

EU-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue

12 January 2012, Hanoi

Press release of the EU Delegation

In the spirit of their recent Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the EU and Vietnam held on 12 January 2012 the first round of their new, capital-based Human Rights Dialogue. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of the Acting Director of the Human Rights and Democracy Department of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Mr. Rolf Timans, and the Director General of the International Organisations Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, Mr Hoang Chi Trung.

The EU emphasised that the promotion of and the respect for human rights and the rule of law was of crucial importance for Vietnam's own development and a key aspect of bilateral relations. In this context, the envisaged revision of the Constitution and a wide range of legislative measures under consideration by the National Assembly are of particular relevance.

The meeting provided an opportunity for both sides to raise issues of interest and concern in an open and in-depth manner, including discussions regarding a number of individual cases of concern to the EU. The EU welcomed the participation of a wide range of representatives from relevant line ministries, agencies and the judiciary in the Dialogue, as well as the opportunity of carrying out a field visit to An Giang Province subsequently. Welcoming Vietnam's remarkable achievements in the promotion of economic and social rights as well as poverty alleviation, the EU expressed the expectation that current macroeconomic challenges do not undermine Vietnam's commitment to continued improvements regarding human rights and the rule of law.

The EU expressed concern about signs of a more restrictive approach to freedom of expression and media in the country, which are a source for concern in Europe and risk to affect Vietnam's international reputation.

While welcoming significant improvements in the field of freedom of religion or belief in Vietnam in recent years, the EU pointed to some worrying developments in 2011. Both sides agreed that further efforts are needed to improve and accelerate the process of registration of congregations and churches in Vietnam.

The EU appreciated ongoing efforts by the Government of Vietnam to improve living conditions of ethnic minorities and their social and economic integration, including support to education in ethnic minorities' languages. The visit to An Giang Province provided an opportunity to meet with local authorities as well as representatives of religious and ethnic minority communities.

The EU took note of Vietnam's commitment to submit shortly implementation reports to UN treaty bodies, notably on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The EU urged Vietnam to fully implement the recommendations accepted under its UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2009, in particular by ratifying the UN Convention against Torture, the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and several ILO Conventions. The EU welcomed the visits to Vietnam by several UN Special Procedures on social and economic rights and suggested extending invitations also to those covering civil and political rights. The EU encouraged Vietnam to accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The EU expressed hope that the ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights currently under preparation will enhance international human rights standards.

Both sides shared the view that an independent, well-functioning judiciary system, the observance of fair trial rules and improved access to justice are essential for any modern society. The EU welcomed ongoing reflections in Vietnam on making administrative detention decisions subject to judicial review. The EU also encouraged Vietnam to cooperate with the ICRC and allow it access to prisons and detention centres, as well as to further reduce the number of offences punishable by the death penalty in the context of the ongoing revision of the criminal code.