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**Statement by His Excellency Dr. BE Truong Thanh, Standing Vice-Chairman of the  
National Committee on Ethnic and Minorities Affairs of Viet Nam  
at the 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the United Nations Forum on Minorities Issues  
“Meaningful and effective participation in economic and development policy-making”  
14-15 December 2010, Geneva**

Madam Chair,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Vietnamese delegation extends its welcome and has the honor to participate in the Third session of the United Nations Forum on “Minorities and effective participation in the economic life”. Our delegation’s presentation will focus on the ethnic minorities in Viet Nam and their participation in economic development.

Madam Chair,

1. Viet Nam is a multi-ethnic nation, with 54 different ethnic groups living together and jointly making the history of our national construction.

- 54 ethnic groups make the total population of nearly 86 million people, in which the majority ethnic group (Kinh) accounts for 85.7% and the rest of 53 ethnic minority groups, 14.3%. Among 53 ethnic minority groups, the population percentage is quite uneven: 5 groups have the population of over one million each, 32 groups with more than ten thousand up to less than one million population, 16 groups with less than 10 thousand population, and 5 ethnic groups with the population of less than one thousand.

- Viet Nam’s ethnic groups have formed a united community, and the cultural identities and traditions of each group have rendered the richness and the diversity of the Vietnamese culture.

- The ethnic groups in Viet Nam live together across the country. Many of the ethnic minorities reside in mountainous or remote areas where remain difficulties and challenges in terms of development conditions, infrastructure, especially transportation system. In these areas, the rate of poverty, marginal poverty and poverty relapse is still high in comparison with the average of the country.

2. Given such features, apart from national socio-economic development policies, the Government of Viet Nam has developed specific investment and development programs to support each region, each group based on their particular needs.

Viet Nam's policies towards the ethnic minorities are consistently based on the principle that "all ethnic groups are equal, united, mutually respecting and assisting each other for common development" and under the motto "more difficult regions need more attention and priority" in all fields.

In terms of legislation, though there is not yet a separate Law on Ethnicity, ethnic policies were legalized in Constitution 1992 (Articles 5, 36, 39 and 133) and in the legal system such as: the Civil Code, Law on Election of National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels, Law on Citizenship, Law on Education, Law on People's Health Care, etc...

Based on these legal regulations, ethnic policies have been integrated into socio-economic development strategies, plans and in ethnic minority-targeted programs, investment projects which are characterized with appropriate mechanisms and policies.

The right to equality of ethnic groups in Viet Nam means they are all equal in terms of both rights and obligations in all political, social, economic and cultural aspects. First, regarding the right to political equality, it is imperative to act against all forms of ethnic division, racial discrimination, narrow nationalism, extremism and national inferiority. And we did touch upon this topic at the Second session of the Forum on Ethnic Minorities last year.

3. Taking into account the topic of the Third session of the Forum, "Minorities and effective participation in the economic life" and the focus of our meeting today, "Meaningful and effective participation in economic and development policy-making", we would like to share some experiences and best practices as follows:

- To provide basis for ethnic policy-planning in specific regions, targets and fields as mentioned above, ethnic minority regions are classified according to geographical conditions, namely, totally mountainous areas, areas with mountains, and plain parts with ethnic minorities. Then, they are classified according to the socio-economic development level and condition: region I, initially developed; region II, temporarily stable; and the region III, extremely difficult.

- Based on such area classification, the Government makes appropriate decisions on target programs through specific projects with high priority given to extremely difficult areas.

4. Target programs are carried out in accordance with concrete requirements applied to the characteristics and features of each region or target, for instance:

- Hunger alleviation and poverty reduction programs conducted in extremely difficult areas are more accelerated. As a result, in these areas the rate of poor household is reduced by 4-5% per year (the average national rate is 2%), helping to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor in the society. At present, the Government of Viet Nam continues to accelerate the rapid and sustainable poverty reduction programs in more than 60 extremely difficult and poor districts (where the poverty household rate is over 50%) in the ethnic minority areas.

- Priority is also given to building and strengthening infrastructure system in extremely difficult areas, particularly transportation, irrigation network. At the same time, the ethnic minority groups are supported in their economic structure transfer to a combined structure of traditional agro-forestry production and other sectors and services of more efficiency.

- We have projects to preserve cultural heritages and traditional cultural identities of ethnic minorities (including their languages, writings, physical and non-physical cultural heritages).

- Special investment and development projects are developed to target the ethnic minority groups of very few populations. The preservation and development projects for five ethnic minority groups with the population of less than 1,000 each (Si La, Pu Peo, O Du, Ro Mam and Brau) have been underway and in the near future, similar projects will be carried out to support the ethnic minority groups with the population of less than 10,000 each.

- In addition, a variety of programs and projects have been implemented in different fields such as trade and tourism development in the mountainous, highland and ethnic minority areas; education and training for the ethnic minorities through the boarding school system of different levels from district and provincial up to graduate and professional; provision of grass-root medical and health care system for people in ethnic minority areas.

Madam Chair,

5. To help the "minorities" (the ethnic minorities) to effectively participate in the economic life, it is our view that very "concrete" and "appropriate" policies should be developed subject to the specific characters of each area and target. For instance, since 2004 we have made policy to provide the land for production and housing, houses and safe water for poor ethnic minority households in 53 provinces. After four years, we gained remarkable achievements: building houses for 373,400 households, 1,552 ha of housing land to 71,713 households and 27,763 ha of production land for 83,563 households, 4,663 water-providing constructions and nearly 200,000 households have to safe water....

6. Some points should be taken into account in planning policy for these targets:

- Programs of awareness and knowledge raising on legal issues and ethnic minority policies to facilitate their access to development information should be communicated in various ways appropriate with their level and languages.

- Programs in ethnic minority areas should involve direct participation of each local community and people, especially well-respected community figures in their implementation. The State provides funding for the investment and construction projects, while local people contribute their labor and construction materials available in the regions. Socialization of needed resources and active involvement of entrepreneurs, social organizations and NGOs in projects to support extremely difficult areas are highly encouraged.

- The projects aimed at rapid and sustainable poverty reduction to these targets should be viewed as "Giving fishing rod, not fish". But it is not enough. Once having the fishing rods, they need to be guided how to fish, not only sufficient for themselves but more than enough for sale; therefore, they also need practical guidance to sell the fish. Only by doing so, could the ultimate goal of accelerating effective participation of ethnic minorities in the economic life be achieved.

We are ready to further exchange views and experiences with other delegations and international organizations so that we will accelerate better and more effectively the participation of ethnic minorities in the economic life.

Thank for your kind attention/.