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IPU Committee on
United Nations Affairs

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ADVISORY GROUP TO THE IPU COMMITTEE ON UNITED NATIONS AFFAIRS

PARLIAMENTARY FIELD MISSION TO VIET NAM FOCUS ON UNITED NATIONS REFORM

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Participants:

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INTRODUCTION

I. United Nations reform

1. Faced with ever growing demands from its membership, the United Nations has resolved to deliver its services in a way that is more attuned to the needs of the 21st century. This means working with greater efficiency and in a less fragmented fashion, in close coordination with the government partners, the donor community and the multilateral funding institutions. It also means adapting to a new panorama in which the UN is no longer principally involved in directing and implementing development projects, but rather focusing upon the provision of the kind of advisory services that it alone has the expertise to offer.

2. The General Assembly's Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of 2004, which called for the organization to be more effective in the field of development, forms the basis of the UN reform process. In November 2006, when the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence issued the report called 'Delivering as One', UN reform was taken a step further and the 'One UN' concept was born. As the title of the report suggests, the intention is to re-organize the inner logic of the system by harmonizing, at country level, the work of the various agencies, funds and programmes that work under the United Nations banner.

3. The One UN reform is being tested by eight pilot countries: Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Rwanda, Pakistan, Tanzania, Uruguay and Viet Nam. The implementation of the reform at country level is built around the concept of the 'Five Ones': One UN Programme, One Office, One UN Budgetary Framework, One set of management Practices, and One Leader. It is understood that "Delivering as One" will require the UN to do business differently. Crucial to the reform's success are much tighter cooperation among the myriad UN agencies, programmes and funds, an upgrading of the UN's professional skills, simplification and harmonization of business practices, and speaking with one voice at all levels.

4. A significant part of the reform involves the UN becoming a more effective partner to the national Government, and partnership and Government ownership are thus central themes to the exercise. Likewise, strong political and financial support is required from the donors who support the One UN Fund for the reform to succeed. Large-scale change within the UN at country level will depend on sustained political support by Member States and bold decision-making at UN Headquarters.

II. Viet Nam and the UN presence

5. Viet Nam has an estimated population of 84 million, with women accounting for 51 per cent of the total. Ho Chi Minh City is the largest urban area, with a population estimated at 5.5 million. The country counts a total of 54 different ethnic groups.

6. In the past few decades Viet Nam has gone through a period of rapid socio-economic development. After reunification in 1975, Viet Nam switched its focus to reconstruction and development, and under the *Doi Moi* (renovation) process, launched in 1986, the country moved from a planned centralized economy based on public ownership to a multi-sector market-based economy.

7. More recently, Viet Nam has sought to accelerate the progress of national industrialization and modernization. It is now ranked as a middle-income country. The GDP growth in 2007 was estimated to be 8.4%, one of the world's highest, although this pace is likely to decelerate as a result of the current global downturn.

8. Behind this optimistic scenario there are significant challenges. Economic growth has ushered in an increase in inequality, particularly a widening rural-urban income gap. Poverty rates remain high, particularly among ethnic minorities, which comprise 14 percent of the population and live mainly in remote upland areas. Despite advances in gender equality, significant hurdles remain for women to achieve an equal place in society. Young women are also at risk from unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Nationally, the number of people living with HIV is increasing rapidly, fuelled by risky sexual behaviour and injecting drug use.

9. The UN System in Viet Nam is represented by a complex array of agencies and offices: FAO, IFAD, ILO, IOM, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN-HABITAT, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNIFEM, UNODC, UNV, WHO, as well as the IMF and the World Bank. Along with the work done by each body, there are four joint programmes covering, respectively, ethnic minorities, HIV, avian influenza, and youth. In 2006, a joint government-UN-donor task force known as the Tripartite Task Force was set up to draft plans to achieve One United Nations in Viet Nam at an early stage. There are also Programme Coordination Groups (PCG) which have been developed as part of the One UN Initiative in Viet Nam to deliver results in a more coordinated and effective manner. The 11

PCGs in Viet Nam bring together staff from various UN organizations working together on a common theme, such as HIV, social and development policy, education or disaster management. The objective of the new coordination structure is to enhance efficiencies, improve coherence, and reduce transaction costs. Each PCG is jointly chaired by a representative of the United Nations and a member of the government of Viet Nam.

10. The role of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office is to oversee the coordination of the UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes and to direct the implementation of UN reform in the country. Most UN agencies have their country offices in the capital city, Hanoi.

III. The National Assembly of Viet Nam

11. The National Assembly is a 493-member unicameral body elected to a five-year term. In Viet Nam the Communist Party of Vietnam is the sole legal depository of political power. Generally each constituency fields five candidates for the National Assembly, of whom three are selected. In 2007, a total of 876 candidates participated in the elections, of whom the vast majority were members of the Communist Party or endorsed by the party. In addition, 31 self-nominated candidates stood for election. The polls resulted in 450 seats going to the Communist Party, 42 to non-Party members, and one to an independent.

12. Constitutionally, the National Assembly is the highest state-power organization and the highest-level representative body of the people. It elects the President, the Prime Minister and the government, and selects the key officials in the state judiciary. It adopts and amends the constitution and oversees the implementation of state plans and budgets. Along with the Ethnic Council, the Assembly has nine Committees.

13. The Assembly holds two sessions a year, each lasting some four weeks. Bills are drafted mostly by the government and put to the parliament for discussion and approval. Between sessions, the activities are carried out by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly and other Assembly bodies. About two thirds of the parliament's membership is part-time, many of the part-timers holding different offices in the Party, the government and the legislature, with the most senior having positions in all three.

14. Within the broader context of reforms in Viet Nam, the National Assembly has grown in stature over recent years, exercising an increasing measure of power through its legislative and scrutiny functions. Future developments will need to see a number of issues being addressed. For example, the membership turnover at each election amounts to some 70 per cent, implying a major training effort for new members each time. Preparedness is also an issue. The information requirements of the members are poorly served, with files sometimes provided with far too little time for their perusal prior to the debate. Internet use is however widespread in the country, with good connectivity.

15. Oversight powers are growing. Parliamentary question time is said to be a genuine exercise rather than a pro-forma one. On financial matters, the State audit institution, a body that performs serious work despite being understaffed, has been reporting to parliament since 2006. The State audit report is submitted by the government inspectorate, which also reports on anti-corruption measures. Corruption is said to be a problem, not least because of the low wages of senior civil servants. A minister's salary was estimated at 350 USD per month, the average wage in Viet Nam being some 150 USD.

IV. Purpose of the IPU field visit to Viet Nam

16. The visit to Viet Nam by the Advisory Group to the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs followed in the wake of its visit to Tanzania in September 2008. Both Tanzania and

Viet Nam belong to the group of pilot countries experimenting with the United Nations reform initiative, as described above. The purpose of the IPU visit was to gather information at first hand about the progress made in the One United Nations reform and, more generally, to gain a better understanding of the complexities of United Nations work at country level. Learning about the way country operations are funded and the use to which the various funds are put was also key to the mission, in keeping with both the core mandate of all parliaments to scrutinize the disbursement and use of public monies, and the terms of reference specifically ascribed to the Group.

17. The Group met with the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, Mr. Nguyen Van Son, and the Deputy Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan. The latter accompanied the delegation on some of its visits. It also met the Vice-President of the Assembly for a concluding talk. It held talks with the senior representatives of UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, and UNAIDS, as well as the Lead Economist of the World Bank and the Senior Resident Representative of the IMF. It also spoke with the UN country team and the UNDP Governance Group. Talks were held with the One UN Donor Group, comprising representatives of the United Kingdom, Canada (chair), Netherlands and France. These three represent the group of donors who contribute to the One UN Fund. At the national ministerial level, it met with the deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Deputy Minister of Finance. Some of the key points arising from these meetings are outlined below.

18. The pattern of the parliament's involvement in the mission differed from the IPU Group's previous field visit. In Tanzania, the Group was accompanied throughout by a delegation of three national parliamentarians, who were able to take advantage of the meetings to acquaint themselves better with the details of UN operations in their country and the progress of the reforms, and express the parliamentary viewpoint on a number of issues. This proved to be a salutary exercise given that the Speaker of the Parliament of Tanzania had expressly stated, at the start of the mission, that the legislature's involvement in United Nations work in his country was minimal.

19. In Viet Nam the deputies of the National Assembly were not present in the meetings in a comparable way. On the other hand, the UN representatives whom the delegation met stated without exception that the relations between their organizations and the National Assembly were good, and that much had been achieved in producing sound legislation through mutual support and cooperation.

V. Meeting with Chairman Nguyen Van Son

20. This first meeting of the IPU group with the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee allowed for an overview of the economic and political developments in Viet Nam. Discussion also broached progress in One United Nations reform and the need for ensuring greater effectiveness in the delivery of international support. It also provided useful information regarding transformation taking place within the National Assembly itself.

21. There was a long history of cooperation and mutual confidence between the authorities of Viet Nam and the United Nations, going back to the difficult years of the post-war economic embargo and international isolation. Throughout the years, the UN had proven to be a trustworthy partner, but with the arrival of new development partners, it had become evident that the UN needed to reform in order to remain a relevant counterpart.

22. Viet Nam was committed to widening its outreach and gradually bringing its own specific contribution to regional and global processes. More recently, these efforts had resulted in Viet Nam joining the World Trade Organization in 2007 and its successful bid to become a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2008. Strengthening national capacities to meet these new responsibilities remained a priority, and the continued support provided by international organizations such as the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union had been greatly appreciated.

23. The last decade had seen significant changes within Viet Nam's political life, and in particular at the level of the National Assembly. The reforms related to the renovation of the organization and operation of the National Assembly, the improvement of election arrangements to increase the quality of MPs, and enhancing the decision-making and oversight functions of the National Assembly.

24. In order to continue to improve the quality of governance, more expertise and a more regular and systematic exchange of information would be required. The ten parliamentary committees of the National Assembly had been exercising a greater role in initiating and drafting legislation, and in that process comprehensive consultations with the UN and other partners had proven to be particularly valuable. Evaluation and supervision were also very important, as parliament debated the national budget and sought to exercise better oversight of official development assistance.

VI. Meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh

25. The Deputy Foreign Minister welcomed the mission and acknowledged the key role that parliaments are called upon to play in helping the United Nations to pursue its reform. Indeed, in the case of Viet Nam, the national authorities themselves had demanded clear and pragmatic measures from their development partners so as to help enhance Viet Nam's development performance and advance steadily towards meeting the MDGs.

26. In June 2005, consultations between the Vietnamese authorities (including members of the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee), national and international donors (including the United Nations Development Program) had led to the adoption of the Hanoi Core Statement on Aid Effectiveness. The Core Statement is a localized, and more far-reaching version of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. It calls for enhanced national ownership, donor alignment with Viet Nam's development, the commitment to use strengthened country systems, and common arrangements for harmonization and simplification, and mutual accountability. The key principles and guidelines included in this document were echoed in the findings of the UN's High-level panel on System-wide coherence which issued its report in November 2006.

27. Overall the One UN reform process was doing fairly well in giving practical effect to the concepts of One Plan, One Budget, One Set of Management Practices, One UN House and One Leader. There was strong support by the Government of Viet Nam for the One UN process to improve effectiveness, and the tripartite engagement with strong leadership by the Government, a committed United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and a supportive donor community was playing a key role in moving the process forward.

28. The Deputy Minister acknowledged that, for the time being, the One UN Steering Committee was structured in such a way as to reflect the tripartite nature of the partnership: government (in particular the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning and Investment); United Nations (represented by the Resident Coordinator); and donor community. The line ministries were not directly involved in that mechanism. The National

Assembly itself was not directly consulted on UN reform issues, although all ministers were also members of parliament.

VII. Meeting with Deputy Finance Minister Pham Sy Danh

29. The Deputy Minister gave an overview of Viet Nam's developments in recent years, and referred to the involvement by the Finance Ministry in the implementation of One UN reform.

30. Efforts were under way to further simplify financial procedures and ensure greater transparency and accountability. Amendments would need to be made to the existing legislative framework, and to that end Viet Nam was benefiting from technical expertise provided by the UN and some bilateral partners (such as Germany) in amending legislation, in particular the State Budget Law. Capacity-building and training programs for public administration were also being implemented, such as a recent World Bank project in support of the Treasury. The State Audit body, which now reported to parliament each year, was also a key institution which requires sustained support. With a population of 90 million, Viet Nam only has 9 local audit offices; capacities clearly needed to be developed.

31. A high proportion of official development assistance (ODA) to the government sector was reflected in the national budget, which was discussed and approved by the National Assembly in November of each year. Donor project funds, however, were not yet ready to go through national mechanisms, although it was expected that with continued reform the situation would gradually change. Clearly, national systems would only be strengthened as they were put to the test and required to manage and effectively account for ODA.

32. The Deputy Minister acknowledged that the National Assembly was playing an increasingly prominent role in financial monitoring, holding deliberations on the national budget and ODA, approving budgetary allocations and making sure that the budget was executed as planned. This was work in progress, and as parliament consolidated its capacity and expertise, the role would develop further.

VIII. Meeting with the United Nations Country Team

33. During the mission to Hanoi, the IPU delegations held several meetings with UN representatives, in the form of a joint discussion with the UN Country Team, individual discussions with the representatives of UNICEF, WHO, UNAIDS and UNDP, and a round-up session with Resident Coordinator John Hendra.

34. Throughout the meetings, Viet Nam was repeatedly referred to as a country where UN reform can and should work, due to the strong tripartite engagement and trust between donors, UN and Government. Both the UN and the Government of Viet Nam are convinced that *"Failure is not an option"*.

35. In the 1980's the United Nations was providing some 60% of the foreign aid entering the country. As Viet-Nam emerged from its post-war isolation, launched a series of ambitious reforms and became an attractive partner for national and international donors, that figure dwindled to a mere 1.7% of ODA to Viet Nam. The UN's most important asset is its credibility and unique expertise. Especially now that the country is moving towards middle-income status, the UN needs to define its comparative advantage as an honest broker, focus more on strategic, upstream policy advice and move away from service delivery.

36. As stipulated in the *Agreed Principles, Objectives and Instruments to achieve One United Nations in Viet Nam*, the comparative advantage of the United Nations lies in support for capacity building; impartial policy support and advice; the provision of objective monitoring and evaluation of development initiatives; access to international experience, expertise and best practice; the promotion of the principles of the United Nations; and support for programmes, projects and initiatives aimed at realizing these principles.

37. In the area of democratic governance, UNDP has been an active partner for many years. The political reform initiated by the authorities of Viet Nam has been supported by UNDP programmes and projects in the fields of parliamentary development (since 1996), public administration reform (since 1992), legal and judiciary reform (since 1995), local governance (since 2000), and in such cross-cutting issues as human rights, civil society organizations and anticorruption (since the beginning of the decade).

38. Challenges that remain and which serve as the basis for continued cooperation between the UN and the authorities of Viet Nam include the following areas:

- transparency and accountability: making government more transparent and accountable to the people;
- people's participation and oversight: creating the space and capacity for elected bodies to represent their constituencies and effectively oversee government and civil society development, through direct versus indirect democracy;
- rule of law and access to justice: reforming and building the capacity of judicial institutions for increasing coherence, transparency and fairness in law implementation;
- decentralization: empowering local governments and making them accountable to their people;
- human rights, including the right to information.

39. As far as the National Assembly of Viet Nam is concerned, the UN has been providing support since the mid-1990s, with a focus on capacity building and policy development, particularly in the areas of legislative review, oversight and representation. The UN has also been working with the National Assembly on a number of substantive issues, including governance, population and reproductive health, HIV-AIDS, domestic violence, and gender equality.

40. Increasingly, work is being conducted directly with Committees of the National Assembly in the form of joint projects (e.g. support to budgetary oversight, supervision of official development assistance), policy research, assistance in the revision of draft laws and monitoring implementation of national laws and international commitments. WHO, for example, has been working closely with the parliamentary Committee for Social Affairs on a number of legislative initiatives, such as the laws on health insurance, clinical diagnostics and therapy, road safety, the revised law on tobacco, as well as draft laws on blood safety or domestic violence.

41. UNAIDS has been working with both national and provincial deputies in developing a coordinated response to the AIDS pandemic. The National Assembly has been instrumental in devising and adopting a new Law on Drugs, which could make a serious contribution to curbing HIV infection from injecting drug use. A promising public-private partnership against AIDS was also developing, with the active involvement of a variety of government agencies and civil society organizations, such as the National Association of People living with AIDS

and the Women's Union (as a mass organization). This partnership will further develop with the application of a new provision according to which draft laws are to be published in advance of parliamentary deliberations, so as to allow for comments from associations, NGOs and other interested parties.

42. Gender mainstreaming has been a constant point of interest in the UN reform. Viet Nam is still Asia's front runner in terms of the number of women in parliament. Efforts have been made to incorporate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into national legislation and to monitor laws and policies to ensure that national legislation, policies and development programmes for ethnic minorities and ethnic minority areas are developed within the CEDAW framework, that they incorporate principles of substantive equality, non-discrimination and state obligation and are in line with the Law on Gender Equality.

43. Based on joint UN-IPU work in the field, the UN has also advocated for gender budgeting and has provided support for enhancing regional female parliamentary caucuses. Recent activities have included training of National Assembly Deputies on how to mainstream gender equality into legislative work, including gender sensitive budgeting, and the organization of a regional workshop to facilitate dialogue among female parliamentary caucuses of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia. In addition, a recently formed Female Parliamentarians Group is being supported by the UN through the UN Gender Joint Programme, which is currently being established.

44. In terms of One UN reform per se, a first One UN Plan was put together in August 2006, bringing together the work and objectives of six UN agencies. By June 2008, the One Plan included almost all 16 UN resident agencies in Viet Nam. The only exception is the UNHCR which has a modest presence in the country, participates occasionally, and is not formally part of the UN system. A larger challenge will come in 2011, when the UN will be called upon to deliver one single, truly strategic Plan, integrating, rather than simply juxtaposing, the contributions of the various UN agencies, identifying comparative advantages, setting priorities and establishing clear responsibilities. This will be done in close cooperation with the authorities of Viet Nam, so that the UN Plan is in step with Viet Nam's own five-year development plan (also scheduled for 2011).

45. The One Plan Fund is proving to be an important tool in the planning and implementation of UN support to Viet Nam. The objective of the Fund is to support coherent resource mobilization and allocation, and disbursement of donor resources to the One Plan under the direction of the Resident Coordinator. It is intended to facilitate One Plan objectives by strengthening planning and coordination, tying the funding allocation to the One Plan and channeling funds towards the highest priority needs. This approach has greatly curbed individual, and sometimes competitive fund-raising by the various UN agencies. The One Fund has hence become the main, though not exclusive, financial mechanism for the UN Country Team. Donors are supporting the Fund in a variety of ways, including through voluntary adherence to a series of principles of engagement: increased allocation of un-earmarked resources to the One Plan Fund, avoiding additional bilateral contributions to various UN agencies in Viet Nam and instead using the One Fund mechanism, leading to greater predictability of resource allocation.

46. The one UN Fund was also proving to be a powerful catalyst in harmonizing the different business practices of the UN agencies and developing One Set of Business Practices. Measurable progress had been made in streamlining financial procedures (in line

with the new Harmonized Cash Transfer Modalities), the replacement of individual programme management software with a single unified system, and the establishment of a single consolidated operations function with harmonized procurement and supply systems.

47. Of all the recommendations of the High Level Panel, the least progress had been made on the One Leader concept. In the case of Viet Nam, the leadership and personal qualities of the Resident Coordinator had gone a long way in building synergies and providing the necessary authority to take tough decisions. The voluntary MoU on the One Leader, signed by all UN agencies, is a unique achievement of the UN Country Team in Viet Nam. However it is based on goodwill and is not legally binding. The Resident Coordinator needs to be conferred with formal authority and tools to become a real “One Leader”, with authority over strategic planning, budget allocation and implementation of the One Plan for which he is fully accountable. It was stressed that de-linking the Resident Coordinator from UNDP was a necessary step although not sufficient in itself. Real empowerment of the Resident Coordinator needs to be ensured.

48. The 16 UN resident agencies are currently spread out in 10 different sites throughout Hanoi. This makes for difficulties in inter-agency communication and cooperation, and duplication of efforts for maintenance and administration. The authorities have insisted upon the value of a One UN House. Land has been identified, funds have been raised, and plans have been made for an eco-friendly and team-friendly “Green One UN House”, to be available by the end of 2010, the historic 1000-year anniversary of the founding of Hanoi. The One UN House should yield sizeable savings through the organization of common operating and support services (operational savings, for example, are estimated at 0.5 million USD per year). It is also expected that the House will serve as a model for the broader ASEAN region, highlighting the viability of an innovative, sustainable and environmentally-friendly building.

49. More importantly, the House is to be designed as an open space where UN personnel will be accommodated not by agency, but by common activities; integrated inter-agency teams dealing with various issues and projects will share the same work place. In terms of the difficulties and challenges ahead, the Resident Coordinator said that, with the exception of the One Plan Fund, rules and procedures in pilot countries have not been changed to grant them the opportunity to truly pilot and innovate. As a consequence, UN reform had generated a kind of duplicated structure with joint UN work generating additional work rather than being embedded in the UN system. As an example he cited that UN organizations are all required to prepare Agency Annual Reports in addition to the One Plan Annual Report. Institutional and organizational change requires tough choices and leadership, for which the Coordinator has not been sufficiently empowered. He also highlighted the support needed from Headquarters to make UN reform a reality.

IX. Meetings with the World Bank and IMF

50. The IPU field mission included meetings with the country offices of the World Bank and the IMF. In both cases, the financial institutions started working with Viet Nam in the 1990's, through the United Nations. In both cases, they had played an important convening role for the donor community, and a variety of partnership groups, formal and informal, had been established to bring the various stakeholders together.

51. The World Bank, together with the Asia Development Bank and Japan, are the three largest donors to Viet Nam, each contributing some one billion USD each year. Most of the World Bank funds go to investment loans, large infrastructure projects and to a lesser extent

budget support. The four pillars of cooperation, in support of Viet Nam's five-year plan, are business development, resource management, social development, and governance. With strong national ownership, consensus-building and financial discipline, Viet Nam had made huge strides in poverty reduction.

52. The IMF has been playing primarily an advisory and technical assistance role, as there have been no IMF programmes in Viet Nam since 2003.

53. With the economic development of Viet Nam making great strides over the past two decades, foreign direct investment, exports and remittances have been steadily growing in importance. Once the global financial crisis began, all these sectors were directly affected, bringing about unexpected turbulence and a downturn in Viet Nam's economic development. Throughout this time of global crisis, the UN Resident Coordinator has been playing an invaluable role, pulling the parties together and coordinating a simple, unified message to be presented by Viet Nam's development partners to the national authorities as they deal with imbalances and help restore confidence. Efforts will need to continue over the months to come, as it is far from certain that the crisis has yet reached its nadir.

X. Meeting with donors

54. The UN works with an informal donor group of 13 bilateral national partners: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The group has a rotating chairmanship, with Canada currently in the chair. Representatives from Canada, France, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and Italy as an observer, participated in the discussion with the IPU delegation.

55. Donors felt that the United Nations done a great deal over the previous three years, with many problems relating to fragmentation, overlap and inconsistencies being tackled. Bringing UN budgets closer to development priorities had led to greater clarity of purpose and better expectations. The donors welcomed these developments and were lending their weight to the process. They were adhering to voluntary guidelines to avoid ear-marking of funds, ensure greater predictability of funding and support the One UN Fund, a quarter of which was provided by donors. Of the remaining 75 per cent, 50 per cent was from core funding and 25 per cent from fundraising. As the One Plan was negotiated by the UN with the Government and vetted by donors, there was a strong and healthy link between the three partners. Performance criteria and benchmarks had been set, which donors insist serve as guidelines, and not as factors of conditionality.

56. Donors considered that the UN Resident Coordinator wielded insufficient authority, which in turn led to a lack of accountability and transparency. The UN had instituted a "firewall" system designed to detach the head of UNDP from the functional role of Resident Coordinator, but that was not enough. The Coordinator needed more power, not least to fully account for how funds were allocated and spent. UN Headquarters needed to acknowledge that reality and respond accordingly if One UN reform was not to be compromised. Donors also supported the gradual redefinition of the UN as a strategic partner providing high-level policy advice. This was all the more desirable as Viet Nam moved towards middle-income status, and donors began to leave. The UN presence might have to be scaled down and tough personnel decisions would need to be taken, but ultimately that would be in the interest of both the country and the UN.

XI. Meeting with civil society organizations

57. Three civil society organizations participated in the meeting with the IPU delegation at the UN offices in Hanoi. Of these, two were international NGOs (Oxfam and Action Aid) and one, the Centre for Cooperation and Human Resource Development, was a national NGO. Much of their work, supported by the United Nations and other donors, was focused on building awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, increased outreach to community-based organizations and interest groups, assistance to emerging local NGO's, and monitoring the implementation of both national laws and international commitments.

58. Action Aid, for example, was monitoring progress in public administration reform, as well as the impact on vulnerable groups of WTO accession. Oxfam was involved in a programme aimed at promoting social accountability, building upon Viet Nam's recently adopted Ordinance on Grassroots Democracy. Implemented in two poor provinces of the country inhabited by a large population of ethnic minorities, the project aimed to develop constructive dialogue between right holders (the people and their representatives) and duty bearers (government officials and local authorities) on development issues and plans, strengthen the voice of civil society as a "bridge" between people and government institutions, and ultimately engage in and influence some of the major development planning. Among the several projects falling under this programme, one was designed to strengthen the representative capacity of the People Council (local parliament) in Ninh Thuan province, build capacity of local MPs in debating and passing development plans, oversee the government's implementation of approved plans and policies, contribute to changes in how deputies are elected, and work with constituents to understand their concerns, aspirations and needs.

59. It was an exciting time for Viet Nam's emerging civil society, with more and more local NGO's organizing forums for consultation and debate with government officials and elected representatives. Women's rights, migrant workers, aid effectiveness and environmental protection were all areas of particular interest. Once again, limited expertise and capacity, as well as reduced access to information, were identified as key challenges that needed to be addressed.

XII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

60. The members of the IPU Advisory Group drew the following broad conclusions and recommendations from their mission:

- Viet Nam has made significant economic and political strides over the past few decades. On the development cooperation front, the authorities of Viet Nam have proven to be capable and responsive, and renewed efforts are under way to achieve greater transparency and accountability;
- The National Assembly of Viet Nam has undergone substantive transformation, and is establishing itself as a strong institution. It would stand to benefit from the earlier provision of information, relevant expertise and continued cooperation with the United Nations. Efforts to improve the quality of law-making and capacities for monitoring and oversight should be continued;
- Following IPU's needs assessment and technical assistance provided to Viet Nam's National Assembly in the early- to mid-1990's, the UN country offices have initiated a variety of programmes and projects in support of parliament at both the national and

local levels. With One UN reform, these linkages with the National Assembly should be further consolidated;

- The positive and constructive cooperation between the United Nations and parliament of Viet Nam demonstrates many good practices that should be shared with other UN member States and mainstreamed into UN inter-agency work. The formal tri-partite consultation and decision-making mechanism on One UN should consider a better and more substantive involvement by both line ministries and the National Assembly;
- Until now, One UN reform in Viet Nam has made headway due to the professionalism and good relations to be found among the UN representatives on the ground. However the Resident Coordinator needs to be endowed with formal authority from UN Headquarters in order to fully discharge his functions as One UN Leader;
- UN Headquarters should also allow for more flexibility in procedures and rules, particularly in the areas of finance and procurement, so that pilot countries can truly innovate and experiment with new solutions;
- The measure of One UN reform is not only the effectiveness of development cooperation but also the paradigm shift from compartmentalized UN bodies and agencies to integrated teams sharing expertise and comparative advantages. In the case of Viet Nam and in other pilot countries, the One Plan Annual UN Report should replace the 14 individual Agency Annual Reports;
- Credible UN reform can lead to stronger support and greater cooperation from and among donors, as the Viet Nam experience clearly shows. Donors to the One UN should continue to provide sustainable, predictable and un-earmarked funding for UN reform to succeed, notwithstanding the current financial crisis. They should also be more ready to use national systems when implementing various programmes and projects;
- Political will and strong leadership are key ingredients for successful UN reform at the national level. Where there is an effective national partner, aware of what can be expected from the United Nations, there invariably follows an appropriate response from the United Nations agencies on the ground. UN member States – and in particular the countries in the ASEAN region - could learn from Viet Nam's example. UN member States in general have yet to attach the necessary importance and support to meaningful United Nations reform;
- Intensified advocacy on tangible successes achieved in One UN reform with UN Headquarters, UN country teams and member States is required in order to facilitate the mainstreaming of UN reform in all countries. Parliaments can play an important role in this regard;
- The IPU calls on all its member parliaments to convene hearings on, and closely examine UN operations in their own countries, and in countries to which they are providing financial and technical support. National parliaments should seek to promote and report on initiatives which build on good practices, such as the experience of Vietnam, and help advance UN reform and aid effectiveness.

MEETINGS

National Assembly of Viet Nam

- Mrs. Tong Thi Phong, Deputy Speaker
- Mr. Nguyen Van Son, Chairman, Foreign Affairs Committee
- Mr. Ngo Quang Xuan, Vice-Chairman, Foreign Affairs Committee
- Mr. Vu Hai Ha, Director General, Foreign Affairs Department

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Standing Deputy Minister
- Ms. Mai Phan Dung, Assistant Director General, Department of International Organisations
- Mr. Khong Hoang Khoi, Desk Officer, Department of International Organisations

Ministry of Finance

- Mr. Pham Sy Danh, Vice Minister
- Mr. Do Cong Thanh, Deputy Head Division, External Finance Department
- Mr. Nguyen Manh Hoa, Deputy General Director, Department of Debt Management and External Finance

United Nations Country Team

- Mr. John Hendra, Resident Coordinator
- Ms. Kitty van der Heijden, Head of the Resident Coordinator Office, Senior Advisor on UN Reform
- Ms. Narumi Yamada, Representative, UN Office on Drugs and Crime
- Mr. Jesper Morch, Representative, UNICEF
- Mr. Jean Dupraz, Deputy Representative, UNICEF
- Ms. Geeta Narayan, Chief, Planning and Social Policy Section, UNICEF
- Mr. Eamonn Murphy, Country Director, UNAIDS
- Ms. Anne-Claire Guichard, Adviser, UNAIDS
- Mr. Andrew R. Bruce, Chief of Mission, IOM
- Mr. Jean-Marc Olivé, MD, Representative, WHO
- Ms. Urmila Singh, Deputy Representative, UNFPA
- Mr. Nilgün F. Tas, Representative, UNIDO
- Mr. Setsuko Yamazaki, Country Director, UNDP
- Mr. Christophe Bahuet, Deputy Country Director, UNDP
- Mr. Trinh Tien Dung, Assistant Country Director, Head of Governance Unit
- Ms. Bui Phuong Tra, Programme Officer, UNDP Governance Unit
- Mr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Han, Programme Officer, UNDP Governance Unit
- Ms. Laura Lalor, UN Reform Support Officer
- Ms. Donatella Pribaz, UNDP

Donors

- Mr. Brian Allemekinders, First Secretary (Development), Canadian International Development Agency, Embassy of Canada.
- Ms. Veronique Saugues, Attaché de Coopération, Embassy of France
- Ms. Bengt van Loosdrecht, Deputy Head of Mission, Head of Development Cooperation, Royal Netherlands Embassy
- Mr. Filippo Ricardo Rodriguez, Programme Officer, Embassy of Italy

Bretton Woods Institutions

- Mr. Benedict Bingham, Senior Resident Representative, IMF
- Mr. Martin Rama, Lead Economist, World Bank (WB)
- Mr. James H. Anderson, Senior Governance Specialist, WB
- Ms. Maria Delfina Alcaide Garrido, Governance Specialist, WB

Non-Governmental Organizations

- Ms. Pham Thuy Anh, Director, Center for Cooperation Human Resources Development
- Mr. Nguyen Tat Quan, Program Manager, ActionAid Vietnam
- Mr. Nguyen Lê Hoa, Programme Coordinator, OXFAM Great Britain