PRESS RELEASE

EU and Vietnam hold Human Rights Dialogue

The EU and Vietnam held on 11 September 2013 in Hanoi the third round of their annual enhanced Dialogue on Human Rights in the spirit of the EU-Vietnam Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed in June 2012.

The EU delegation was led by Mrs Véronique Arnault, Director for Human Rights and Democracy in the European External Action Services (EEAS). The Vietnamese delegation was led by Mr Hoang Chi Trung, Director General of the International Organisations Department of the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and included a broad range of experts from various services, agencies and ministries.

The Dialogue allowed the two sides to exchange views on a wide range of issues and was conducted in a frank and open atmosphere. It provided an opportunity to take stock of positive developments in the area of human rights in Vietnam (progress as regards the situation of Lesbian, Gay, Trans, Bisexual and Intersex Persons, plans for signing and ratifying United Nations Convention against Torture in 2014, invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief to visit Vietnam in 2014) but also for the EU to express strong concerns regarding in particular Freedom of Expression and of the Media. The Dialogue was complemented by a visit to an administrative detention centre in Ninh Binh province. Furthermore, a number of side-meetings with local bloggers, human rights defenders and NGOs were held.

The two sides reviewed recent developments in human rights. The EU raised issues relating to freedom of expression and the media, including recent internet legislation and expressed concern regarding extensive application of national security provisions in the penal code. The EU reiterated its concerns regarding the situation of a number of internet bloggers and human rights defenders and their relatives. It encouraged Vietnam to consider the free-flow of ideas as providing huge benefits to
meet the challenges that come with a modernising society. The EU also raised the issue of implementation of Freedom of Religion or Belief.

There were extensive discussions on constitutional, legal and judicial reforms under preparation in Vietnam, some of which the EU, together with some of its Member States, is supporting through technical assistance. The EU urged Vietnam, when drafting new legislation, to put it in line with its international obligations, notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The EU stressed the importance of access to lawyers and the right to a fair trial, as well as the need to improve prison conditions. The EU regretted the resumption of executions in Vietnam, stressing that the de-facto suspension of capital punishment would have been the occasion for Vietnam to declare a moratorium. The EU encouraged Vietnam to further reduce the number of offences punishable by death penalty and improve prison conditions for persons on death row. It offered to share experience that would help Vietnam to move towards ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Vietnam stressed its commitment to fight corruption more efficiently, which should help the country to remain attractive for foreign investment.

The two sides discussed cooperation in international fora, both on thematic and country-specific issues. The EU welcomed Vietnam’s increased engagement with international human rights mechanisms. With reference to Vietnam’s candidature for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council for the term 2014-2016, the EU encouraged Vietnam to make specific pledges. The EU welcomed Vietnam’s willingness to engage further with UN Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups and to invite some of them to visit the country, notably in view of the Universal Periodic Review of the country in 2014.

Vietnam shared its views on the work of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and on the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD) adopted last year. The EU appreciated Vietnam’s positive and constructive role as coordinator for EU relations within ASEAN and reiterated its willingness to work with ASEAN on Human Rights. The EU stressed its commitment to support AICHR and work closely together to implement the AHRD.

The EU also raised a number of individual cases of concern, reiterating its request for access to these persons and observation of their trials.