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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women****Thirty-seventh session**

15 January-2 February 2007

**Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination
of Discrimination against Women: Viet Nam**

1. The Committee considered the combined fifth and sixth periodic report of Viet Nam (CEDAW/C/VNM/5-6) at its 759th and 760th meetings, on 17 January 2007 (see CEDAW/C/SR.759 and 760). The Committee's list of issues and questions is contained in CEDAW/C/VNM/Q/6, and the responses of Viet Nam are contained in CEDAW/C/VNM/Q/6/Add.1.

Introduction

2. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the State party for the combined fifth and sixth periodic report, which followed the Committee's guidelines and has taken into account the Committee's previous concluding comments. It also expresses its appreciation to the State party for the written replies to the list of issues and questions raised by the pre-session working group and for the oral presentation and further clarification in response to the questions posed orally by the Committee.

3. The Committee commends the State party for its high-level delegation headed by the Chairperson of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam and which included women and men representing different ministries. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the constructive dialogue held between the delegation and the members of the Committee.

Positive aspects

4. The Committee commends the State party for the adoption of a number of new laws that aim at eliminating discrimination against women and promoting gender equality in compliance with the State party's obligation under the Convention. In particular, the Committee welcomes the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality of November 2006, which will enter into force on 1 July 2007, the 2003 amendment to the Land Law and the Law on Marriage and Family.

5. The Committee also welcomes the recent adoption of the Law on Signing, Joining and Implementing International Conventions, which entered into force in January 2006, according to which all reports related to international treaties are to be submitted to the National Assembly for adoption prior to their submission to the relevant treaty bodies.

6. The Committee also commends the State party for the adoption of its National Strategy for the Advancement of Women for 2001-2010, which has been drawn up in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

7. While recalling the obligation of the State party to systematically and continuously implement all the provisions of the Convention, the Committee views the concerns and recommendations identified in the present concluding comments as requiring the State party's priority attention between now and the submission of the next periodic report. Consequently, the Committee calls upon the State party to focus on those areas in its implementation activities and to report on action taken and results achieved in its next periodic report. It also calls upon the State party to submit the present concluding comments to all relevant ministries and to Parliament so as to ensure their full implementation.

8. While welcoming the adoption of the new Law on Gender Equality as an improvement of the legal regime and the implementation of the Convention as well as other legal and policy measures that have been put in place in different areas in recent years to eliminate discrimination against women and girls and to promote gender equality, the Committee regrets that the State party did not provide sufficient information or data on the actual impact of these laws and measures and the extent to which they have resulted in accelerating the advancement of women and girls and their enjoyment of their human rights in all areas covered by the Convention.

9. The Committee recommends that the State party focus on the implementation of existing laws and policies by: setting clearly defined and time-bound targets; systematically collecting and analysing data; monitoring impact, trends over time and progress towards realizing goals and objectives, and results achieved; and allocating sufficient human and financial resources for the effective enforcement of existing laws. With regard to the Convention and the new Law on Gender Equality, the Committee encourages the State party to: ensure their wide dissemination within the country, including their translation into minority languages, in particular among policymakers across all sectors, mass organizations, civil society and the media; take measures towards the speedy harmonization of existing legislation with the objectives of the Convention and the Law on Gender Equality, particularly in the areas of employment, social security, education, the representation of women in political and decision-making bodies and within the public administration and health-care services; and report in its next periodic report on the progress made. With regard to the Land Law, the Committee calls upon the State party to take the necessary steps to remove any administrative obstacles that may prevent the issuance of joint land use certificates to husbands and wives, particularly in rural areas.

10. The Committee is concerned about the State party's apparent lack of clarity about the difference between temporary special measures that are aimed at

accelerating de facto or substantive equality of women, as called for under article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and general social policies that are adopted to implement the Convention.

11. The Committee recommends that the State party take concrete measures, including temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and general recommendation 25, in all sectors, with a view to accelerating the practical realization of the goal of women's de facto or substantive equality with men in all areas of the Convention.

12. The Committee reiterates its concern about the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes, including the preference for male offspring, regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men within the family and society at large. These stereotypes present a significant obstacle to the implementation of the Convention, are a root cause of violence against women and put women in a disadvantaged position in a number of areas, including in the labour market and in political and public life.

13. The Committee recommends that the State party take measures to bring about changes in traditional patriarchal attitudes and in gender-role stereotyping. Such measures should include awareness-raising and public educational campaigns addressing women and girls as well as men and boys, with a view to eliminating stereotypes associated with traditional gender roles in the family and in society, in accordance with articles 2 (f) and 5 (a) of the Convention. Special attention should be given to the role of the media in perpetuating such stereotypes, as well as their role in contributing to a social and cultural change towards an environment that is supportive of gender equality. The Committee recommends, in particular, that the Convention be translated into those ethnic minority languages with their own alphabets and that radio programmes in the languages of ethnic minorities, among other forms of media, be used in regularly disseminating information on the Convention and on gender equality.

14. The Committee acknowledges the improvement of the representation of women in Parliament, which is among the highest in Asia, and takes note of the 2001 Law on the Election of National Assembly Deputies and the 2003 Law on the Election of Members of the People's Council, which established a quota system for female deputies, as well as the targets set by the State party for women's representation in public bodies at different levels. The Committee remains concerned about the underrepresentation of women in appointed public decision-making bodies, particularly at the district and commune/ward levels.

15. The Committee calls upon the State party to regularly review its targets for women's participation in public life and decision-making. It encourages the State party to develop concrete measures, with specific timelines, including the use of temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation 25, to accelerate women's full and equal participation in political life at all levels, in specially appointed and elected positions, including leadership positions in mass organizations and at commune/ward level. The Committee recommends that the State party implement training programmes and awareness-raising campaigns, with a special focus on mass organizations, on the right of women to full and equal participation at all levels of decision-making. It also calls on the

State party to monitor the impact of measures taken, track trends over time, take necessary corrective measures and provide detailed information about results achieved in its next report.

16. Although the Committee welcomes the drafting of a new bill on domestic violence, it continues to be concerned about the lack of information and data on all forms of violence against women and girls, the insufficient information on measures taken to prevent and combat violence against women, including services provided to victims, and the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of all forms of violence.

17. In accordance with its general recommendation 19, the Committee reiterates its recommendation that the State party give high priority to putting in place comprehensive measures to address all forms of violence against women and girls, including through the speedy adoption of the law on domestic violence. Such measures should ensure that women and girls who are victims of violence have access to immediate means of redress and protection and that perpetrators are prosecuted and punished. The Committee urges the State party to conduct research on the prevalence, causes and consequences of all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, to serve as the basis for comprehensive and targeted intervention. The Committee repeats its recommendation that the State party continue and increase the implementation of educational and awareness-raising measures aimed at law enforcement officials, the judiciary, health-care providers, social workers, community leaders and the general public, in order to ensure that they understand that all forms of violence against women and girls are unacceptable. It also recommends the establishment of a sufficient number of crisis centres, including shelters for victims of violence, in both urban and rural areas.

18. The Committee welcomes a number of measures, including the Ordinance on the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution, bilateral and multilateral agreements and the Action Plan for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Women and Girls, but is concerned about the persistence of trafficking in women and girls and the exploitation of prostitution, both within the country and to other countries. The Committee is also concerned about the low rates of prosecution and conviction of traffickers and of others who exploit the prostitution of women. The Committee also notes with concern reports that trafficked women and girls face problems in enjoying their citizenship rights when returning to Viet Nam, as well as in conveying citizenship to their children born abroad. It is also concerned about reports that rehabilitation measures, such as administrative camps, may stigmatize girls and young women victims of prostitution and deny them due process rights. In addition, the Committee is concerned about the lack of systematic data collection on the phenomenon of trafficking and exploitation of prostitution.

19. The Committee urges the State party to consider ratifying the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementary to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and to intensify its efforts to combat all forms of trafficking in women and girls, including by enacting specific and comprehensive legislation on the phenomenon. The Committee further calls upon the State party to increase its efforts at international, regional and bilateral cooperation to address more effectively the causes of trafficking, and to improve its efforts to prevent trafficking through information exchange. The

Committee urges the State party to collect and analyse data from the police and international sources, prosecute and punish traffickers and ensure the protection of the human rights of trafficked women and girls. It urges the State party to pursue a holistic approach aimed at addressing the root causes of trafficking and improving prevention. Such efforts should include measures to improve the economic situation of women and girls and to provide them with educational and economic opportunities, thereby reducing and eliminating their vulnerability to exploitation and traffickers. It should also facilitate the reintegration into society of women and girls who are victims of exploitation and trafficking, including children born to Vietnamese women abroad, by ensuring that they are neither criminalized nor penalized and fully enjoy their human rights. It should also enhance rehabilitation, social integration and economic empowerment programmes.

20. While noting progress towards reaching high levels of literacy in the country, the Committee notes with concern that a high proportion of girls still drop out of school and that girls in rural and remote areas do not have full access to education.

21. **The Committee urges the State party to take all appropriate measures to eliminate the disparity in school enrolment rates and to achieve universal primary education for girls in accordance with article 10 of the Convention, the strategic objectives and actions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3. It urges the State party to address effectively the obstacles that prevent girls from continuing their education, such as family responsibilities and the cost of education. It also recommends that teacher training programmes at all levels integrate the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of sex. The Committee also calls on the State party to support education programmes on the culture of ethnic minority groups.**

22. The Committee expresses concern that insufficient information was provided about women's de facto situation in the formal and informal labour markets. It is also concerned at the concentration of women in the informal economy, which negatively affects their eligibility for social security and other benefits, including health care. The Committee continues to be concerned about the occupational segregation between women and men in the labour market and the persistent high gap in wages between women and men.

23. **The Committee urges the State party to adopt effective measures in the formal labour market to eliminate occupational segregation, both horizontal and vertical, and to narrow and close the wage gap between women and men. It also encourages the State party to ensure the enforcement of regulations of the Labour Code for the benefit of women working in export processing zones, with a particular focus on women's access to social security and health-care services. Efforts to develop guidelines and regulations to provide women in the informal economy with access to such benefits and services should also be enhanced. The Committee requests the State party to assess the impact of economic restructuring processes on women, including women belonging to ethnic minorities and living in rural and remote areas. It requests the State party to ensure that all poverty reduction programmes and strategies are gender-sensitive and also to provide targeted support to disadvantaged groups of women. The Committee invites the State party to monitor the impact of**

measures taken and trends over time and to report to the Committee on results achieved in its next report.

24. The Committee expresses its concern about women's limited access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, and about the very high rate of abortions, in particular among adolescent and young women. The Committee is also concerned about the increase in HIV/AIDS infections among women.

25. The Committee urges the State party to take concrete measures to enhance women's access to health care, in particular to sexual and reproductive health services, in accordance with article 12 of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation 24 on women and health. It requests the State party to strengthen measures aimed at the prevention of unwanted pregnancies, including through improved availability, acceptability and use of modern means of birth control, in order to eliminate the use of abortion as a method of family planning. The Committee recommends that the State party give priority attention to the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescent and young women and men and that it provide age-appropriate sex education, including in school curricula, with special attention to the prevention of early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. The Committee also calls on the State party to ensure the effective implementation of its national strategy on the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, including improved access to antiretroviral drugs, protection and care for babies born with HIV and training for medical personnel.

26. The Committee is concerned about the differential minimum legal age for marriage for women and men as well as about reports on underage marriages of girls, which limit their development and opportunities to fully develop their skills and capacities, especially in some ethnic minority areas.

27. The Committee urges the State party to set the same minimum age of marriage for women and men at 18 years, in line with article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and article 16 of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation 21 on equality in marriage and family relations. It also calls on the State party to take measures to prevent and stop underage marriages.

28. The Committee expresses its concern about the situation of women in rural and remote areas, as well as the situation of ethnic minority women, who lack sufficient access to adequate health services, education opportunities, employment and credit facilities.

29. The Committee calls upon the State party to pay special attention to the needs of women living in rural and remote areas and women belonging to ethnic minorities by ensuring that they have equal access to health care, education, social security, income-generation opportunities and participation in decision-making processes at all levels. It also encourages the State party to use innovative methods to improve information on and awareness of the provisions of the Convention and of relevant laws, including the Law on Gender Equality, among women and girls in rural and remote areas and women belonging to ethnic minorities. The Committee requests the State party to ensure that the draft law on ethnic minorities integrates the objectives of the Law on Gender Equality and that the draft law on ethnic minorities be passed as soon as possible. The Committee requests that comprehensive information be included

in the next periodic report, including sex-disaggregated data and trends over time, on the de facto holistic position of rural and ethnic minority women and on the impact of measures taken and results achieved in the implementation of policies and programmes for these groups of women and girls.

30. The Committee encourages the State party to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to accept, as soon as possible, the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention concerning the meeting time of the Committee.

31. The Committee urges the State party to utilize fully, in its implementation of its obligations under the Convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which reinforce the provisions of the Convention, and requests the State party to include information thereon in its next periodic report.

32. The Committee also emphasizes that a full and effective implementation of the Convention is indispensable for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It calls for the integration of a gender perspective and explicit reflection of the provisions of the Convention in all efforts aimed at the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and requests the State party to include information thereon in its next periodic report.

33. The Committee notes that the adherence of States to the seven major international human rights instruments¹ enhances the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. Therefore, the Committee encourages the Government of Viet Nam to consider ratifying the treaties to which it is not yet a party, namely, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

34. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Viet Nam of the present concluding comments in order to make the people, including government officials, politicians, parliamentarians and women's and human rights organizations, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure de jure and de facto equality of women, as well as the further steps that are required in that regard. The Committee requests the State party to continue to disseminate widely, in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention, its Optional Protocol, the Committee's general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

35. The Committee requests the State party to respond to the concerns expressed in the present concluding comments in its next periodic report under article 18 of the Convention. The Committee invites the State party to submit its seventh periodic report, which is due in March 2007, and its eighth periodic report, due in March 2011, in a combined report in March 2011.

¹ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.