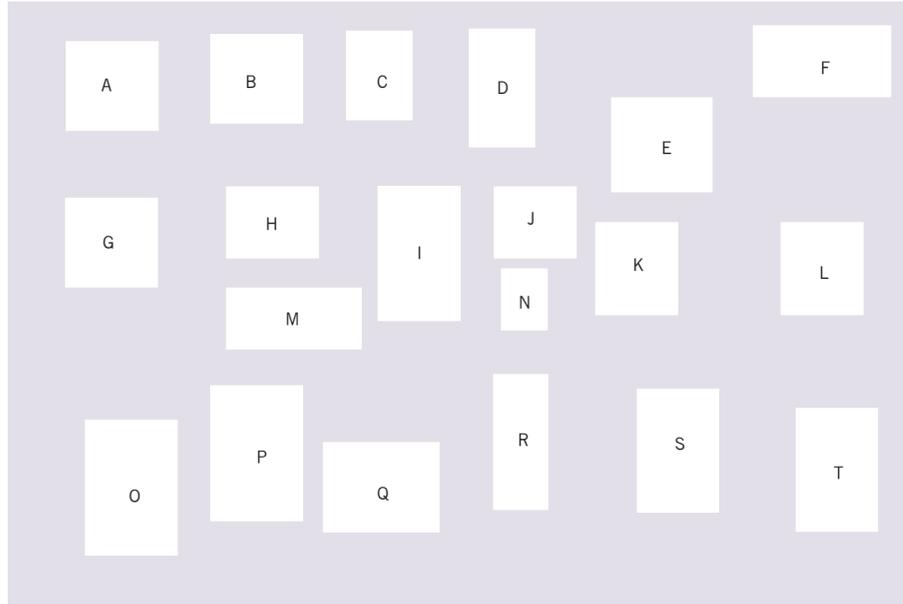


The Vietnam Disability Quilt



Peace Fellow Jesse Cottrell helped the two quilters to make panels for this quilt. He is shown here with Cao Thi Men, one of the quilters, and Xuan Dung Tran Thi, from The Association for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (AEPD) in Vietnam - Jesse's host organization. Jesse wrote the quilter profiles (below right). PWD is used throughout to refer to a Person With Disability.



AP's Program Manager Karin Orr helped her aunt Teresa to assemble the quilt in Fresno, California. Teresa has been quilting for many years.



Nancy Evans who works with Faithful Circle Quilting Guild in Columbia, Maryland helped to complete the quilt.



A. A PWD waves for help from her roof during a flood. (Ms. Cao)



B. A PWD tends to a bed of roses. (Ms. Cao)



C. A PWD plays the guitar for an able-bodied person. (Ms. Cao)



D. An amputee organizes agricultural products, proving that PWDs can contribute to society. (Ms. Cao)



Long Ngru was 19 when she was hit by a motorbike and crippled for life. "The first thing I thought after my accident was that I didn't want to be a burden to my family," she told me. She spent the next 13 years of her life in depression, bolstered by a supportive family but still unhappy with her life in a wheelchair.

According to Ms. Long, this all changed with her introduction to the Association for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (AEPD). After attending an AEPD training, Ms. Ngru found a supportive community of other persons with disabilities (PWDs) who were also trying to deal with depression and social exclusion.

Deeply encouraged, Ms. Long attended a second training on financial planning, which helped prepare PWDs to start their own businesses. "Thanks to the training, I learned that PWDs could be valuable," she told me. Following the training, Ms. Long received a grant from AEPD that paid for a refrigerator. This helped her start the cafe that she now operates. At the training, Ms. Long met her future husband - another PWD who

had been a recluse for most of his life before his involvement with AEPD. The couple was married a year after the training. They now run the cafe together while raising their first child.

Ms. Long's quilt panels depict her, her husband and her baby. She hopes her quilt would express the happiness she felt after AEPD helped her to meet other PWDs and start a family.



In 1973, six year old **Cao Thi Men** and her little sister were playing in a field when they heard the screech of an incoming American plane. Instinctively the young Cao Thi Men wrapped herself over her younger sibling. Her first memory after regaining consciousness is of her baby sister, screaming but unharmed. Her next memory is trying in vain to move her legs.

Shrapnel from the bomb had cut Ms. Cao's spinal cord and was embedded in her lower back, leaving her in agony. Surgeons couldn't extract the shrapnel without risking her life. "I considered suicide," Ms. Cao told me. When Mr. Hun, an outreach worker from the AEPD first visited Ms Cao in 2007, she had already spent more than three decades confined to bed and was deeply depressed. But Hun, who himself has disability, persisted. It took two years, but after she finally agreed to see a doctor surgeons were able to removed the shrapnel from her spine. The change was dramatic. The pain was gone and although she couldn't walk, she regained enough movement in her legs to

leave her bed without assistance for the first time since she was a child.

It took another two years for Mr. Hun to convince Ms. Cao to attend her first AEPD training, in basket weaving. She was a natural. With Hun's help, she secured a job weaving conical hats with the local women's union, the first job of her life. Ms. Cao also made her first friends, most of them PWDs who had also dealt with depression and social exclusion. When I asked her if she wanted to participate in the AP quilting project, Ms. Cao quickly said yes. I didn't need to explain how other PWDs could benefit from hearing her story. She understood that quilting was a way for her to comfort others, just as Mr. Hun had helped her.

"Sorry, I could only make 12 (panels)," Ms. Cao told me when I came to her house to pick up her panels for the quilt. I hadn't asked for more than one or two. Instead, Ms. Cao had singlehandedly made enough panels to make a whole quilt! It was also apparent that she had sewn her life story. One panel shows a mangled body. Another shows a frowning, legless woman next to a bomb. Yet another depicts a PWD trapped on the roof as a flood engulfs her home below, as almost happened to Ms. Cao during Vietnam's historic floods in 2010. This underscores the challenge that will face many PWDs from climate change - and this theme is apparent in many of the quilt panels.

Yet, amidst the stories of struggle and sorrow, Ms. Cao's panels are of optimism and social inclusion. "This one shows that disabled people can be useful in society," she said, displaying a panel of a crippled person farming. "And this other one shows me making conical hats for a living." She smiled as she said this.

Ms. Cao is happy with her new life. She laughs when she plays with her nieces. She smiles with pride when she shows visitors her beautiful woven bowls. It was only when I asked Ms. Cao what she thought of AEPD and Mr. Hun that the look on her face changed, hinting at pain she'd only recently overcome. "They gave me my life back," she told me, with tears in her eyes. "I owe them everything."



E. A person holds the family dog over her head during a flood. (Ms. Cao)



F. A PWD seeks shelter on her roof during major flooding. (Ms. Cao)



G. A scene in which a PWD lives through major flooding. (Ms. Long)



H. Long Ngru depicts herself in a wheelchair sewing baby clothes for her daughter. Her husband is also a PWD.



I. PWDs sit on their roofs during a flood. (Ms. Cao)



J. Long Ngru depicts herself in a wheelchair sewing baby clothes for her daughter. Her husband is also a PWD.



K. A PWD in an agricultural community. (Ms. Cao)



L. A scene in which a PWD lives through major flooding. (Ms. Cao)



M. Ms Cao depicts herself next to the missile that hit and crippled her.



N. An able-bodied person helps someone in a wheelchair. (Ms. Cao)



O. A scene in which a PWD lives through major flooding. (Ms. Cao)



P. PWDs in a major flood. (Ms. Cao)



Q. Ms Cao depicts a PWD farming, to prove that PWDs can be useful in society.



R. A person with disabilities. (Ms. Cao)



S. A PWD working on a farm. (Ms. Cao)



T. Several scenes in which PWDs live through major flooding. (Ms. Long)