

Overview

In an opening address to the National Assembly on 4 May 2003, Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, noted that, despite an altered international political and economic landscape and various natural disasters, Vietnam has been able to maintain a high degree of macro-economic stability, achieving a GDP growth rate of 7.04% in 2002, and of 6.9% for the first quarter of 2003. The Deputy Prime Minister attributed the positive performance of the economy to a series of policy measures that included the increasingly rigorous implementation of the Enterprise Law of 2000, and the formal endorsement of the private sector by the Communist Party at its Ninth Congress in 2002. The private sector is increasingly viewed as a key to economic growth and employment creation in Viet Nam.

The present Ten Year Socio-Economic Development Strategy and Five-Year sectoral development plans make a strong commitment to equitable, people-centered development. Viet Nam's Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) was approved in May 2002 and reflects the Government's concern with human resources development, employment creation and social protection. More generally, employment is recognized as an important path to the eradication of poverty and the country's Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction (HEPR) programme and National Target Programme for Employment, which pre-date the CPRGS, have been amalgamated, under the leadership of the Ministry of Labour, to provide a framework for targeted interventions in support of CPRGS implementation. While poverty remains an important issue, rising standards of living, increased spending on social services and Viet Nam's improved position on the Human Development Index has resulted in its being removed from the list of least developed countries in 2002 (UNCTAD, 2002).

ILO Constituents

Government - Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) is the focal point for the ILO in Viet Nam. Ms. NGUYEN Thi Hang is the Minister of Labor.

Employers - The Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) is one of the two recognized employers' organizations in Viet Nam. On the occasion of its Fourth National Conference in April this year the VCCI was awarded the State Independence Order, (1st Class) and the Prime Minister's Certificate of Merit in recognition of its increasingly important role in the country's economic development. In particular, the VCCI is emerging as a spokesperson for employers and plays a prominent role in the Vietnam Business Forum and other discussions between the business community and the highest level of Government. The National Conference elected a new President, Mr. VU Tien Loc, for a five-year term from 2003-2008.

The Vietnam Cooperative Alliance (VCA) is the second recognized employers organizations in Vietnam. The bulk of its membership comprises cooperative enterprises and micro-business.

Mr. NGUYEN Ty is the President of the Vietnam Cooperative Alliance (VCA).

Workers - The Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL) is one of five mass organizations. It is entrusted with the representation of the interests of formal sector workers in Viet Nam. However, the revised Labour Code requires the formation of trade unions in all enterprises with over ten workers and the VGCL is now looking to extend its reach to the workers in the emerging private sector, including those in micro-enterprises and the informal economy. The Ninth National Congress of the VGCL will be held in October this year and will review the organization's Constitution with a view to revision at both the central and local level

Ms. CU Thi Hau is President of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL).

Technical Cooperation

On-going projects include: the U. S. funded *National Program for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labor in Viet Nam*, launched in February this year to support the realization of a National Programme against Child Labor; the *Viet Nam Project to Combat Trafficking in Children and Women* in the Mekong Sub-region which is awaiting final approval for its second five-year phase; *Promoting More and Better Jobs for Young Women in Viet Nam: the transition from school to work* which is being carried out in the context of the ILO's International Programme on *More and Better Jobs for Women*; an ILO/Japan project on the *Expansion of Employment Opportunities for Women*, launched in February this year, to address the promotion of women's employment in rural areas; a French-funded project on the *Extension of Micro-insurance and Micro-finance Schemes to Informal Women Workers*, launched in May, is expected to contribute to poverty alleviation in Viet Nam through the design and field testing of innovative methods of risk management for women in the informal sector; a German-funded *Safe Work and Integrated Labor Inspection* project will assist the Vietnamese Labor Inspectorate revitalize its structure and operations and enhance its effectiveness in the face of economic and social change. Two projects on women workers' rights and one on mainstreaming gender into the HEPR programme were concluded at the end of 2002.

A wide range of activities are also being undertaken in the field of occupational safety and health with Japanese and RBTC funding and a *National Action Plan on SafeWork*, jointly crafted by the Ministries of Labour and Health, with inputs from employers' and workers' organizations is expected to be tabled for discussion later this year. The ILO has also provided assistance in the drafting of new social security and unemployment insurance legislation.

While MoLISA has assumed a coordinating role in relation to the U. S. funded project on *Promoting Sound Industrial Relations at the Workplace and Strengthening the Capacity of Industrial Relations Actors in Viet Nam* that was launched in January this year, implementation is tripartite. The project is intended to strengthen the capacity of the Government and the social partners to promote and support industrial relations and workplace cooperation in Viet Nam. It builds on an earlier South Asia and Vietnam project on Tripartism that ended in February 2003. The ILO Office in Viet Nam is also cooperating with the Social Dialogue Sector, and the Sub-Regional Office for East Asia to promote a more active role for its tripartite constituents in the implementation and monitoring of the CPRGS.

International Labor Standards and tripartism

Vietnam has ratified fifteen Conventions, three of which are core Conventions (C100, C111, C182). A tripartite plus working group has recommended the ratification of the Minimum Age Convention, (No.138) which is now before the Prime Minister for consideration. Seminars were held in 2002 to review the two forced labour Conventions (C29 and 105), Convention 144 on tripartism and Convention 184 on occupational safety and health in agriculture. Preliminary work was also undertaken in the context of the ILO's SAVPOT project on a legal framework for the establishment of a tripartite consultative body on labour issues. Selected ILS have been translated into Vietnamese in the context of an UNDP-financed project and will be printed for wide distribution in the course of this year.