

*Madam Chair,
Members of the Permanent Forum,*

My Delegation asked for the floor to speak on agenda item 4(a) entitled "*Human rights, with special emphasis on an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people*". A handful of individuals participating in this Forum with political agenda have abused the Forum to spread fabricated information on Viet Nam. We hope our statement would contribute to helping the Forum, the Special Rapporteur and distinguished delegates better understand the policies and efforts undertaken by the Vietnamese Government and the actual situation in Viet Nam with regard to human rights, in particular those of ethnic minority groups.

Madam Chair,

Viet Nam is a multi-ethnic and multi-religion country. On our territory, there are nearly 60 ethnic communities living side-by-side with one another. Throughout our common history of national salvation, construction and development, they have developed a strong tradition of patriotism, unity and mutual assistance. Ethnic minorities in Viet Nam account for more than 20 millions, or a quarter of the population, many of whom choose to practise one or another among ten different religions. Living close to one another, they are increasingly involved in cultural exchanges among themselves, but also manage to retain their own identities. The diversity of their cultures does not take them off the track of the common development of the nation as a whole. This harmony of diversity and unity itself is a tradition forged through our struggle for survival.

Viet Nam pursues a comprehensive approach in addressing all human rights, be they civil, political, economic, social or cultural. In following that approach, we pay special attention to the second set of rights, that is economic, social and cultural rights, which are extremely important to all people in developing countries, especially the poor. Without fully realizing these rights, people cannot truly enjoy their other rights. Therefore, Viet Nam is making every effort to meet the Millennium Development Goals through various national targeted programmes with special attention to the poor people in rural, mountainous and remote areas, including ethnic minorities. Our records in this field are well-known to the UN agencies and the international community.

Madam Chair,

Since it gained independence in 1945, Viet Nam has been pursuing a policy of equality, solidarity and mutual assistance among all ethnic groups, which prohibits any acts of racial discrimination or division and preserves the identities and traditions of all ethnic groups, while developing and implementing policies that promote comprehensive development with a view to gradually improving both material and spiritual living standards for people of ethnic minorities.

Many projects have been allocated to the development of the socio-economic infrastructure of the remote, mountainous areas and areas with special difficulties. In fact, the people living in those areas are enjoying not only equality but also privileges and priorities in all major fields, be it economic, educational, cultural or healthcare. Ethnic minority groups are represented at high proportions in all major state organs and decision-making mechanisms.

The right of every Vietnamese citizen to practise a belief, to follow or not to follow a particular religion is firmly guaranteed by the Constitution and recently was further stipulated in Decree of the National Assembly on religions and believes, which became effective on 15 November 2004. The Constitution and the Decree specifically provide for, inter alia, the equality and mutual respect among all religions and between people who follow a religion and those who do not follow any religions. While freedom of religion and belief is guaranteed by law and put into practice through specific policies, it is our position that this freedom shall not be abused to infringe on other people's rights and freedoms, or to provoke violence and division among ethnicities and religions. In any country, this is essential for the maintenance of the rule of law.

Madam Chair,

Viet Nam attaches great importance to international cooperation in this regard. Viet Nam is among the four countries in Southeast Asia participating in UNDP's *Regional Initiative on Strengthening Policy Dialogue on Indigenous, Highland and Tribal Peoples Rights and Development* (RIPP). Through this initiative we hope to exchange information and experience on priority issues of mutual interest.

Madam Chair,

For the effectiveness of the Forum's work and its impact on needy peoples around the world, its deliberations and recommendations should be based on factual, accurate and truthful information. Unfortunately, accurate and truthful information is not what a handful of individuals with political agendas belonging to organisations such as the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation, United Association of Khmer Kampuchea Krom Buddhist Monks and the Montagnard Foundation provide this Forum with. They have no legitimate rights to participate, to speak on Viet Nam at this Forum. We have more than once registered out protest in this regard. To retain its prestige, the Forum needs to take measures to put an end to their abuses.

I thank you Madam Chair.