



SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
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STATEMENT

by Mr. Pham Hai Anh

Delegate of Viet Nam

*at the Fourth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum
on Indigenous Issues*

New York, 18 May 2004

on agenda item 3 (a):

**Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals -
"Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger"**

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*Madam Chair,
Members of the Permanent Forum,
Distinguished Delegates,*

Thank you, Madam Chair, for giving me the opportunity to speak before the Forum.

Madam Chair,

My Delegation welcomes the focus of this session on the implementation of two Millennium Development Goals in relation to indigenous people. Our intention here today is to provide the Permanent Forum with information and facts on the actual situation and developments regarding the implementation of MDG Goal 1 as pertaining to ethnic minority population in Viet Nam.

The Government of Viet Nam has always attached great importance to the issue of hunger eradication and poverty reduction, which has been among the top priorities since the very first day of our independence from colonialism in 1945.

Our records in achieving national and international goals relating to poverty reduction are well-known. In the year 2000, Viet Nam already reduced the number of population living in poverty to 35%, thus halving this number as compared to that of 1990. We are now committed to achieving a further 40% reduction by 2010.

This has been achieved through great efforts by the people and Government of Viet Nam in developing and implementing various National Targeted Programmes, such as the Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Programme and the Socio-Economic Development Programme for Communes with particular hardships in ethnic minority, mountainous and remote areas (or Programme 135 for short). The latter is of great relevance to the discussion at this Forum today.

Programme 135 was launched in 1998 for the period of 1999-2005 in order to help address vital development needs in over 2,000 communes in rural, mountainous, ethnic minority and remote areas throughout the country, such as the mountainous region to the north, ethnic minority areas in the Central Highlands and to the south, where poverty rate was 50-60% at that time. This Programme, covering nearly a quarter of all communes and benefiting 15 per cent of the total population, has greatly contributed to narrowing development gap among different regions in the country.

The focus of this Programme is to provide those areas with the most vital infrastructure that they scarcely had 7 years ago, that is roads, electricity grid, schools, clinics, minor irrigation facilities, etc. It is managed and implemented in a decentralised manner to better respond to the actual needs of different communes. In this process, local communities also actively participated inter alia in identifying poor households and choosing among the range of local infrastructure projects. There was an independent evaluation of the Programme conducted in 2003-2004 with UNDP's support, which considered this Programme as fairly well targeted.

After six years of implementation, the local communes have constructed and put in operation 22,000 infrastructure facilities, thus helping people in those communes to improve their living conditions and reducing the poverty rate to 23% at the end of 2004.

In recent years, the Central Highlands has become one of the fastest growing regions of the country with an average growth rate of 9.9%, higher than the national average. The infrastructure in the Central Highlands provinces has improved considerably. Each province has thousands of kilometers of asphalted road and a low voltage electricity grid. Now, 99% of the communes in the region have roads to the centers (while the figure for the whole country is 97.4%). From 89% to 97.4% of the communes are connected to the national power grid (while it is only 89% nationwide). In the near future, tens of bridges will be built, while a project aimed to install an oil pipeline to the region has been underway. The State has made big investments in irrigation works, helping the local people maintain their production during dry seasons. Poor households are provided with loans to buy houses at low interest rates. There have been also policies to address ethnic minorities's needs for housing and farming land, including through subsidies to the local people to reclaim land for cultivation and husbandry. Poverty reduction programs in the Central Highlands have been actively implemented, cutting the poverty rate from 24.9% in 2001 down to 17.4% in 2003.

Nonetheless, there is much to learn from that and to improve. It is our intention that the new Poverty Reduction Programme as well as Programme 135 for 2006-2010 are to be designed so that all of the targeted poor, and especially the poorest women, men and children among them, have access to and benefit directly from programme interventions. There is also a need for more simple, participatory, flexible and equitable ways of allocating programme resources to allow the local people to effectively utilize these resources to meet their needs and priorities. In order to ensure sustainable development and prevent reimpoverishment, investment structure under Programme 135 in the future will shift its focus to production-oriented assistance, as well as further delegation of power to local government levels in terms of approving and implementing projects.

To conclude, Madam Chair, we hope that our sharing of the above information and facts would contribute to better understanding by this august Forum of Viet Nam's tremendous efforts in meeting the Millennium Development Goals to the benefits of all, particularly of ethnic minority people and people in regions of particular hardship.

To further improve the living conditions and standards of our people in general and of the people of ethnic minorities and those of mountainous and remote areas in particular, we realize that much remains to be desired. We are committed to continued efforts in this direction.

Before I conclude, let me strike a note of concern. The report contained in document E/C.19/2005/4/Add.13 stated that "This (Viet Nam is on track in achieving the Millennium Development Goals) was achieved (...) at the expense of the indigenous peoples...". That statement can only be described as inaccurate and ill-intentioned and should be rejected.

I thank you for your attention.