

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

**ON VIETNAM'S COMBINED 5th AND 6th NATIONAL REPORT
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE
ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST
WOMEN (CEDAW)**

**By Mme HA THI KHIET,
Chairperson of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in
Vietnam, Head of the Vietnamese Delegation.**

(Session 37, CEDAW Committee, New York, 17/1/2007)

*Madame Chair,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of the Vietnamese Delegation, I would like to extend to Madame Chair and other members of the Committee the best wishes for the New Year 2007. Our best wishes also go to your good health, happiness and success. We would also congratulate and highly value the enormous contributions made by the CEDAW Committee in its 25 years of operation in pursuing the noble cause of promoting gender equality and women's advancement, thus helping the best implementation of CEDAW worldwide.

I now have the honour to introduce the composition of the Vietnamese Delegation accompanying me to this session:

1. H.E. Ambassador Le Luong Minh, Chief Representative of Vietnam at the United Nations;
2. Madame Tran Thi Mai Huong, First-Vice Chairperson of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam;

3. Madame Nguyen Thi Kim Lien, Deputy President of the Vietnam Women's Union;
4. Mrs. Duong Thi Thanh Mai, Director of the Institute of Legal Studies, Ministry of Justice;
5. Mr. Nguyen Tat Thanh, Minister Counsellor, Deputy Chief Permanent Representative of Vietnam at the United Nations;
6. Mr. Vu Anh Quang, Deputy Director General, Department of International Organisations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
7. Mrs. Pham Nguyen Cuong, Deputy Director General in charge of women advancement's affairs, Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs;
8. Mr. Nguyen Huy Dzung, Deputy Chief of Interpretation;
9. Ms. Hoang Thi Thu Huyen, Official of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam.
10. Mr. Pham Hai Anh, Third Secretary of the Permanent Representative Mission of Vietnam at the UN.

Madame Chair,

Distinguished Committee Members,

The Vietnamese State attaches much importance to the serious implementation of the provisions of CEDAW including the submission of the regular reports to the Committee. The combined 5th and 6th National Report has been carefully prepared by an inter-disciplinary board led by top figures of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFW) and adopted by the Prime Minister before submission to the Committee. I am very much delighted to take this opportunity to inform you that from now on, under Article 102 of the Law on Signing, Joining and Implementing International Conventions, which comes into effect on January 1st 2006, all national reports on international treaties and conventions that Vietnam is a party to, including reports on CEDAW, shall be submitted to the National Assembly for adoption.

The combined 5th and 6th National Report covers Vietnam's implementation of CEDAW during 2000-2003. Due to the large time gap between the date of submission of the report and today's session, I shall try to update some new developments on the implementation of CEDAW in the recent years.

1. Backgrounds on the implementation of CEDAW in Vietnam since 2000 to date.

Vietnam continues to pursue the policy of renovation and reform as well as the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development for 2001-2010 aiming at making 'the people wealthy, the country strong, the society democratic, just and advanced' so as 'to bring Vietnam out of the state of underdevelopment and create the foundation for Vietnam to basically become a modern and industrial country by the year 2020...' The Vietnamese State has advocated many appropriate policies and measures to maintain security, political stability and socio-economic development, further improving the legal, institutional and policy systems. As such, Vietnam has been able to make many important achievements, particularly in economic development and promotion of social justice, building the rule of law and ensuring human rights.

The Vietnamese economy continuously experiences high growth rate with an average of 7.51% in the last 5 years of 2001-2005. In 2006, the growth rate stood at 8.17%. Average per capita income also increases fast from US\$ 485 in 2003 to US\$ 723 in 2006.

Resources for socio-economic development have been continuously increased and now occupy 30% of the State budget. As such, many social areas have experienced positive changes. In particular, Vietnam has been recognised by the United Nations for reaching the Millennium Development Goal on poverty reduction 10 years ahead of schedule (with a reduction of 60% in the last 10 years) and the ratio of poor households shrinks considerably from 28.9% in 2001 to 19% in 2006. In a span of 5 years, the country has been able to provide 7.5 million new jobs. The average longevity of Vietnamese has increased from 68 in 1999 to 71.3 in 2005 (with the respective figure for male and female being 69.5 and 73.5). The Human Development Index (HDI) also increases sharply, from 0.688 in 2001 to 0.704 in 2004 (ranking 108/177 countries).

The Vietnamese State continues to accelerate the development of the rule of law and improve its legal system to better respect and ensure human rights. Many new laws relating to human rights have been passed like the Law on Media, Law on Complaints and Denunciation, Labour Code, Law on Education, Law on the protection, care and education of children, Law on the Youth, and the Law on Gender Equality.

These achievements have indeed created much better conditions for Vietnamese women to participate and benefit equally in the development

process. However, apart from what we have been able to do, Vietnam still faces various difficulties and challenges. The people's living standard remains lower than many other countries in the region. Many thrusting social problems are still present. The income gap between various social groups and regions caused by the impacts of the market economy is widening. All these negatively affect the implementation of CEDAW.

2. Directions and measures to fight all forms of discrimination against women and to promote the development and advancement of women.

Vietnam is for the strict elimination of all forms of discrimination between men and women in the family as well as in all aspects of the social life. In the last 5 years, Vietnam has deployed various policies and measures in the legislative, executive and judicial fields to promote the equality between men and women and ensure the full development of women so as to enhance women's role and position in all areas.

The principle of equality, non-discrimination between men and women, fighting gender-related preconception and prejudices in the family and society has been clearly made in the Constitution and further detailed in all the new legal documents of Vietnam. In particular, the Vietnamese National Assembly's adoption of the Law on Gender Equality on November 26, 2006, with the contents and spirit of which reflect clearly the fundamental principles and provisions of CEDAW, has really helped improve the Vietnamese legal system on gender equality and women's advancement while at the same time confirming Vietnam's strong commitment and determination in implementing at best the CEDAW and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on gender equality. The Law shall come into effect on July 1, 2007 and includes 6 chapters and 44 articles, clearly providing for the goals, fundamental principles and the State's policies on gender equality. It also defines the key contents of gender equality in all areas of the social and family life; measures to ensure and promote gender equality; responsibilities of all agencies, organisations, families and individuals; as well as oversight, inspection and treatment of violations of gender equality. The Government of Vietnam shall make detail guidance for the implementation of the Law.

The Vietnamese State has also introduced many policies and measures to implement the Millennium Goals on male-female equality and the enhancement of women's role in all areas. These policies have been concretised and integrated into quantitative targets in the Strategy and National Programme on growth, poverty reduction and employment for 2001-2005; the National Strategy on Reproductive Health Care 2001-2010; and the Strategy for Education Development for 2001-2010; the National Strategy for Advancement of Women until 2010, etc. Vietnam's orientation for the sustainable development strategy

(Vietnam's Agenda 21) also identifies that women belong to 1 of the 7 priority social groups for sustainable development in Vietnam.

The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam is a concrete example of the institutionalisation of gender equality targets with the overall goal being 'improving the quality of women's material and mental life, creating all conditions to effectively implement the fundamental rights and bringing into full play the role of women in all political, economic, cultural and educational fields.' Apart from this overall goal, the Strategy also sets out 5 concrete objectives and 20 quantitative targets to eliminate discrimination against women, ensure women's equal rights in the fields of labour-employment, education, health care, and improve the quality and efficiency of women's participation in political, economic, cultural, social fields and leadership as well as enhance capacity of national machinery for the advancement of women. The Strategy further identifies that the integration of gender issues in planning and implementing public policies is one of the 8 key solutions.

On the basis of this Strategy, on March 18, 2002, the NCFAW adopted the Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the year 2005, the first phase of the 10-Year Strategy. This Plan is a component that has been integrated into Vietnam's Socio-Economic Development Plan for 2001-2005. So far, Vietnam has been able to reach and surpass many targets of the Action Plan and in June 2006, an Action Plan from now to the year 2010 has been adopted with many new contents in order to meet and surpass the targets set in the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women.

The said policies and measures have been widely disseminated and concretised through specific action plans. The Ministries, agencies and all the provinces and cities under direct Central management have formulated and deployed their own plans of action for the advancement of women in their respective areas and localities. The acceleration of gender-related activities has brought about a strong change in the society's awareness and action over gender discrimination issues. Gender perspective in Vietnam have been introduced, studied and elevated into a methodology and gender integration has become a strategic solution that the Prime Minister asked all ministries, agencies and levels to implement to materialise the targets on gender equality and women advancement. This further shows Vietnam's huge efforts and high determination in implementing CEDAW.

The Government has also applied various specific measures to promote the equality between men and women, particularly in identifying the retirement age, retirement benefits and payment, allowances and social insurance policy, maternity leave allowance, etc. for female labours; identifying the minimum ratio of females in the leadership of various levels of administration as well as

the training courses and specific measures to protect mothers and pregnant women, etc. The Vietnamese State also commits itself to the fight against the exploitation of women for prostitution, violence against women and trafficking in women and children through the strictest legislative, executive and judicial measures, considering this as the permanent political task to ensure the health, dignity and honour of women and children.

Institutionally speaking, the NCFAW has been consolidated, counselling the Prime Minister on legal and policy matters relating to women and coordinating with other concerned government agencies in monitoring, supervising, propagating and mobilising the implementation of the laws and policies mentioned above. The national machinery for the advancement of women has been developed from Centre to the localities and to date, Committees for the Advancement of Women have been established in all Ministries, agencies and 100% of the provinces and cities under direct Central management, 97.8% of the districts and 84.2% of the communes and wards. At the same time, the Vietnamese Women's Union is effectively carrying out specific programmes for women (especially the credit projects for poor women) while participating in the formulation and oversight of laws and policies on equality between men and women. The Council of Female Entrepreneurs has been established to protect the interests of and assist female entrepreneurs in their undertakings. The Women's Affairs Units under the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour also play an active role in the protection of the rights and interests of female labours and gender equality in the State agencies and enterprises. Many funds and projects to assist women and gender equality have been put in motion such as the project on 'Gender in Public Policy', 'Development of Female Enterprises', 'Increasing the ratio of females in elected bodies', and 'Changing/Licensing Land Use Right Certificate enlisting the names of both husband and wife', etc.

3. Vietnam's achievements in the implementation of CEDAW, particularly in promoting gender equality in all fields and enhancing the role and position of women in the family and society.

The achievements made by Vietnam in the last 5 years in this area are very much significant. The gender gaps in most political, economic, social, health, educational, labour-employment and cultural areas have been narrowed down considerably. Vietnamese women occupy 49% of the labour force, playing an important role in the social life and the country's development. The 'Vietnam Gender Assessment' Report released in December 2006 by the World Bank (WB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and Canada International Development Agency (CIDA) finds out that Vietnam is among the leading countries of the world in terms of the ratio of women's participation in economic activities and

is one of the leading nation in the field of gender equality. Vietnam is also seen as a country that makes the fastest change in decreasing the gender gap in the last 20 years in East Asia. As the national plans always take into consideration gender issues, it is sure that further strides shall be made in gender equality. Vietnam's Gender Development Index (GDI) has increased from 0.668 in 1998 to 0.708 in 2004, ranking 80 out of 136 countries and there is almost no gap with the Human Development Index (0.709).

- The number of women in managerial or leadership positions is on the increase. The proportion of women in the elected bodies (National Assembly, People's Council of all levels) is higher than the previous terms. Vietnam leads Asian countries and ranks 18th in the world on women participation in the parliament in the 11th National Assembly (2002-2007) with a ratio of 27.31%. The number of female delegates in provincial People's Council during the term of 2004-2009 is 23.8% while the figures for district and ward/commune levels are at 23.2% and 20.1% respectively. The ratio of women occupying ministerial and similar rank is 12.5%. In the entire country, the number of women taking up the position of Chairperson of the provincial People's Committee is 8 and Deputy Chairperson of the provincial People's Committee is 32, marking an increase of 50% as compared to the previous term. The proportion of women in the People's Committee in other levels of administration has also been increased between the terms of 2004-2009 and 1999-2002: at provincial level, this ratio swells from 6.4% to 23.9% while the figures for district level change from 4.9% to 23% and commune level from 4.5% to 19.5%. The ratio of female judges of the People's Supreme High Court was 33% in 2004. Female entrepreneurs now occupy 20% of the total number, of whom 25% work in the private sector.

- Gender equality is a priority target of Vietnam's National Programme on Education towards the year 2015. Budget allocation for education is rather high in Vietnam as against the current national income (according to ADB) and increases fast: 15% in 2000, 17.4% in 2004, and over 19% in 2006. Male and female students in all schools and grades share the same classrooms and syllabuses under similar learning conditions, scholarship and allowance schemes. In principle, Vietnam has been able to ensure gender equality in education. In 2004, the ratios of above-10 female and male literates are 91% and 96% respectively. Within the age range of 15-24, the literacy ratio of female to male is 0.99 and there is no significant gap between the ratios of male and female student at all educational levels. In the 2003-2004 year, the ratios of female teachers are 100% in pre-school level, 78.3% in elementary school, 68.2% in junior high-school, 56.1% in senior high-school, 65.6% in vocational high-school and 40.5% in college and university. In 2005, the ratio of female post-graduates reached 30.1%.

- Economic independence is a very much important condition to attain women's equality with men and has become the No. 1 target in the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam. Many measures to facilitate women in finding employment, developing their economies, increasing their income and stabilising their and their families' life have been taken from the Centre to the localities. According to statistics quoted in the Vietnam Gender Assessment Report of December 2006 by the WB, ADB, DFID and CIDA, 83% of females and 85% of males in the working age have jobs. The gender gap in terms of salary and wage has also been reduced from 78% in 1998 to 83% in the urban areas and 85% in the rural ones in the present time as compared with respective figures for men. Among the 2.9 million vocational trainees of the period of 2001-2003, over 30% were females and 46.5% of the 7.5 million labours finding employment during 2001-2005 were female. More than 40% of the annual number of labours finding new employment is females with 46.5% of whom in the public sector. At present, women occupy 19% of the leadership positions, 41.5% in highly skilled professions, 58.5% in middle range professions. The ratio of time utilisation among rural women is increasing continuously and reached the average of 77.2% in 2003 and 80.2% in 2005, showing no much difference with men.

- Vietnam has got the legal, policy and institutional frameworks on healthcare as well as an established medical network in the entire country. In 2005, over 90% of women got access to medical services. The health of pregnant and delivering women has been thoroughly cared for and significantly improved. As such, maternal mortality rate shrank from 105/100,000 living newborns in 1990 to 85/100,000 in 2004. The average number of prenatal checks-up of a pregnant woman increased from 1.9 in 1999 to 2.5 in 2003. The rate of delivering women receiving medical care reaches over 95% (98% in cities and delta areas).

- The reforms made in credit policy and poverty reduction programmes have really provided women with better access to Credit Assistance Funds. By December 2002, the number of women-headed poor households receiving credits occupied 60% of the total loans, marking an increase of 20% as against 1999. Credit funds working through the Women's Union are considered as of high efficiency (with the rate of debt return reaching over 99%). By December 2006, over 10 million poor women got access to loans and credits for production development from the Women's Unions under the payment orders of the Government's Bank of Social Policies.

Most recently, the Prime Minister has made the decision to allocate VND 40 billion (approx. US\$ 2.6 million) from the State budget to the Women's Union to set up a support fund for poor women for poverty reduction.

4. Outstanding matters and challenges in CEDAW implementation.

Apart from the important and fundamental achievements mentioned above, Vietnam still faces many difficulties and challenges in the implementation of CEDAW.

- Gender stereotyping and the society's attitude of giving preference to male over female, especially in the family remain and are reflected in the preference of boys to girls, seeing household cores as purely a woman's affairs, etc. The average daily working hour of women is 13 while it is only 9 for men. As such, they have little time left for learning, relax and entertainment or other social activities as compared to men.

- Access to education by female children and women of the ethnic minorities in the remote and mountainous areas is more difficult and obstructed than boys and men because they have to work to assist their families, lacking the conditions to join boarding schools far from their homes and partly due to the custom of early marriage. The rate of women holding high degrees and titles is much lower than men.

- There remains a gap between laws and law enforcement as a number of legal provisions are yet to be appropriate to reality and the oversight mechanism is still loose. A number of legal provisions for the protection of women's rights have not been applied as sanction measures are absent or remain at just the level of administrative fines.

- Though the rate of women in leadership and managerial positions increases considerably, it however remains at low level incommensurate to ratio of women in society. In terms of labour and employment, though there is not much gap in the participation in economic activities, women's average income is still lower than that of men. The rate of trained female labours is also lower than that of men.

- Healthcare service for women, especially reproductive healthcare for ethnic minority women of the remote and difficult areas, is yet to be sufficient. Abortion due to unsafe sex, particularly among young female adolescents and women, is on the increase, seriously affecting their reproductive and sexual health. HIV/AIDS transmission in women and mother-to-child transmission are yet to be curbed.

- Women abuse in family is still observed in both the urban and rural areas and in all social groups. The notion considering this as purely private and family-related is still rather popular in society.

- Vietnam is also facing a number of new challenges arising from the negative impacts of the market economy and the expansion of international interactions, especially the problem of trafficking in women for prostitution purpose, wrong-doings in the marriage service for women looking for foreign husbands are becoming thrusting social problems.

5. Directions and measures for the time to come.

In order to bring into full play the achievements made and overcome the outstanding problems, in the time to come, the NCFAW plans to propose to the Government a number of measures as follows:

- The legal, mechanism and institutional systems on gender equality need to be further reviewed and improved. The coming into effect of the Law on Gender Equality on July 1st, 2007 is an important legal step forward contributing to the promotion of equality between men and women and the advancement of women in Vietnam.

- In terms of institution, it is necessary to build the capacity and enhance the efficiency of the NCFAW, increasing the resources for activities conducted for the advancement of women while at the same time attaching importance to training of gender specialists and experts for the branches and localities so as to proactively implement gender integration activities. The Vietnamese Women's Union must also consolidate its role as the representative and protector of women's legitimate interests. At the same time, it is necessary to provide social criticism over the laws and policies relating to women.

- It is further necessary to accelerate the integration of gender perspectives into all strategies, plans and socio-economic development targets; the promotion of solutions for poverty reduction works, job creation, education, vocational training and healthcare for women to most effectively bring the Law on Gender Equality into life.

- Enhancement of the awareness on gender equality, laws and policies for women, particularly in the rural, remote and far areas must be furthered. On the other hand, there must be sterner measures to combat violence, prostitution, trafficking in women while at the same time developing more tools to provide legal assistance and victim assistance to minimise the impacts on women.

- It is further necessary to mobilise more international resources for the promotion of gender equality and women's advancement, encouraging investors and donors to participate in Vietnam's programmes and projects in this area, enhancing the cooperation with other countries and international organisations to learn more experience in the settlement of gender-related issues and

coordinating to combat trafficking in women and children across national borders in the time to come.

Madame Chair,

Distinguished Committee members,

In short, it could be said that Vietnam has been able to make fundamental and important achievements in the course of implementation of CEDAW in the recent years. However, Vietnam also faces many difficulties and challenges, requiring us to further our efforts in this field. We can reconfirm the strong commitment and determination of the State of Vietnam in implementing at best the provisions of CEDAW and fulfil the Millennium Development Goal on gender equality before the year 2015. On this occasion, we would like to express our sincere thanks to and deep appreciation for the precious support and assistance that CEDAW Committee, international organisations, donors and other countries have extended to us in the cause of promoting equality and advancement of Vietnamese women in the recent years.

The Government of Vietnam looks forward to having stronger international cooperation in the field of gender equality and the promotion women's rights and advancement. Today's session with the Committee is indeed a good opportunity to enhance our mutual understanding. We hope that you would provide us with precious comments and constructive recommendations to help us further improve our policies and measures to best implement the provisions of CEDAW in the interests of Vietnamese women and for the fulfilment of the common goals of women in the entire world, for peace, progress, equality and development in the 21st century.

Thank you very much for your patience, Madame Chair and distinguished Committee members./.