

# AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGE COUNCIL

## NINETEENTH AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION TO THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

27 June - 3 July 2015



### DELEGATION

**Mr Matthew Merry - Delegation Leader** (Australian Labor Party)  
Official, National Union of Workers

**Ms Leah Dwyer** (Australian Labor Party)  
Workplace Organiser, Community and Public Sector Union

**Ms Caitlin Keage** (Liberal Party of Australia)  
Media Advisor, Office of Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham

**Mr Craig McAllister** (National Party of Australia)  
Research Officer, Western Australian Department of Premier and Cabinet

**Mr Gideon Rozner** (Liberal Party of Australia)  
Assistant Advisor, Office of Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson

**Mr Tim Smith MP** (Liberal Party of Australia)  
State Member for Kew, Parliament of Victoria

**Mrs Sharon Forester** (Council Representative)  
Secretariat Director for Australian Political Exchange Council

## Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Delegation Report.....	4
Saturday 27 June.....	4
Meeting with Tuoi Tre Newspaper .....	4
Sunday 28 June .....	5
Cu Chi Tunnel Visit .....	5
Courtesy Call to Leaders of Ho Chi Minh City .....	5
Ho Chi Minh City Youth Union Headquarters .....	5
Monday 29 June.....	6
Visits to Historic Sites in Ho Chi Minh City.....	6
Tuesday 30 June.....	6
Thua Thien Hue Province - Courtesy Call with Mr Tran Thanh Binh, Deputy Secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party .....	6
Youth Union - Thua Thien Hue Province.....	7
Local Youth Projects in Hue .....	7
Reception for Delegation at the Residence of HE Mr Hugh Borrowman - Australian Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam .....	8
Wednesday 1 July .....	8
Briefing at the Australian Embassy .....	8
Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union.....	8
National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam .....	8
Thursday 2 July.....	9
Ministry of Foreign Affairs .....	9
Visit to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum.....	9
Courtesy Call to Leaders of Hanoi City.....	9
Ministry of Labour.....	9
Background Data.....	9
Women.....	10
International Assistance.....	10
Friday 3 July.....	11
Ministry of Industry and Trade .....	11
Conclusion.....	11

## **Executive Summary**

On Friday 26 June, the delegates were formally introduced to each other and to the Australian Political Exchange Council (Auspol) Secretariat. Briefings were received on the history of the Australia-Vietnam bilateral relationship as well as the economic and social links between the two nations. The key note speakers were officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Vietnamese Embassy and Senator Cory Bernardi, Senator for South Australia (Leader of the 18<sup>th</sup> Australian Delegation to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam).

Demographically, Vietnam is a young nation with a nation-wide average age of 39. Vietnam is a developing economy with political and economic reform transforming the country from one of the poorest in the world to one of a lower-middle income status. Higher education holds a particularly high value nationally. Investment in infrastructure and urban planning is also an area of importance with international aid a significant aspect.

Upon arrival in Vietnam, the delegation was greeted and guided by Ms Tran Hoai Minh, Program Officer of the International Department of the Ho Chi Minh Youth Union (HCYU). Meetings and events took place over the course of the week in Ho Chi Minh City, Hue City, and Hanoi.

The briefings and assistance provided prior to departure gave the delegates a good foundation to participate in the program and gain a deeper appreciation of the scheduled meetings and program activities ahead. The guidance of the program officers from Auspol and HCYU helped fulfil the purpose of the visit in learning about the political culture and experience in Vietnam.

## **Delegation Report**

**Saturday 27 June**

### **Meeting with Tuoi Tre Newspaper**

The delegation was introduced to the leadership team of the Tuoi Tre Newspaper, a leading news publication in Vietnam, to discuss its development, history and current activities. The meeting was led by Tang Huu Phong, Editor-in-Chief of Tuoi Tre Newspaper. Also in attendance was the Chief of Archives, Chief of Office, representatives from the Union of Youth, and the Manager of the Personnel Department.

Tuoi Tre Newspaper was originally published as a secret bulletin. During reforms in Vietnam, the newspaper had to adapt and meet the demands of the emerging environment. It started out as a rudimentary hard copy publication in the 1970's and has now shifted with technology to include websites, social media and digital platforms. Tuoi Tre Newspaper has grown to a stable of seven publications (three print and four online).

Their first edition was published forty years ago in a clandestine environment. At this time in 1975, 3,000 copies were distributed in a simple hard copy format. 1983 saw the first publication of a Weekend Magazine which included social and political pages which took a more sophisticated approach to reporting. Twenty-three years later, Tuoi Tre became a daily newspaper (20 pages per issue).

Growth in circulation saw 500,000 copies in distribution by 2008, this was the peak of the hard copy format. Currently, it is estimated that 325,000 copies are distributed. The drop in print media is due to the newspaper moving to an online format, similar to many newspapers around the world.

There is an illustrated comic version in magazine format and currently 90,000 copies have been distributed to readers in Vietnam. To reflect the significant changes in the manner that the readership accesses Tuoi Tre Newspaper, the online version currently receives approximately 75 million hits to their news page a month. Tuoi Tre Newspaper has just completed implementing digital platforms for all of its print content.

Our host shared pictures of operating reports and explained the role that Australians and Americans have had in training reporters. They now have 13 operating offices which are home to many travelling reporters to Vietnam. The newsroom and production room is in the same area to help with the collaboration of information and archives.

Tuoi Tre Newspaper has a printing house in Ho Chi Minh and currently lease out half of their building to other TV networks and media outlets.

Tuoi Tre Newspaper has started a program called 'Focus on Development' which aims to help 48,000 students and have raised more than 250 billion VND (approximately \$12 million US).

As part of their philanthropic goals, Tuoi Tre Newspaper has increased their social responsibility by being involved with the building of bridges, hospitals and tree planting. Reporters are actively involved with the projects which they also report on. The newspaper leadership team note they have had 40 years of solid patriotism and contribute to those who need assistance.

## **Sunday 28 June**

### **Cu Chi Tunnel Visit**

The delegation visited the Cu Chi Tunnels and after an inspection of the spartan nature of the tunnels, the delegates were shown a presentation on life in the tunnels during the Vietnam conflict and their social and historical legacy in Vietnam.

The cultural importance of the tunnels to the people of Vietnam serve as a strong link to a significant period in the nation's history.

### **Courtesy Call to Leaders of Ho Chi Minh City**

Mr Le Thanh Liem, Vice President of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, welcomed discussions relating to the development of Ho Chi Minh City, particularly in relation to infrastructure and urban development.

The delegation was advised that many infrastructure projects are currently underway in the city and that its complexion is changing rapidly. An example of this is the construction of the first segment of a new metro railway system. The rail project will help meet the changing needs of the city as they shift from private vehicular transport to mass transportation.

Another means to reduce pressure on the transport network is to apply urban planning measures. This will ensure that in the future Ho Chi Minh City's industrial areas are complemented with well planned residential areas that are in close proximity. This is said to alleviate the need for people to commute long distances to and from their workplace.

### **Ho Chi Minh City Youth Union Headquarters**

Mr Nguyen Manh Cuong, Secretary of the Youth Union of Ho Chi Minh City, met the delegation along with leaders and representatives of the Youth Union, including a number of representatives from the International Affairs Division.

There are over 2.5 million young people within the city and around 620,000 of them are members of the Ho Chi Minh City Youth Union. It is estimated that around 60% of young people in the city approach the youth union for assistance in their education, employment and recreational needs. The priorities of the youth union's activities are currently focused on youth education, which includes a focus on patriotic activities, employment and volunteer work. The vision and legacy of Ho Chi Minh filters through everything; young people are encouraged to be disciplined and noble in their endeavours and put the party and the country at the centre of their activities.

There are seven assistant organisations of the youth union that provide assistance to local youth. These organisations have a focus on employment, social activities, science, technological development as well as business start-up ventures. A number of challenges faced by Ho Chi Minh city were discussed including the increasing urban population, public transport and pollution. There are ongoing policy discussions that relate to encouraging migration and habitation away from Ho Chi Minh City, instead building economic development in the regions. There is a focus on moving Ho Chi Minh City away from heavy industries to focus more on technological industries and local start-ups. This carries consequences for the youth who have always seen Ho Chi Minh City as a place of broad opportunity, particularly those with limited education. The shift in the economic make-up of the city will impact young people who do not have an education in technology or sciences.

Of interest to the delegation was the Youth Union's focus on local start-up's. Originally, this scheme focused on assisting young entrepreneurs creating business networks. Now there is a focus on mentoring and training youth on financial and legal literacy that is required to run a small business. Young people who are trying to start up a small enterprise are provided with office support and loans which carry minimal interest. The focus on start-ups is spreading outside of Ho Chi Minh with some regional areas starting to take the lead. The Youth Union also runs a competition where young people submit business start-up proposals. The idea selected as the most innovative will win assistance and funding to enable the entrepreneur to make their vision a reality. A recent example of a competition winner included a young person who had designed an app that would remotely disable stolen motorbikes.

A notable interaction that came out of the meeting was when a delegate asked the Youth Union what Australia could do to assist the City representatives to cater for young people. Australia is a focus for Vietnamese youth; there are local alumni associations that links new and old Vietnamese students who attended Australian universities. It was noted that there are currently a number of scholarships available to students in Ho Chi Minh City to attend universities in Australia and today many leaders in the City have university degrees acquired through Australian universities. This is a source of ongoing pride for the City. Accordingly, the City leaders and youth union officials would greatly appreciate more opportunities, such as scholarships, for young people to go to university in Australia and bring their knowledge and skills back to Vietnam.

## **Monday 29 June**

### **Visits to Historic Sites in Ho Chi Minh City**

Delegates visited sites of historic importance to modern Ho Chi Minh City, including the War Remnants Museum and the Independence Palace.

Although Vietnam is demographically young and future oriented, these sites demonstrate the importance of reflection and observance of the legacy left by older generations.

## **Tuesday 30 June**

### **Thua Thien Hue Province - Courtesy Call with Mr Tran Thanh Binh, Deputy Secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party**

Mr Tran remarked on the rich and long history that Hue has in Vietnam's cultural and political history. Furthermore, he spoke of the progress that has been made in Hue and that development had been progressed with the assistance of many countries including Australia. He expressed his hope that links between the Vietnamese Communist Party and political parties in Australia could be further improved with ongoing delegations and other forms of international cooperation.

Hue City is currently preparing for the National Communist Party Congress in 2016. Mr Tran encouraged the Australian delegates to maintain an interest in Vietnam and its cultural and political affairs into the future and reinforced the importance of strengthening the political links between Australia and Vietnam.

### **Youth Union - Thua Thien Hue Province**

This was the second year that an Auspol delegation has visited the Central Province Communist Party in Hue. 300,000 young people make up the labour force in the central provinces with 88,000 of them being members of the Communist Youth Union.

There is a focus on instilling a political and ideological education in young people and an expectation that they will follow the example of “Uncle” Ho Chi Minh. There is also a focus on local volunteerism, specifically on building a civilised and urban life, environmental protection, promoting international festivals and vocational education.

One of the hosts had a role within the Youth Union to monitor the recreational, cultural and art activities of young people and to assist them in leading noble and industrious lives that are modelled on the example set by Ho Chi Minh.

The leaders were very keen to hear about how young people engage in politics in Australian political parties. The Australian delegates advised that this is something Australian parties continue to work on, in that, encouraging young people to get involved. It was commonly agreed that in Australia, university politics and political youth groups within parties were central to ensure a vibrant and diverse youth wing of our respective parties.

### **Local Youth Projects in Hue**

There are a number of local environmental projects, many of them funded through the World Wildlife Fund and the United Nations Environment Program to mobilise young people around protecting their urban and regional environment. These projects run under the motto of “green, clean and beautiful”.

The biggest issues affecting young people are the lack of employment opportunities. Around 60% of young people who are employed in the central province have a stable job. The remainder are working in informal jobs. The delegation was informed on how there is a need for the provincial leadership to work with the vocational education centres to assist young people to look for and apply for stable jobs in their local area.

There are scholarship programs for the young and gifted who find themselves confronted by barriers to achieving a decent education. As part of this program, some students participate in international exchanges to neighbouring Laos. It was stated that there is no funding currently available from the Australian Government to assist the central provinces in creating jobs for young people.

Those activities that engage young people in environmental protection and in assisting or volunteering at international festivals are seen as critical to recruiting young people to the movement and keeping them active in their community.

## **Reception for Delegation at the Residence of HE Mr Hugh Borrowman - Australian Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam**

Upon arrival in Hanoi, the delegation attended a reception hosted by the Australian Ambassador to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, His Excellency, Mr Hugh Borrowman. Also in attendance were a number of Australian officers working in Vietnam in a range of areas, including education and law enforcement.

The delegates had the opportunity to discuss Australia's interaction with Vietnam as well as hear the personal insights of Australian personnel who had vast experience in working in cooperation with Vietnam and its authorities.

## **Wednesday 1 July**

### **Briefing at the Australian Embassy**

The delegation attended a formal address and briefing at the Australian Embassy from Ambassador, His Excellency, Mr Hugh Borrowman.

Issues raised related to the history of the Australian and Vietnamese bilateral relationship, the importance of understanding and fostering people to people links, activities in international development, regional security engagement and foreign aid, among other matters.

Australia's dialogue with Vietnam on export and investment opportunities was canvassed, with Vietnam experiencing a solid increase in economic growth. This attracts international capital and expertise in delivering goods and services to meet its growing needs. The increase in engagement through high level visits highlighted a sign of a strong and growing relationship between Vietnam and Australia.

### **Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union**

Delegates visited the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union. Hosts included Mr Nguyen Long Hai, Secretary of the Youth Union; Ms Pham Phuong Chi, Deputy Chair of the Vietnam Youth Federation and Head of the International Department at the Youth Union; and Ms Bui Diem Huong, Deputy Head of the International Department of the Youth Union - all being former Auspol Delegates to Australia.

Issues discussed included initiatives aimed at promoting the participation of Vietnamese youth in social and political forums, and programs aimed at encouraging young people to participate in cultural, sporting and community events to assist in preventing the marginalisation of youth who may be at risk of isolation due to mental health or other issues affecting their wellbeing.

### **National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam**

The Delegation visited the National Assembly of Vietnam and were greeted by Mr Bui Sy Loi, Deputy Head of the Social Issues Committee of the National Assembly.

A number of issues were discussed, ranging from the structure of the National Assembly to the carriage of portfolio responsibilities within the Assembly. Social issues relating to health and welfare were raised including the challenge of keeping up the provision of health and welfare services in a society where the standard of living for many is rising and expectations are changing.

The topics of urban development and housing were raised and discussed. These reflected many of the issues raised in meetings with city leaders throughout the visit.



## **Thursday 2 July**

### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

The Delegation was hosted by Mr Nguyen Thanh Tan, Head of the Southeast Asian, Southern Asian and South Pacific Department. Matters raised included the recent move to enhance the Australia-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership.

Additionally, the delegation was advised that Vietnam is a nation seeking to promote enhanced trade and improved stability among other key priorities in the region. It was also stated that developments in the South China Sea are of interest to Vietnam and other nations in the region and that stability in the region was of utmost importance.

### **Visit to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum**

The Delegation was guided to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and escorted through the chamber to pay a mark of respect to a revered figure in Vietnam. This was followed by a tour of the former residence of Ho Chi Minh and its surrounds.

### **Courtesy Call to Leaders of Hanoi City**

Delegates were greeted by Mr Le Hong Son, Vice President of Hanoi's People's Committee. The delegation was briefed on a number of issues affecting Hanoi including housing for the City's residents and a need to improve mass transportation in Greater Hanoi. Urban and community infrastructure are in need of constant improvement and Vietnam and its cities are constantly seeking and engaging in investment to build new and improved infrastructure. The delegation then engaged in discussion relating to the challenge of meeting the City's transport needs, given the very high use of private vehicles particularly motor cycles in such a large and busy city such as Hanoi.

### **Ministry of Labour**

The delegation met with the Deputy Head of the Department of Social Protection and the Head of International Cooperation. There were a number of questions during the session that focused on young people in the labour market as well as women in the informal and formal economies.

### **Background Data**

- Over 90 million people in the labour market
- 54% workforce population
- Majority of workers are in the agricultural sector, approximately 45%
- 22% in the construction industry
- 60% of workers are in the informal economy.

Vietnam established a labour code in 1994 which was updated in 2012 to include specific conditions and recommendations for economically marginalised people and the management of and assistance for unemployed people. Today, there are unemployment centres throughout the country to assist people in finding work.

Since the labour code was introduced, there has been a noticeable decline in the density of the informal workforce (75% to 60%). While this appears as a successful outcome, it is not clear to what extent this decline in the informal workforce is also the result of economic liberalisation of the country.

Recent policy developments:

- A National Employment Fund has been set up to assist disabled people as well as ethnic minorities. This fund assists them in starting their own business but also assists small and medium enterprises recruit people from these disadvantaged groups.
- An unemployment insurance system was established in 2009 that provides money and training to those who are unemployed.
- A national wage council is responsible for setting baseline standards in terms of wages and conditions. The council is made up of government officials, employers and trade union representatives. The council encourages workplaces to come to collective agreements on workplace standards. While collective agreements are successful for international firms and the public sector, they are difficult to implement in small and medium enterprises.

### **Women**

Women's participation in the economy is protected through the labour code and there are laws that promote gender equality in the workplace. Female participation remains high with around 72% of Vietnamese women participating in the labour force. This is higher than female participation in Australia, keeping in mind that much of this labour force would be in the 'informal sector' where women do not have access to workplace security and protections. There is a maternity leave framework in place which provides a woman who works in the formal sector with an entitlement to six months paid maternity leave. During this period, her employer is legally prohibited from terminating her employment during the period of her maternity leave. While this is a welcomed policy that encourages women to balance their families and work, precarious employment for women remains an issue for many.

### **International Assistance**

The Vietnamese government receives funding from international governments (including Australia) to assist in training young people in vocational pathways. The three tiers of training that are provided to students are school, secondary school and college education. Each tier of training receives funding from governments and private investors.

Currently there are an estimated one million young people in training throughout Vietnam and around 18% of them already have specific vocational qualifications. This being said, there is a strong need to improve vocational training to young people who live in rural provinces.

## **Friday 3 July**

### **Ministry of Industry and Trade**

The delegation met with officials from the Ministry of Industry and Trade, led by Mr To Ngoc Son, Deputy Head of the Asia-Pacific Department. Discussions centred around Vietnam's efforts to increase and improve its ability to trade with other nations in the region as well as globally.

Two areas are of particular interest in improving Vietnam's export industries and hence economic benefit. An important objective for the agricultural sector is animal raising and improving the means of doing so to improve the quality of the produce and improve yield for the producers. The second area of interest is to develop stronger food processing industries so that a value adding approach to the agricultural and fishery sectors can take place for the benefit of all interests in these industries. Improving the supply chain logistics and implementing cold storage systems will allow Vietnam to improve its participation in exporting and importing fresh and processed foods with a view to enhancing trade opportunities.

Discussion ensued about the impact of regional stability or the lack of it on trade, highlighting that regional stability and strengthening of trade in the Asia Pacific region go hand in hand.

### **Conclusion**

The delegation would like to thank Ms Tran Hoai Minh, Program Officer of the International Department of the HCYU, for her ongoing support and assistance during the visit. The delegation would also like to acknowledge the many officials who generously provided their insights and knowledge into Vietnam's political system and culture.