

**EMBASSY OF VIET NAM IN THE UNITED STATES**

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**US – VIETNAM RELATIONS:**

**Deputy PM Hoang Trung Hai visited US**

From Nov. 15-20, Deputy PM Hoang Trung Hai paid a working visit to the US to speed up the implementation of bilateral cooperation agreements reached during the US visit by PM Nguyen Tan Dung last June. While in the US, the Deputy PM met with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Deputy National Security Advisor Daniel Price, Secretary of the Department of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez, Trade Representative Susan C. Schwab and former Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky, among other US high-ranking officials. He also visited the Susquehanna nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania state.

At his meetings with US officials, Deputy PM Hai briefed them of Vietnam's socio-economic situation, and plans for future development, especially solutions to curb inflation and stabilise macro economy in the context of the global economic-financial turmoil.

At a meeting with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the Deputy PM stressed that Vietnam always attaches importance to development of its partnership with the US in various fields in line with high-level statements between the two countries. He also highly valued positive developments in the friendship and cooperation between the two countries in recent years, especially in economics and trade. Hai expressed his wish that she supports the US's granting of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) treatment to Vietnam.

**US Senator agrees with PM on need to lift trade barriers**

During a meeting with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in Hanoi on Dec. 17, the Chairman of the US Senate Finance Committee, Max Baucus admitted that discrimination in trade matters is a barrier that should be removed from his country's commerce with Vietnam. Baucus reiterated his strong support for early granting of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) to Vietnam and said he hoped the US president-elect Barack Obama would grant this sooner rather than later. He pledged to do his utmost to boost relations between the two countries, especially between the two legislative bodies.

PM Dung asked Senator Baucus to support the removal of a US supervision mechanism regarding Vietnamese clothing. The US should grant the GSP to Vietnam soon and put an end to its discriminative treatment of catfish imports from Vietnam, in the interests of both nations, Dung emphasised.

During the visit to Vietnam, Baucus also met with some other Vietnamese Ministries, visited some Vietnamese provinces and held discussions with students from the Foreign Affairs Institute regarding concrete measures that could be taken to boost relations between the two countries.

### **US Institute for Global Engagement's (IGE) delegation visited Vietnam (13-17 October, 2008)**

On October 13, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem received a delegation from the US Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), headed by its President, Doctor Chris Seiple. Speaking at the reception for the delegation, Deputy PM Pham Gia Khiem hoped that, after the fact-finding tour, the IGE delegation would have a better understanding of Vietnam's policies regarding religion and the objective reality of religious activities in the host country.

During trip to Vietnam, Dr. Chris Seiple signed an unprecedented agreement with Vietnam to work with the Government's Committee on Religious Affairs in providing pilot religious freedom seminars at the provincial level. This agreement was confirmed at the provincial level in IGE meetings with the Standing Committee of the Central Highlands and the Peoples' Committees of Dak Lak and Gia Lai provinces. IGE also discussed with these provincial leaders how to better facilitate the introduction of development NGOs to the Central Highlands to serve the people there.

The highlight of the trip was participating in the 65th anniversary of the Evangelical Church of the South in Pleiku, the capital of Gia Lai Province.

### **USAID delegation visits Dak Lak province**

A delegation from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) visited the Central Highlands province of Dak Lak on Nov.10 to examine opportunities for support in areas such as poverty reduction, employment, healthcare and social services.

At a reception for the delegation, the Chairman of the provincial People's Committee, Lu Ngoc Cu, stressed the importance of the USAID project, saying that it has helped to increase the rubber-growing area in the province and contributed to improving the living conditions for local residents.

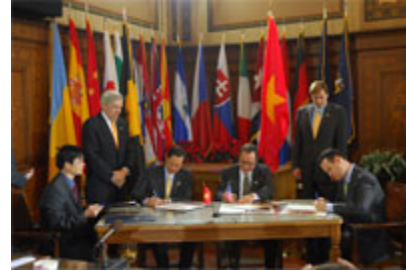
He said he hoped that USAID will continue to implement projects in education, healthcare and poverty reduction in the province.

The U.S. established the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office in Hanoi in 2001. The office, formerly part of the Regional Development Mission/Asia (RDM/A) based in Bangkok (Thailand), was officially upgraded to full USAID Mission status in July 2008 with Mr. Francis A. Donovan as the first USAID Vietnam Representative.

## EMBASSY HIGHLIGHT

### **Danang Has US Sister City**

After a period of various of cooperative activities between people of Pittsburgh and Da Nang, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2008, at Pittsburgh City Hall with the witness of Springdale Rep. Jason Altmire, the President and members of City Council Pittsburgh, many citizens and news media of Pittsburgh, Mayor Luke Ravenstahl signed a memorandum to officially establish sister city tie between Pittsburgh and Da Nang city of Vietnam. Embassy of Vietnam Charge' d'affaires Nguyen Tien Minh and some of the Embassy officials attended the ceremony.



The partnership establishes a formal basis by which cities can develop and sustain cultural, social, educational and economic ties with one another.

A delegation from Pittsburgh will visit Danang for a similar ceremony as well as business opportunities in Da Nang in Feb 2009.

### **Vietnamese pianist performs in Washington**

Nguyen Bich Tra, one of Vietnam 's top classical pianist, performed in Washington on December 3 in the non-profit programme of performing arts for everyone sponsored by the Kennedy Centre of the USA in cooperation with the Embassy of Vietnam in Washington DC.

Bich Tra made two performance visits to the US with the first in a charity tour of Ohio . She also performed in Russia , the UK , Sweden , Norway , Poland , Germany , Spain and recently, in October, Japan where she participated in the Festival of Asian Musical Bands.

After finishing recording projects with Toccata Classics of the UK, she would come back to Vietnam to continue playing less-known works by Leo Ornstein and others for everyone and teaching young Vietnamese musicians and artists how to raise musical sense and develop individual ability in self-confidence and self-expression.

## VIETNAM HIGHLIGHT

## **Protestant churches receive recognition decisions**

The Adventist Church of Vietnam and the Presbyterian Church of Vietnam held a ceremony in Ho Chi Minh City on December 21 to receive government decisions recognising the churches as religious organisations.

Head of the Government's Committee for Religious Affairs Nguyen The Doanh said the decisions aim to facilitate religious practice of the two Protestant organisations' dignitaries and followers.

He said he expected with the new legal status, the two churches would make more contributions to the nation towards the goal of a prosperous country and a just, democratic and civilised society.

The Adventist Church made its first presence in Vietnam in 1929 and it has since then expanded its wings to 25 cities and provinces nationwide.

Meanwhile the Presbyterian Church came to Vietnam in 1989 and it now has members and followers in 14 cities and provinces.

## **Vietnam lures over 64 billion USD in FDI in 2008**

According to the Foreign Investment Department under the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), Vietnam attracted 1,171 new foreign direct investment (FDI) projects with a total registered capital of over 60.2 billion USD in 2008, tripling last year's figure.

The newly registered capital was mainly poured into the industrial and construction sectors, with 572 projects capitalized at over 32.6 billion USD and the service sector ranked second with 554 projects with a combined registered capital of 27.4 billion USD.

Most FDI projects licensed in 2008 were wholly foreign-invested, making up 75.3 percent of the total projects and 51.7 percent of the total capital. The projects' average size reached 51.47 million USD, up sharply from previous years.

In total, Vietnam attracted over 64 billion USD in both newly registered and additional FDI in 2008, doubling the figure from 2007. The volume of disbursed capital reached 11.5 billion USD, up 43 percent against last year.

Malaysia topped the list of 50 countries and territories registering to invest in Vietnam this year with 55 projects capitalized at 14.9 billion USD. It was followed by Taiwan , Japan , Singapore and Brunei .

## **Government holds year – end meeting**

On 23-24<sup>th</sup> December, Cabinet members held year – end meeting in Hochiminh city. They all agreed that the government's drastic measures have proven to be effective in

curbing inflation, preventing the economic slowdown and ensuring the macro economic stability and social security, in the context of the world complex situation and domestic difficulties such as natural disasters and epidemics.

In 2008, the country obtained a GDP growth of 6.23 percent, the lowest growth in last 10 year while consumer price index (CPI) hit 20 –year record of more than 20 percent.

Regarding the 2009 tasks, PM Dung urged cabinet members to focus on the task of preventing economic slowdown to maintain the GDP growth rate of 6.5 percent and ensure social security.

He also asked the ministers to take the initiative in providing information for the press.

### **Vietnam's soccer win AFF Suzuki Cup: the first international title**

Vietnam won the Asean Football Federation (AFF) Suzuki Cup 2008 on Sunday after holding a 1-1 draw with Thailand in the second leg in Hanoi. The aggregate score was 3-2.

Vietnam, who eliminated defending champions Singapore in the semi-finals, went into Sunday's match with a one-goal aggregate lead after shocking the Thais with a 2-1 win in the first leg in Bangkok on Wednesday.

Vietnam's victory capped one of the most surprising runs in the 12-year history of South East Asia's football championship.