

Report to Human Rights Committee (HRC) on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in Vietnam

Submitted by: Good Neighbors International (GNI) in Vietnam

Date: May 22, 2025

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Executive Summary

Good Neighbors International (GNI) has been actively engaged in community development and humanitarian aid in Vietnam since 2005. Through various programs focusing on child protection, women's empowerment, and support for ethnic minority groups, GNI has observed significant progress in the promotion and protection of civil and political rights in Vietnam. GNI Vietnam has actively participated in local dialogues on child protection, gender equality, and education reform, engaging with authorities at commune and district levels. GNI emphasizes rights-based approaches in all programming and collaborates with both government and grassroots actors to align with international human rights norms. However, challenges remain, particularly in areas such as preventing violence against children, access to global citizenship education for poor mountainous children, and participation in decision-making processes for women. This report provides an overview of GNI's observations, achievements, and recommendations to further enhance the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in Vietnam.

Good Neighbors International (GNI) in Vietnam

General Director



Dao Thien Ly

Introduction

Good Neighbors International in Vietnam (GNI) is a member of Good Neighbors, an international humanitarian and development organization operating in 50 countries. Since 2005, GNI has implemented community development projects focused on child rights, women's empowerment, community development, and ethnic minority inclusion across 5 provinces (Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa) and 02 cities (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh city) in Vietnam, with more than 18,000 sponsored children and hundreds of community-based projects annually. This report outlines the current status of civil and political rights in Vietnam from the perspective of GNI's programmatic experiences and presents both progress and remaining challenges.

I. Promotion of Civil and Political Rights through GNI's Work

1. Child Rights and Protection

Access to Education: Education remains a cornerstone of GNI's efforts to empower marginal children and ensure equal access to opportunities. GNI has supported children's education by providing school supplies, scholarships, and infrastructure improvements. The organization has built 17 schools, established 66 school libraries and six reading clubs across rural provinces, distributing more than 200,000 books and nurturing a culture of learning. Special attention has been given to digital inclusion for girls in mountainous areas through computer literacy classes and infrastructure support in under-resourced schools. Furthermore, GNI has collaborated with the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to expand psychosocial support services nationwide. From 2022 to 2024, this partnership trained over 14,600 school staff and developed national guidelines for school-based counseling, with the aim of fostering safer, more inclusive learning environments for vulnerable children, particularly girls. These efforts have contributed to higher school enrollment and retention rates, especially among girls and children from ethnic minority groups.

2. Advancing Girls' Empowerment and Human Rights

Vietnam has national mechanisms to prevent torture, domestic violence and improve access to legal aid. However, community awareness of channels to report and seek support when cases occur is still uneven, especially among poor ethnic minorities. Therefore, GNI has made efforts to conduct communication events to raise community and child awareness in coordination with local children/people's clubs and commune-level authorities. GNI Vietnam has made significant strides in protecting and promoting the rights of girls through a holistic approach that combines child protection systems, raise community awareness of children's rights, anti-child marriage advocacy. To strengthen the child protection ecosystem at the community level, GNI has developed a grassroots-oriented model anchored in local participation. The organization facilitated the establishment of six Child Protection Committees at both district and commune levels, incorporating local government officials, Women's Union leaders, and youth representatives. These structures serve as the backbone for sustained child safeguarding in rural areas. Complementing this governance system, GNI founded 12 child protection clubs involving nearly 300 children—approximately 70% of whom are girls—empowering them to become agents of change within their communities. Two community-based child protection hotlines were launched, alongside widespread dissemination of hotline access through public

signage in 22 communes. In total, 34 training sessions on child rights were conducted across nine target communes, and girls were ensured meaningful participation in more than 50% of all GNI project assessments and planning activities. These project activities have improved early detection and case management of child abuse and neglect, aligned with Articles 24 and 23 of ICCPR.

3. Combating Early Marriage in Ethnic Areas

In Ha Giang and Hoa Binh provinces, GNI's long-term "Children Are Not Brides" initiative—using community theatre, youth clubs, and peer education—has contributed to declining rates of child marriage in pilot communes, in support of girls' autonomy and informed consent in family matters. Addressing harmful traditional practices, GNI launched the "Children Are Not Brides" campaign—a three-phase intervention carried out between 2020 and 2023 in Quang Binh district of Ha Giang province. This project targeted early and forced marriage among ethnic minority youth through education, communication, and direct support. Hundreds of children aged 12 to 18 were engaged in club activities, training sessions, and creative contests that increased their awareness of gender equality, legal protections, and reproductive rights. The initiative extended support to adolescent mothers by improving maternal healthcare services, distributing childcare kits, and upgrading facilities in commune health centers. Additionally, comprehensive sexuality education was introduced to 885 students and their teachers, fostering a safe and informed learning environment.

3. Women and Ethnic Minorities's Participation and Empowerment

Economic Empowerment

GNI's economic empowerment initiatives have opened new pathways for rural women and girls to build resilient livelihoods and express cultural identity. GNI has implemented programs to promote women's economic independence, including training in financial management skills, production-business planning, and revolving capital support. These project activities have helped women generate income, improve their livelihoods, and achieve greater autonomy. Over 1,000 women in Hoa Binh, Tuyen Quang, and Thanh Hoa have gained control over household income and strengthened their community leadership roles. In Ha Giang, we supported the establishment of a brocade cooperative managed by 15 Pa Then ethnic minority women. These artisans not only earn sustainable incomes by preserving traditional weaving but also mentor local youth, hosting trainings that reached over 1,000 participants and visitors in 2024 alone. In another innovative livelihood model, 12 women's groups involving 334 members were trained in sustainable worm farming, linking climate-smart agriculture to women's economic inclusion. With GNI's technical and market linkage support, these initiatives have boosted household income while promoting circular waste management.

Participation in Decision-Making

Efforts have been made to encourage women's participation in community decision-making processes, such as inviting them to participate in community representative meetings for project phase design, annual monitoring meetings and project phase evaluations.

GNI facilitates awareness-raising sessions on gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and legal protections under national and international frameworks, promoting women's informed participation in civic life.

GNI's inclusive development model prioritizes ethnic minority communities in hard-to-reach areas, ensuring access to education, primary health care, and community participation through Community Development Committees. GNI also empowers ethnic youth via "Global Citizenship Education" projects, enhancing intercultural dialogue, SDG awareness, and civic engagement.

II. GNI Observations in Relation to Vietnam's Replies to the HRC

Vietnam has made notable legal reforms to strengthen its human rights framework, including the adoption of Resolution No. 27-NQ/TW (2022) to enhance rule of law and citizen rights. GNI welcomes these reforms and recognizes increased governmental efforts in public service digitalization and community-based consultation mechanisms. During 20 years of operation in Vietnam, GNI cooperated quite smoothly with authorities at all levels and specialized agencies at the ministerial level on child protection, education and community development. We also noticed there were still some gaps remaining in the practical enforcement of rights, especially for marginalized communities.

1. On Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality (Articles 2, 3, 26)

Vietnam's national report highlights commendable progress in advancing gender equality, including the enactment of the 2022 Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control and increased representation of women in leadership roles. However, based on GNI's field experience, gender-based discrimination and child marriage persist, particularly in remote and ethnic minority regions such as Ha Giang and Hoa Binh. Findings from the "Children Are Not Brides" project reveal that limited access to reproductive health education, career pathfinder counselling continue to lead girls into early marriage. To address these challenges, GNI recommends greater investment in localized implementation of gender-related laws, including the expansion of reproductive health counseling and child rights education mandatory training for commune-level staff working in ethnic minority areas. And continue to support resources for them to carry out propaganda activities on child protection laws, marriage and family laws in the community.

2. On Child Protection and Access to Justice (Articles 6, 7, 24)

Vietnam's state report highlights the existence of national mechanisms for preventing torture, domestic violence, and improving access to legal aid. In practice, however, GNI has observed several gaps. GNI appreciates the cooperation of the Department of Children, and local authorities at all levels in cooperating with GNI to report and promptly support cases of child rights abuse. Although GNI has supported the establishment of child protection volunteer networks and hotlines across the 07 project districts, the activities of these networks and hotlines have been reduced or stopped after GNI handed over to the localities - mainly due to lack of resources to maintain them. Low levels of legal awareness among community members continue to hinder meaningful participation and protection of children.

Vietnam has made measurable efforts to incorporate child rights and abuse prevention into its national curriculum, from preschool through high school. However, implementation remains inconsistent due to gaps in teacher capacity, lack of tailored educational resources, and cultural

sensitivity around certain topics. Continued investment, especially in training, curriculum development, and multi-stakeholder engagement including INGOs, is essential to ensure that every child—particularly in rural and ethnic communities—receives comprehensive protection and rights education.

Furthermore, although Vietnam has built Peace Houses and child-friendly courts, psychosocial support in schools remains uneven, especially in mountainous and rural areas. To address these gaps, GNI recommends that local authorities plan to allocate budgets for training and maintaining community-based child protection networks. In addition, priority should be given to expanding mental health and social work services in schools, especially in underserved areas.

3. On Ethnic Minority Rights and Participation (Articles 27, 25)

Vietnam's report describes substantial investment in socio-economic development for ethnic minorities through the National Target Program (2021–2030) and increased political representation. According to GNI's insights, to enable child- and women-led consultation in policy-making processes affecting ethnic communities, they first need to be empowered with rights awareness and relevant skills. Next, they need to be supported with the necessary facilities to participate in online and offline forums to discuss issues related to minority communities. GNI's programs such as "Children in Action for the Future" and "Global Youth Network" have also shown that ethnic minority children rarely have the opportunity to participate in national policy dialogues. Our project activities such as the Pa Then women's cooperative, youth clubs and global citizenship education have provided opportunities for them to become aware of their community's issues such as poverty and pollution and take action to solve them. GNI recommends investing in digital inclusion and establishing mechanisms to allow ethnic minorities, especially children, to participate in giving opinions on issues related to them.

4. On Civil and Political Rights – Freedom of Expression and Assembly (Articles 19–22)

Vietnam's reply affirms legal guarantees on freedom of expression and the press, citing high internet penetration and legal protections for journalists.

While Vietnam has expanded access to information through digital platforms, restrictive laws (e.g. Cybersecurity Law No. 22/2018/QH14) state that the space for exchange is monitored: Content deemed "anti-state" or "harmful to national security", although not specifically defined, may be censored or removed. This has led to hesitation and careful self-censorship by INGOs and youth networks when they want to discuss issues such as civil rights, the environment, and policy advocacy.

GNI has supported youth clubs, community civic groups and media led by children or women to promote constructive civic expression. In parallel, GNI also coordinated with the Department of Children (Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs) to organize a Training Course on Child Protection in the Media (2021). Participants were journalists, media workers and local partners who are carrying out work related to child protection. The training provided them with the knowledge and skills needed when working with children or including information and images related to children in news articles and media products.

We recommend that regulatory agencies in Vietnam provide more specific guidance with definitions and procedures for implementing the Law on Cyber Security and Information Security in Cyberspace.

5. On Freedom of Religion and Cultural Rights (Articles 18, 27)

Vietnam affirms freedom of religion and support for cultural preservation, including land access for religious and ethnic communities. Project local authorities have discussed with GNI on piloting cooperation in community tourism models associated with promoting indigenous culture. GNI supports the preservation of cultural identity through projects like the Pa Then Brocade Cooperative in Quang Binh District - Ha Giang province, which empowers ethnic women to retain and teach traditional weaving. We recommend continuing mainstream ethnic cultural heritage into education and tourism policies, and provide institutional support for minority-led cooperatives.

III. Conclusion

GNI recognizes Vietnam's progress in legal reforms and national strategies addressing civil and political rights. However, GNI's field experience reveals gaps in implementation, particularly for children, girls, and ethnic minorities in rural and mountainous areas. Based on our observations and experiences, GNI offers the following recommendations to enhance the implementation of the ICCPR in Vietnam:

1. **Strengthen Enforcement of Child Protection Laws:** Ensure full implementation of child protection measures in ethnic minority and rural areas, with increased investment in social services and trained personnel. GNI recommends the development and rollout of national-level interdisciplinary training programs for teachers, police officers, legal professionals, and healthcare staff on child rights and child protection. As a civil society actor with existing partnerships with the Department of Children and Ministry of Education and Training, GNI is ready to contribute technical inputs, pilot training models, and support the integration of community-based child protection approaches into national systems.
2. **Enhance Educational Access:** Invest in infrastructure and resources to ensure all children, especially those from marginalized communities, have access to quality education.
3. **Promote Women's Leadership:** Implement programs that encourage and support women's participation in political and community leadership roles. Enhance Women's Political Participation: Introduce quota-based models or affirmative measures to increase female representation in commune-level People's Committees and other decision-making bodies.
4. **Formalizing civil society-government partnerships to deliver community-based human rights education and protection:** Recognize non-formal civic learning programs, such as GNI's initiatives, as complementary to national education reforms and tools for civic engagement. Expanding school-based services for psychological counseling, reproductive health, and civic education. Ensuring youth and ethnic

minority children's voices are reflected in national and local policymaking through participatory mechanisms.

5. **Increase Collaboration:** Foster partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and civil society to address human rights challenges effectively.

GNI Vietnam remains committed to supporting inclusive development and advancing the rights of all individuals in Vietnam, guided by the principles of dignity, equity, and participation.

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