

In November 2011, I was assigned to work the APEC summit in Hawaii, where I served as the Liaison Officer for Madam Hanh, the wife of Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang. His attendance at the APEC summit was the first visit both he and his wife made to the United States. During a tour I arranged for Madam Hanh at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, one of her tour guides, a local Hawaiian in traditional dress, came up to me and said that he had served in the Vietnam War. He asked me if he should tell Madam Hanh that he was a Vietnam veteran. I said that he absolutely should. After colorfully narrating a story about traditional Hawaiian culture, he turned to Madam Hanh and with the utmost sincerity said "Ma'am, I served in the Vietnam war for two years. I have always wanted to go back to visit your country, but never did." Madam Hanh was visibly moved. She looked at him for a few seconds, smiled and said, "You are always welcome in Vietnam." It was a touching moment of personal diplomacy that I will never forget.