



VIETNAM WOMEN'S UNION
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REPORT ON
ENSURING AND PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS
*(As inputs to the consolidated document of the Office of the
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
to serve the Universal Periodic Review UPR)*

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF THE VIETNAM WOMEN'S UNION

1. The Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) is a socio-political organization, representing the legal and legitimate rights and interests of Vietnamese women across all levels of society. The VWU strives for women's development and gender equality. The VWU is a member of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and ASEAN Confederation of Women's Organizations (ACWO). The VWU was founded in 1930 and operates throughout Vietnam at four levels of central, provincial, district, and commune ones. Currently, the VWU has 15 million members.

Goals in the 2012-2017 term:

- To unify and mobilize women to bring into full play their inner strengths, to proactively and enthusiastically participate in socio-economic development and national defense; To build happy and sustainable families; To improve women's material and spiritual life. To cultivate patriotism, health, knowledge, working skills, resourcefulness, creativity, cultured lifestyle and kind-heartedness among Vietnamese women.

- To build a stronger VWU organization, increasing its ability to fulfill its key role in women's activities and gender equality realization.

Main tasks:

- Providing communication, education and mobilization of women to implement laws and policies, uphold fine virtues and enhance their capacity and awareness.
- Mobilizing and assisting women in nurturing happy and sustainable families.
- Mobilizing and assisting women in economic development, sustainable poverty reduction, and environmental protection.
- Advising, proposing, participating in the development of laws and policies on gender equality and social counter arguments to such laws, and monitoring enforcement.
- Building and developing a stronger VWU organization.
- Strengthening international relations and cooperation.

II. ACHIEVEMENTS IN ENSURING AND PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

2. Women's Unions (WUs) at all levels have focused on activities that ***ensure, promote women's rights in access to information, improving their capacity and awareness.*** With a team of communicators and outreach workers having been increasingly added, the communication methods having been increasingly diversified (such as: direct communication, competitions/contests, communication campaigns, documentary films, reportages, publications, exhibitions, displaying products, building and maintaining women's bookshelf, communal women's library, women's reading room...), the VWU has communicated and disseminated the Party's orientations and the State's policies and laws related to women; disseminated scientific and technological knowledge, and life skills to the Union's members and women from different walks of life... By the end of 2011, 9,990 commune-level WUs (equivalent to 74.45%) had established the women's bookshelf. The Project of distributing the free-of-charge Vietnamese Women's Newspaper has been launched with over 32,000 copies of the bulletin on Ethnic and Mountainous topics distributed to 1,848 communal WUs and 19,503 hamlet WU chapters in especially disadvantaged areas. This bulletin aims at providing information to and

creating a forum for WUs staff of different levels and women from different walks of life to exchange and share their experiences. The VWU also works closely with the Education - Training sector and Border Guards to promote illiteracy eradication activities for women and WU staff at the grassroots level in mountainous areas. A number of models of illiteracy eradication have been implemented, such as learning from relatives, family members and the community; combining literacy teaching and education about methods of doing business, cultivation and animal husbandry, child rearing, etc. From 2007 to 2012, more than 54,000 women had participated in literacy classes. The VWU's activities have contributed to increasing women's awareness of the equality, improving their position in the family and society, thus promoting gender equality.

3. To show its roles in building the rule-of-law state, the VWU has proactively ***participated in development and supervision of law and policy implementation related to gender equality; giving social counter arguments***; contributing to ensuring gender mainstreaming in the laws, codes, legal normative documents, thereby promoting women's rights. The VWU focused on training, giving guidelines on social counter arguments, compiling materials and proposing changes to a number of draft laws (*the Law on Persons with Disabilities, the Labor Code (revised), the Law on Adoption, the Law on Food Safety, the Law on Execution of Criminal Sentences, the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat, and the Law on the Elderly, ect*). In 2013, the VWU focused on gathering comments on and inputs to *the draft amendment of the 1992 Constitution, the draft revised Land Law, etc*. WUs have also made persistent recommendations of policies related to women, family and children; have participated in activities to protect legal rights and legitimate interests of women and children; have been active in coordination with the judicial sector, in providing on-the-spot legal counseling, allowing many WU members and women to access legal counseling and legal aid.

WUs at all levels have taken the initiative in identifying their priorities and supervising the implementation of a number of the Party's orientations, laws

and social security policies (including Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW¹, the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, Decree No. 19/2003/ND-CP², policies concerning poverty reduction and vocational training for rural workers, etc.) and participated with a high sense of responsibility in a number of thematic monitoring and supervision activities implemented by state bodies. Through such supervision, shortcomings in the implementation of policies were discovered and timely communicated to the competent agencies for consideration and correction. The results of this supervision served as the foundation for WU involvement in the formulation, social counter-arguments, and proposals of laws, policies, and solutions in each related field.

4. To *ensure and promote women's rights in politics*, VWU has developed the plan of action, actively consulting and proactively finding eligible female candidates and introducing them to be included in the personnel planning for Party Committees, National Assembly, State, government, ministries, localities. WUs have participated in political consultation, organised skills training for female candidates to the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels in the term 2011 – 2016. As the result, the number of women members in the Party Committees at the commune and district levels and in the People's Councils at all levels has increased; the percentage of women deputies to the 13th National Assembly is 24,4% (*ranking 2nd in the Southeast Asia and 5th in the Asia Pacific*). Especially, for the first time in Vietnam, two women were recently elected to be members of the Politburo of the Party Central Committee. Vietnamese women have become increasingly active and proactive in exercising their rights as citizens and have been involved in different forms of direct democracy in their communities, contributing to implementing the national and local socio-economic development objectives.

5. To promote *women's rights in economic, labor and employment areas*, the VWU has focused on such practical activities as: buiding Affection

¹ Resolution 11-NQ/TW of the Political Bureau dated April 27, 2007 on the work for women in the period of accelerating industrialization and modernization.

² Decree No. 19/2003/ND-CP dated March 7, 2003 regulating the responsibilities of state administrative agencies at all levels in ensuring the participation of the Vietnam Women's Union at all levels in state management.

Houses for disadvantaged women (such as the poor women with disability); building models of poverty reduction (such as movements “*Women’s mutual help in economic development*,” “*Help poor women with targeted addresses*”...); providing support in terms of capital and knowledge, plants and breeding animals, vocational training and jobs creation for women and girls... Over the period of 2007-2012, WUs at different levels had assisted with the construction and repair of 10,713 “*Affection Houses*” for especially disadvantaged women; and helped more than 256,000 women entrepreneurs access loans. By early 2012, the total outstanding loans provided under the management of WUs at all levels had reached over 47,000 billion VND, helping more than 21 million women with loans for the development of production and business, building houses, buying means of production, assisting more than 2.7 million poor female-headed households in economic development, nearly 450,000 households of which have risen out of poverty... Vocational training for women has been intensified nationwide. Vocational training activities have been organized in a flexible manner (not only at vocational training establishments, but also through joint-training and mobile classes) and in closer combination with job creation through providing credit and expanding cooperation with different partners to create on-the-spot jobs for female workers. From 2007 to 2011, WUs at different levels had organized and co-organised vocational training for more than 1.1 million female workers, of which 300,000 trained at the WU vocational training establishments and referred more than 800,000 female workers to jobs. After 3 years (from 2010 to 2012) of implementing the project “*Vocational training for rural laborers*” according to the Decision No 1956/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister and the project “*Supporting women in vocational training and job creation in the 2010 – 2015 period*”, 21 provincial/ municipal WUs have set-up 76 successful models of job creation for rural women after vocational training, attracting 9,189 local laborers using the budget for vocational training for rural labor. This is an important contribution of VWU to the country’s achievements in poverty reduction and economic development.

6. The VWU has also paid due attention to promoting and ensuring women’s rights *in building happy and sustainable families*.

Building prosperous, equal, advanced and happy families is the common goal of almost all the VWU’s programs and activities. The campaign “*Building the family without poverty, law violation and social evils*,

domestic violence, giving birth to more than 2 children, having malnourished and school drop-out children; and maintaining clean house, kitchens and surrounding lanes” (the campaign “*Building the family of 5 Without-s and 3 Clean-s*” for short) has received positive responses from a great number of VWU members and has gradually entered everyday life.

The WU has developed and carried out a number of projects that focus on the family as the main target with comprehensive approaches for intervention and assistance. The project “*Educating 5 million mothers on good parenting over the 2010-2015 period*” has provided initial assistance to women to improve their awareness, knowledge and skills, and bring about behavioral changes towards scientific child rearing.

The models of home daycare, transporting children to and from school, elderly care, domestic help services are being piloted. New models in family and marriage counseling and support, in prevention and control of domestic violence have been implemented. So far, the VWU has set up 15 marriage support centers in the 15 provinces/cities with a high concentration of women getting married with foreigners in order to provide them with knowledge of laws, customs and practices of the destination countries, contributing to reducing the number of marriages resulting from illegal and risky brokerage services. Implementing the Decree No. 68/2002/ND-CP ‘*detailing on the implementation of a number of articles of the Marriage and Family Law on the marriage and family relations involving foreign elements*’ of the Government, the VWU has worked with functional agencies and organizations in South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore on the issue of Vietnamese brides in order to protect the rights and dignity of the Vietnamese women marrying foreigners. With the support from different international and domestic donors, the central VWU has set up and been operating the model “Peace House” – shelter for women and children – survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking which offers a package of comprehensive support, including safe accommodation, psychological care, health care, legal counseling and aid, vocational training, support for sustainable reintegration into the community. From 2007 to March 2013, 3,719 counseling sessions had been provided, 238 residents at the Peace House had received comprehensive support for reintegration into the community. This is an effective model and is considered by domestic and international organizations to be necessary intervention in gender-based violence prevention and control in Vietnam.

7. The VWU has carried out many activities with the aim to ***promote and ensure the rights of disadvantaged women's groups***. In order to support people at high-risk of getting infected or living with HIV/AIDS, women and children - returned survivors of trafficking, *Centers for supporting women from disadvantaged backgrounds and providing legal counseling* in different provinces/cities have organized visits to, provided counseling, psychological support, health care, vocational training and job creation for nearly 14,000 people, provided loans amounted 622 billion VND for 264,000 women at high risk of HIV infection, sexually abused women, and returned survivors of human trafficking... for the production development.

To help the vulnerable women to settle down and be reintegrated into the community, VWU has built-up many intervention models with nearly 4,000 clubs (such as Club of prevention and control of trafficking in women and children; Club of social evils prevention, Happy family Club, Women and legislation Club etc.), attracting the participation of many families and the community. The VWU has implemented many activities to support Agent Orange victims, particularly women and children such as visiting, encouraging, giving gifts, distributing free medicine, providing loans to women having husbands and/or children – victims of Agent Orange, launching movements to support Agent Orange victims. The VWU has also actively raised voice to seek support for Agent Orange victims at the international forums and events, and raised funds from the international organizations for community-based projects and initiatives to support this target group.

The VWU is also working to ensure that older people in Vietnam can lead dignified, active, healthy and secure lives. To effectively implement the activities of caring for and promoting the roles of older people in general and of older women in particular in Vietnam, over the recent years, the VWU has had initiatives in developing models, appropriate to older people, such as; “*Club of older people with income generating activities, health care and social support*”, “*Credit & savings groups/teams/clubs of older women*”, “*Club of supporting older people affected with HIV/AIDS*”... Especially, with the financial and technical support from some international organizations, the VWU in cooperation with local partners have developed a comprehensive model “*Intergenerational Self-help Club*” for improving the awareness and caring for older people materially and spiritually; promoting

their rights and voices; creating linkages between older people and the local authorities and promoting the roles of older people in the community development activities.

Concerning women with disabilities, the VWU has carried out practical activities to support them such as providing communication in different forms on the rights of persons with disabilities, setting-up the model of self-help group of women with disabilities, collaborating with the sector of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs to carry out survey on the situation and needs of women with disabilities in order to work out appropriate interventions. The VWU has implemented or co-implemented activities for the empowerment of women with disabilities such as counseling, loans provision, vocational training and job referral... to enable them to become self-confident and well integrate with the community.

8. VWU's international cooperation activities on human rights are diversified in forms such as participating in forums, signing and implementing the cooperation agreements/MoU, exchange of visits, participating and contributing comments/ ideas at conferences and workshops on various topics. These activities have contributed actively to protecting and promoting human rights, particularly those of women and disadvantaged groups.

III. CHALLENGES

9. Vietnam is now in the period of national industrialization and modernization. There still exist many difficulties in the country's socio-economic conditions, especially in rural, mountainous, remote and isolated areas. Therefore, rural women, ethnic minority women and disadvantaged women's groups (such as poor, disabled, single women...) lack of opportunities to get access to information, educational and health care services. They have fewer opportunities for studying and improving their knowledge and professional skills, therefore, they do not meet the requirements of the period of industrialization, modernization and international integration. Although female laborers are of large quantity,

however, majority of them do the manual work with low technical skills, and they earn incomes lower than male workers do.

10. Due to gender prejudice, the sex imbalance at birth remains a challenge in Vietnam. Besides, women still face with many problems arising in the market economy, especially in the integration process: abortion and divorce rates are on the rise, crimes and social evils have become more complicated; the HIV infection rate tends to increase among women (from 19.65% in 2006 to 31% in 2011)³. Family services have not met the needs of the society; There are not enough kindergartens and nursery schools in almost all of the localities and industrial zones (only 18% of under-36-month children have access to such schools⁴.) These all present great difficulties and challenges to families, and particularly women. Besides, epidemics, natural disasters, environmental pollution, food contamination ... are on the rise, affecting the health and quality of life of women, particularly rural women, those living in areas with below-standard living conditions, women working in the industrial and processing zones ...

11. There are still areas for improvement in international cooperation to deal with issues related to Vietnamese women marrying foreigners, such as provision of information, communication, counseling, preventing human rights violations occurring in selecting brides and in marriage; ensuring conditions for marriage life, and handling after-divorce issues, etc.

ON BEHALF OF THE VWU'S PRESIDUM
VICE PRESIDENT
Ms. Bui Thi Hoa
(signed)

³ Source: Ministry of Health, 2011

⁴ Source: Ministry Education and Training, 2011