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**AUDREY HEPBURN HELPS VIETNAM FORGE A KINDER IMAGE**

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Actress Audrey Hepburn travelled to a remote mountainous area of Vietnam this  
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month to help raise funds for poor children and forge a kinder image of this isolated communist country.

Hepburn, who has worked as a goodwill ambassador for UNICEF since 1988, said she wanted to remind people in the West that Vietnam was a country, not just a war.

"I would like to give a much more accessible, human picture of Vietnam than just the Vietnam war. It's a ghost that has to be laid (to rest)," she said in an interview in Hanoi.

Hepburn flew in a Vietnamese helicopter to the remote north-eastern village of Mo Vang in Hoang Lien Son province near the Chinese border on November 1 to visit ethnic minorities who are among Vietnam's poorest people.

She stopped at a simple wooden health clinic tucked in among rugged green mountains and staffed by Vietnamese health workers trained and equipped by UNICEF, the United Nations children's fund.

They test people for malaria and treat others for goitre, an enlargement of the thyroid gland caused by iodine deficiency that produces a large swelling in the throat.

Ten million of Vietnam's 65 million people live in mountainous areas and the iodine deficiency disorder affects 35 per cent of them because iodine is lacking in the mountain soil, plants and animals.

The disorder causes cretinism or mental retardation among two per cent of the two million people in the most remote mountain areas.

Few Westerners get to visit Vietnam's far-flung ethnic minority areas.

At one point on Hepburn's trip village women of the Tay minority swarmed around to dress her in a bright, traditional skirt and blouse.

The chattering women then bustled along behind the sprightly 61-year-old actress, who gained fame for films such as "Roman Holiday," "Breakfast at Tiffany's," "My Fair Lady" and "Funny Face," as she strolled past rice fields in her new costume.

Sixty per cent of the people in Mo Vang suffer from goitre, one of the highest rates in the country, UNICEF officer Jean Dricot told reporters. Several elderly retarded people, stricken by the disorder, sat staring from their thatched huts.

But malaria was the main killer of children and pregnant women in the area, Dricot said.

Hundreds of villagers, many dressed in the black trousers, tunics and headdress of the Hmuong and Dao people, gathered on a hillside to watch Hepburn's helicopter take off. Dozens danced and swirled to traditional percussion music.

During her visit to Vietnam from October 31 to November 3, Hepburn met government officials in and around Hanoi and visited community health facilities. Her visit followed a fund-raising tour through Los Angeles, New Zealand and Australia.

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One of Hepburn's major films, "War and Peace," was shown on Vietnamese television during her visit.

The actress, born in Belgium of a British father and Dutch mother, lives in Switzerland. As UNICEF's goodwill ambassador, she raises funds for children's programmes and publicises UNICEF's work.

Sitting in her hotel room in Hanoi a day after the helicopter trip, she told Reuters that Vietnam had the will to provide good education and health care for its children, but lacked basic resources such as books and medicine.

Looking like the ballet dancer she once was, she sat with her bare feet propped on a chair, her hair tied back and wearing a simple denim dress.

Hepburn made a brief reference to a U.S. trade embargo that has denied Vietnam bilateral American trade and aid, as well as funds from international lending bodies and technology and investment from many Western countries.

"I'm not in the business of politics. I'm in the business of children," she said. "This country needs not just to be opened up (from sanctions), but knowledge-wise."

Otherwise, she said, "This generation of children will go downhill."  
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