



Committees of Correspondence For Democracy and Socialism

July 12, 2018

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To: UN Human Rights Council

From: Paul Krehbiel, Co-Chair
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Duncan McFarland, Chair, Socialist Education Project
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Re: Universal Periodic Review, Viet Nam: Stakeholder Report

The Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism (CCDS) is a national social justice organization in the United States of America committed to economic justice, equality, peace, democracy and socialism. We are a multi-racial, multi-national organization rooted in the working-class with members from all walks of life. CCDS was founded in 1992. We have regular conventions with elected delegates, and we work in partnership with many peace and justice organizations in the US and other countries. We are an independent organization and not affiliated with any political party.

CCDS has had a direct relationship with Viet Nam since 2008. We have organized two study tours of Viet Nam, in 2009 and in 2011. CCDS participants included US war veterans, university professors, workers and managers in many fields and professions, and included leaders and activists in US trade unions, and other social justice organizations for peace, women, people of color, environmental justice, human rights and others. Both visits were hosted by the Viet Nam Women's Union, a mass-based organization of women from across Vietnam. We also have a friendship relationship with the Viet Nam – US Friendship Association.

CCDS Stakeholder Report

We want to begin by framing our report within the historical context of a country that has fought for freedom and independence for 1,000 years, from colonialism, imperialism and other forms of bondage, and devastated by decades of foreign imposed wars. Under these extremely harsh conditions Viet Nam has made extraordinary progress in building an independent country, and has developed a system of laws based on promoting the all-around well-being of all citizens and residents, including individual human rights. Viet Nam has made remarkable

progress in building its economy, sharply reducing poverty, and in significantly raising the standard of living of its people. Viet Nam has made important gains in providing health care, education and culture to all its people, making provisions to involve people of all ethnic groups, women, and geographic regions in shaping and managing these social programs. Viet Nam promotes friendship and cooperation among all its people, and has established meaningful cooperative ventures with many countries around the world. All of these achievements go a long way toward fulfilling many principles and goals of the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights, and Viet Nam has been recognized and commended for its progress by several UN agencies and bodies. Paul Krehbiel, Harry Targ, and Duncan McFarland, all national leaders of CCDS, were participants in the CCDS study tours conducted in 2009 and 2011. Here are impressions from all three of those study tour participants.

The Vietnam Women's Union is a large mass organization with thirteen million members, devoted to empowering women in many ways. We visited a rural women's club and witnessed the high level of participation and engagement. Educational activities are conducted on issues including women's rights and family and community health issues. The VWU also holds training sessions for women to participate in politics; we learned that 28% of the members of the Vietnam parliament are women. The VWU also supports entrepreneurial activities to help women in business and runs a women's museum in Hanoi to preserve women's history and culture, including national minorities. Another department supports victims of sex trafficking and violence. The women's union also runs a travel agency, which made our excellent arrangements, publishes a newspaper and literature, and maintains contacts with other women's organizations and people around this world. The Vietnam Women's Union sponsors an outstanding national program supporting Vietnamese women's human rights.

One of our first impressions was that Vietnam was a nation at work. Everywhere we travelled we saw people working. Many people were employed by both domestic and foreign businesses, and many people started and ran their own businesses. This vibrant economic activity attests to the far-sighted policies of the Vietnamese government which has worked for decades to promote and assist economic development at all levels of the economy. We saw people running small businesses selling a host of products in cities, towns and rural areas, all encouraged and supported by the government. Many people used the yards of their homes for their businesses, from building furniture, to cooking and serving food, to weaving clothing, to creating pieces of art.

We also visited larger manufacturing businesses and met with workers on the shop floor, managers and trade union officials and members. Many of our CCDS members are members of trade unions in the US, so we were particularly interested in learning about the rights and responsibilities of unions in Vietnam. We heard union members explain how the union gave them a voice at work, worked to protect and advance their wages and improve their working conditions. We also learned that there are workers' strikes in Viet Nam, in fact many strikes – especially in the foreign-owned companies, and that the union, government, and sometimes the Communist Party would intervene to help workers resolve their grievances. This was in contrast to strikes in some other countries where authorities routinely react by suppressing the workers, often by using police violence and arrests. This was important to us as it indicated that workers in Viet Nam seem to feel that they can disagree and oppose what they see as harmful policies by their employer, including going on strike, with the expectation of making some improvements and with little fear of repercussions. This is extremely important because so many workers in other countries, including in the United States, fear going on strike because they are afraid that they might lose their job permanently due to employer retaliation. For us, this was an indication that human rights exist for striking workers in Viet Nam in a greater degree than for many workers in many other countries.

We also visited hospitals and health centers and were impressed by the approach and care given to patients. One remarkable hospital was the Tu Du Hospital in Hanoi. Of particular significance was the care provided to young

children suffering from birth defects and diseases from Agent Orange, sprayed indiscriminately throughout southern Viet Nam by the US during the war. We also met with and had frank discussions with college students and their professors at the University of Da Nang. The students were studying sciences and engineering and were excited about pursuing advanced education to contribute to the development of their country.

We also heard in many formal events and informal discussions Vietnamese who spoke freely about a variety of issues, including problems that they saw in Vietnam. The discussions were often probing, differences were expressed, and carried out within an atmosphere of posing ways to correct the problems. One big issue was corruption among some government officials, which was freely discussed in the cafes and streets, and taken up in the mass media. We also visited bookstores where we saw a range of political viewpoints expressed, from the communism of Ho Chi Minh to the conservative free market capitalism of Ronald Reagan. All of these observations indicated that Viet Nam is taking seriously human rights issues, such as freedom of speech, and working to create a society where full and open discussion takes place.

If you have any questions, please contact us as we want to cooperate with the United Nations in carrying out this important mission.