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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF THE HEAD OF THE VIETNAM DELEGATION
At the 61st session of the CEDAW Committee
Geneva, July 10, 2015

Madam Chair,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Vietnamese delegation, I wish to extend my warmest greetings to all Committee members. I also thank the Committee for giving my team the opportunity to update you about the CEDAW implementation in Vietnam.

Today, it is an honor that I am joined by Ambassador Nguyen Trung Thanh, Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the UN and representatives from the Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam.

Madam Chair,

During the development of the report, the Vietnamese Government instructed the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and other relevant agencies to open consultations with United Nations organizations, political-social mass organizations and non-governmental organizations through seminars, workshops or by written comments. The Committee on Social Affairs of the National Assembly also provided their comments and inputs for finalization of the report.

Let me now update you on the achievements, challenges and future directions of Viet Nam in implementing the Convention.

1. Development of laws, policies and programs relating to implementation of CEDAW

Enhancing laws and legislation

Since the last dialogue between the Government of Vietnam and the CEDAW Committee in early 2007, Viet Nam has shown strong political commitments towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. This was evident in the process for development of laws, policies, for instance:

- The Constitution 2013 stipulates that: "Male and female citizens are equal in all aspects. The State needs to issue policies to ensure the rights and opportunities

to gender equality; the State, the society and families need to create conditions for the comprehensive development of women, promoting their roles in the society; gender-based discrimination is strictly prohibited". This is the first time the issue of gender-based discrimination is stated in the highest legal document of Viet Nam;

- The revised Labour Code (2012) increases the length of maternity leave of female employees from 4 months to 6 months; and for the first time regulations on prevention of sexual harassment at work was put in place;

- The revised Social Insurance Law (2014), for the first time ever, regulates the paternity leave to enable male employees to have more time to take care of their new-born children and share household responsibilities with their wives;

- The revised Law on Land (2013) continues to reaffirm and ensure the equal rights of women to ownership of land between spouses;

- The revised Law on Marriage and Family (2014) for the first time stipulates to recognize the chore work and other tasks related to maintain family life as paid labour; spouses are equal in their rights and obligations in the creation, possession, use and making decision on the common property; no differentiation on the importance of unpaid care work and paid work in the family;

- The Law on Vocational Education (2013) stipulates the women-related policy in which the learners who are women, rural workers participating in short-training programs are supported with reduction and/or exemption of training fees;

- The first-ever Occupational Safety and Health Act (2015) states the policy of the State in the expansion of the coverage in ensuring occupational safety and health for the informal sector where the majority of workers are women.

Policies, strategies, programs and specific activities

The Government of Viet Nam has issued many policies and approved, implemented many strategies, programs and action plans on gender equality and empowerment of women, including, notably:

- The National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011-2020 approved by the Government sets the target that "by 2020, basically, ensuring substantive equality between men and women on opportunity, participation and enjoyment in the fields of politics, economy, culture and society, contributing to the rapid and sustainable development of the country".

- Accordingly, the National Program on Gender Equality 2011-2015 was approved with the commitment of allocating approximately USD 50 millions from the State budget and mobilizing other resources to carry out the Program with focus in the three main topics: i) raising awareness, changing behavior on gender equality; ii) improving the capacity and efficiency of State management on gender equality; iii) piloting the supporting services for implementation of gender equality, reducing gender gaps in some regions and sectors which remain high level of gender inequality...

- Many other national strategies and programs have made positive impacts on further strengthening access to social services for women and protect the rights,

anti-discrimination, such as: the National Strategy on Care and Protection of People's Health 2011-2020, which aims to reduce maternal mortality rates; the National Strategy on Ethnic Affairs until 2020, which sets out specific goals on policies towards ethnic minority women; the National Action Program on Prevention against Domestic Violence by 2020 that aims to detect and deal with acts of domestic violence and provide support to the victims of domestic violence; the National Action Program on Child Protection and the Programme on Prevention and Reduction of Child Labor 2015-2020 aiming at reduction of the number of children, particularly the girls, from school dropout, with the long-term goal of narrowing the development gap...

The international community has recorded the efforts of Viet Nam with encouraging achievements in gender equality. According to the 2012 ranking on gender inequality index (GII) by the United Nations, Viet Nam ranks 47th out of 187 nations, compared to that of 58th out of 136 nations in 2010 .

2. Updates of information on status of the implementation of CEDAW in some specific areas:

Madame Chair,

Now, I would like to share some updates on implementation of the Convention in some specific areas:

Mainstreaming gender equality in the development of legal documents

Viet Nam sets a target that by 2015, 80% of legal documents have been mainstreamed with gender equality promotion and elimination of all forms of gender discrimination. According to the Vietnamese regulations, all the draft laws, ordinances, resolutions must undergo gender auditing by the National Assembly Committee on Social Affairs. All the Decrees, Prime Minister's Decisions must undergo gender auditing by the Ministry of Justice. In fact, Vietnam has reached these targets.

Organization, machinery and resources to perform gender equality

Since 2008, the Ministry of Labour-Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) is the focal agency to assist the Government in performing the state management on gender equality. Other ministries collaborate to implement state management of gender equality within their respective sectors. People's Committees at all levels perform state management of gender equality as assigned.

The state management machinery on gender equality is established from central to local level. At central level, the inter-sectoral organization-known as the National Committee for the advancement of women is established and chaired by Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and members are leaders from 18 Ministries. At provincial and district level, this Committee is led by the Vice Chair of People's Committee.

Every year, the staffs working in gender equality are trained and retrain to update knowledge and skills on the job.

Communication to Eliminate gender stereotypes

In the National program on gender equality period 2011 – 2015, there is one separate project on communication, awareness raising, behavior change

communication on gender equality. The Radio, Television and newspapers regularly have news, articles, reportages reflecting on the theme of women and gender equality. Some local television or radio has broadcasted in ethnic minority languages. During the past 5 years, government agencies, in collaboration with many organizations, organize many media campaigns on the occasion of the International Day on prevention of violence against women and girls; contest or creative camps for gender equality, etc. Gender bias cultural and information products are being seized.

In the political field

Vietnam has female representatives in all highest leading agencies of the Party and Government: 2 member of Politburo, 1 member of the Party Central Committee Secretariat, 2 Vice Chairwomen of the National Assembly, 1 Vice President, 11 Ministers and Ministerial level position holders. Women accounts for 25% of the members the National Assembly and People's Council accounts for about 25%. 50% of Ministries or government agencies have female leaders. Particularly, the Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs has female Ministers in three consecutive terms. At the local level, 60% of provinces have female leaders.

Economic, labor and employment sectors

The gender gap in the field of economic, labor and employment is being narrowed down. The rate of women as enterprise directors / CEO and farm owners has been constantly increased to 28% and 9% respectively.

Among the total number of jobs being created during 2011-2015, the percentage of female workers is nearly 49% and male worker accounts for 51%. There is almost no considerable difference between men in women in terms of job creation. Similarly, there is no difference in the unemployment rate by sex.

Education and training

- The Government of Vietnam adopts the "Program on building a learning society 2012-2020". During the implementation of this Program, there has been increasing rate of enrollment in each grade. The number of female students from junior secondary to tertiary level is always higher than that of male students. The government is particularly committed to eliminate illiteracy and has a National program of illiteracy elimination, which devotes special attention to women and girls in remote and ethnic minority areas. As of 2014, the literacy rate of ethnic minority people reached 93.76%, among which ethnic minority women reached 93.4% (exceeding the target of 90% set in 2015).

- The percentage of women with higher education is increasing. In 2015, 47% of the masters and 20% of doctors are women as compared to the target of 40% and 20% respectively in the National Strategy on Gender Equality.

Healthcare

Under the CEDAW concluding observations in previous meeting, the Government of Vietnam has made considerable efforts to ensure the equal rights to access to health care, ensure reproductive rights, delivery the services of pregnancy, childbirth, safe motherhood, family planning for women; ensure

there are no barriers for people with HIV / AIDS in accessing to human rights as compared to other people. Among those, special focus is given for women from ethnic minorities, remote areas. Institutionally, Vietnam has issued many important legal documents, programs and strategies to ensure the achievement of the millennium development goals

To date, the implementation has achieved the following results:

- The ratio of maternal mortality at birth decreased from 80 / 100,000 in 2005 to 60 / 100,000 in 2014, ranking number 4th among 10 countries in Southeast Asia and has achieved Millennium Development Goal number 5.
- Child mortality rate decreased rapidly to 14.9 ‰ for children under 1 year old and 22.4 ‰ for children below 5 years of age.
- The percentage of malnourished children under age 5 are reduced sustainably over the years to more than 14% in 2014, exceeding the target of 20.5% under the millennium development goals and reaching this target 7 years ahead of schedule.
- The ratio of HIV / AIDS is controlled below 0.3%; the rate of condom use by sex workers group is over 90%

The indicators on the health of mothers and children of Vietnam is internationally rated as better than countries with similar income levels and is one of 9 countries achieved progress of the goal on reducing maternal mortality

Rural women

Rural women has been a key beneficiary of the Vietnamese Government's priority policies and socio-economic development plans, including those on vocational training for rural workers, the national target programme on sustainable development, the programmes on preferential credits and maternity supports, among others.

49% of the nearly 1.8 million trained rural workers between 2010-2014 was women. More than 80% of the women-led poor families that were eligible and in need of finance had access to low-interest loans from various credit schemes for employment and poverty reduction.

The State's Cash Transfer Programme targeting poor ethnic minority women who has observed the family planning policy has enabled the women to provide better care for their new-born babies and themselves.

Gender equality in family life, step-by-step eliminate gender-based violence

The Vietnamese Government has been investing efforts to promote gender equality in family life and eliminate gender-based violence.

In a survey jointly conducted in 2014 by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs and the Institute for Family and Gender Affairs, more than 64% of

those interviewed claimed that there had been a significant increase in the amount of time men spent on houseworks.

Almost all reported victims of domestic violence have received legal aid, healthcare and other support services at public clinics, social protection facilities and safe shelters.

The Government also issued the Decree 167 on administrative fines for cases of domestic violence in 2013, and stepped up other efforts to diminish domestic violence cases and provide legal aid and support services to victims of domestic violence. Many of the support models were replicated with strong participation from both women and men.

3. Challenges and gaps in Convention implementation

Madam Chair,

Having registered encouraging progresses, we acknowledge that there remain many gaps and challenges in implementing the Convention in order to achieve substantive equality and de facto elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

The first challenge is that the understanding, attitude and behavior of the society and of certain groups, including among policy makers on substantive gender equality remain somewhat limited. This is due to the fact that the deep-seated mindset that privileges men over women—a product from the feudal period and Confucianism remains prevalent today not only within families but rather in various civil, economic, political and social domains.

Another challenge is that gender gaps persist in key areas including politics, economy, education and training, healthcare, especially in the remote, difficult and ethnic minority regions. Persisting gender-based violence with its complexity has exerted serious impacts not only on the individuals concerned but also on the law and order of the society, and the development of the entire nation.

The last but not least is that the Convention implementation asks for enormous resources, not only in terms of finance but also manpower and national machinery while Vietnam has been facing budget constraints and a low level of economic development.

The Government is deeply aware of those gaps and therefore has undertaken a series of interventions, including improvement of the legal framework and policies, development of national plans and programs for gender equality and women empowerment, most notably the National Program on Gender Equality for 2016-2020, the National Plan to Prevent and Suppress Gender-based Violence for 2016-2020 and the National Plan for Comprehensive Education Reforms. The Government has also allocated sufficient resources for implementation of those programs and stepped up international cooperation to share experience and good practice and to engage NGOs, political-social mass organisations with a view to realising all goals on gender equality and non-discrimination against women.

4. CONCLUSION

Madam Chair,

Amid the multiple difficulties, especially in terms of resources, the Vietnamese Government has invested much effort to implement the Convention, hence the many achievements that I have mentioned above.

Nevertheless, Vietnam is aware that achieving substantive equality and non-discrimination against women is a progressive process and also the aspiration of all nations. Despite the achievements made, Vietnam is aware of the challenges ahead that need its redoubled efforts to overcome.

The Vietnamese delegation therefore looks forward to a constructive and productive dialogue with all distinguished Committee members today. Your recommendations will enable Vietnam to cut short the time to achieve substantive equality and elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

I thank you for your kind attention.