

# AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGE COUNCIL

## EIGHTEENTH AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION TO THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

5-11 APRIL 2014



### DELEGATION

**Senator Cory Bernardi** (Liberal Party of Australia) **Delegation Leader**  
Senator for South Australia

**Mr Ross Macdonald** (Liberal Party of Australia)  
Advisor, Office of the Hon Philip Ruddock MP

**Mr Luke Achterstraat** (Liberal Party of Australia)  
Assistant Advisor, Office of the Hon Andrew Robb AO MP

**Ms Lorna Clarke** (Australian Labor Party)  
Legal Policy Advisor, Office of the Hon Bill Shorten MP

**Mr Mathew Hilakari** (Australian Labor Party)  
Electorate Officer, Office of the Hon Alan Griffin MP

**Mr Matthew Fraser** (The Nationals)  
2013 Nationals' Candidate for Richmond

**Ms Suzy Domitrovic – Council Representative**  
Executive Officer, Australian Political Exchange Council

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	3
Delegation Report .....	3
Sunday 6 April – Hanoi .....	3
Monday 7 April - Hanoi.....	4
Tuesday 8 April - Hanoi.....	6
Wednesday 9 April – Hue City .....	8
Thursday 10 April – Hue City .....	8
Friday 11 April – Ho Chi Minh City.....	9
Conclusion .....	10

## **Executive Summary**

The 18<sup>th</sup> Australian Political Exchange Council Delegation to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was hosted by the Vietnam International Youth Cooperation Development Centre and took place in April 2014. The delegation was extremely grateful for the opportunity to visit this diverse and engaging country and to spend time with representatives from a number of the country's organisations, particularly youth organisations.

Given the delegation's focus on youth, it was a very valuable experience to meet with Vietnam's young leaders and discuss the ongoing challenge of encouraging younger generations to become more involved in their local communities and wider society. All delegates were impressed by the extensive range of support offered to young Vietnamese from organisations that wish to help them with their education, training and employment prospects.

The delegation visited three cities during its week-long visit in Vietnam: Hanoi, Hue and Ho Chi Minh City. This took the delegation right across the country and gave all members a significant insight into the varied nature of Vietnam's environment, people and culture. To then be able to discuss these areas in greater detail with the local officials and authorities gave us all a much deeper understanding of the country. Our hosts were very generous and thoughtful in planning our visit; the delegation was able to take part in an array of cultural, social and political experiences in Vietnam.

The meetings were very informative, providing both Australians and Vietnamese with a unique opportunity to explore and discuss issues of common interest and other topics that may not have been so familiar. International relations, immigration, economic reform, health, communication, education, politics, tourism, the environment and the media were all discussed, among many other topics that helped both Australians and Vietnamese to gain a better understanding of the other's country, its challenges and its achievements.

Everyone involved expressed gratitude for the work of political exchanges in facilitating direct, open and valuable communication between countries. The delegation was able to see firsthand how important Australia's relationship is with Vietnam and it was very encouraging to see both sides express a strong desire to continue this relationship into the future.

The delegation is deeply appreciative to the Australian Political Exchange Council and our hosts for allowing us the opportunity to visit such a wonderful country.

## **Delegation Report**

### **Sunday 6 April – Hanoi**

#### Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum

The Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum is a sombre and revered memorial in Ba Dinh Square. Standing on the same spot where Ho Chi Minh established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945, does provide one with the sense of history.

Inspired by Lenin's mausoleum in Russia, the body of Vietnam's former prime minister and president lies in state with an honour guard in attendance.

The gardens around the mausoleum are a fitting tribute to the diverse regions of Vietnam featuring many varieties of flora from the different areas of the country.

### Hanoi Temple of Literature

One of the delegation's first stops in Vietnam was the Hanoi Temple of Literature. Built in 1071, the temple is a shining example of the rich and varied culture of Vietnam. It is an important landmark in Vietnam's educational history as it was the site of the country's first university and remains a telling monument to Confucius and the work of scholars across the ages.

The pavilions, halls and statues in the temple grounds are frequented by local people and tourists every day. The delegation was also told that the temple is a popular gathering point for Vietnamese New Year celebrations.

### Vietnam Museum of Ethnology

Vietnam's culture is informed by and includes the history of 54 distinct ethnic groups. The Vietnam Museum of Ethnology celebrates these groups and acknowledges the vital role each of them has played in the Vietnam of today.

A relatively new establishment (opened in 1997), the museum building pays tribute to Vietnam's past and present: the building was designed in the shape of a traditional Vietnamese drum by a member of a minority ethnic tribe while the interior was designed by a French architect.

The museum holds more than 15,000 artefacts ranging from everyday objects to priceless antiquities. It provides a very comprehensive and fascinating overview of Vietnamese culture and is a key instrument in preserving the cultural significance of the country's ethnic groups.

### Water puppet show

The delegation was treated to a water puppet show in the evening. It showcased a tradition that has been a part of Vietnamese culture since the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

The flooded water paddies of northern Vietnam formed the initial stage for the first water puppet shows. The wooden puppets are made to look like they walk on water as the puppeteers control the puppets using bamboo rods. Stories of life in rural Vietnam and other events of national significance are the main focus of the performances.

## **Monday 7 April - Hanoi**

### Meeting with Mr Hugh Borrowman, Ambassador to Vietnam

The delegation was fortunate to meet with His Excellency Mr Hugh Borrowman, Australia's Ambassador to Vietnam, and a number of representatives from the Embassy.

During the meeting a general overview of the country was provided to the delegation. This included issues surrounding aid, education, human rights, immigration and culture (which is very family-focused in Vietnam).

### Meeting with Mr Nguyen Long Hai, Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union (HCYU) and representatives from the Vietnam Youth Federation and Vietnam National Union of Students

With over 20 million members across three levels (university, provincial and central) the HCYU plays a significant role in the younger generations of Vietnamese.

The HCYU focuses its efforts on encouraging young people to get involved in volunteering, entrepreneurship and study. For entrepreneurs, a number of opportunities are currently presenting themselves in the areas of tourism, agri-business and the education industries.

The Vietnam Youth Federation engages Vietnamese youth aged between 15 and 30 and has about eight million individual members. Its main aims are for its members to promote and participate in the modernisation of Vietnam and industrialisation of the country's economy as well as representing the rights of young people to Vietnamese agencies and authorities.

The Federation boasts a vast range of facilities for its members to use including TV and radio facilities, publishing houses, research institutes and training, cultural and education centres.

Founded in 1955, the Vietnam National Union of Students acts as a bridge between the Communist Party and student organisations. The Union operates in Vietnamese educational institutions and also supports Vietnamese citizens in universities and colleges overseas.

It was encouraging to see the intense focus on young people as presented by these organisations and the many ways in which each group offers support to youth.

#### Meeting with the Chairman of the External Affairs Committee of the National Assembly

The Chairman gave the delegation a warm welcome and spoke about the building of the National Assembly and the appreciation Vietnam holds for the Australian Political Exchange Council and its programs, which has been a mutually fruitful endeavour for 30 years.

The celebration of 40 years of Vietnam-Australia relations was also a positive point of discussion between the Chairman and the delegation, with cooperation taking many forms through such avenues as infrastructure, education and industry. A new comprehensive agreement that was recently jointly signed by Australia and Vietnam was also mentioned. Both sides indicated their desire for this rewarding relationship to continue well into the future.

The Chairman highlighted the inroads being made to encourage younger generations to engage in the economy and politics by emphasising the importance of the Youth Union, young entrepreneurs and the establishment of a young persons' deputy group. The Foreign Affairs Minister's focus on the need for 'bridges of understanding' impressed the Chairman, who noted that while there will always be a few disagreements between nations, dialogue is always a good start to cooperation.

Discussion moved on to the major changes in the Party in Vietnam. The role of Doi Moi was credited by the Chairman as having brought renewal to the National Assembly, which now includes options for transparency and measures of no-confidence in leaders as part of the Assembly process. Priorities for the National Assembly include traffic reform, economic development and 2020 industrialisation.

While Doi Moi spurred strong growth, such fast growth is not sustainable and the global financial crisis presented problems for Vietnam. The country is now aiming, through restructure and investment, for more durable growth of around six to seven per cent. The Chairman also mentioned the potential for more forums of investment between Australia and Vietnam.

Visit with Deputy Head of the Commission for Foreign Affairs Relations of the Party Central Committee, Mr Tran Dac Loi

Representatives from the committee told the delegation about the transformation and modernisation of Vietnam, including the move away from a subsidised market and the adoption of international economic integration.

A key issue for the party was sustainability and environmental conservation. Vietnam is a land where natural disasters like typhoons, tropical storms and flooding can occur and the party is also mindful of the country's limited resources and the impact of climate change. Vietnamese authorities are now more mindful of environmental issues when building roads and houses.

The delegation also heard about the importance of AusAID to Vietnam, the party's desire to expand local education for all Vietnamese and poverty reduction being a priority for the party.

**Tuesday 8 April - Hanoi**

Meeting with the Vice President of National Academy of Politics and Public Administration

The delegation was fortunate enough to spend time with the Vice President of the National Academy of Politics and Public Administration, who passed on regards from the President who was going overseas at the time of the delegation's visit.

The meeting with the Vice President focused on education and the vital role that younger generations play in the development of a nation. The Vice President spoke of the interest in ensuring the best level of training for young Vietnamese in terms of leadership and the management of society, with a particular focus on duties and seeking benefits for all. The 'national benefit' is a key driver and motivation in modern Vietnam. When asked about the legal training that young Vietnamese received, the Vice President spoke of dual elements of state management law and political theory and ideology.

The Vice President spoke positively of the growing entrepreneurial attitude in the country. The opportunities afforded to the country through the Doi Moi reforms in the 1980s have harmonised the state with the market economy and also provided students with the option to study overseas and bring back to Vietnam the expertise and knowledge they gained while away.

This has given the country the confidence to actively seek to strengthen relationships with other countries in the future.

Meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Industry and Trade

The meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Industry and Trade provided the delegation with a firsthand account of experiences in a still-developing market-based economy.

The ministry itself was established in 1997 when the industry and trade portfolios were brought together to form one portfolio. The move was designed to increase domestic production for an international market. Support for small and medium businesses was a focus of the discussions as the ministry manages the small business portfolio and both groups were keen to delve into the best strategies to foster small business in their countries.

The ministry maintains working relationships with more than 180 nations and noted that their relationship with the Chinese is a particularly mutually beneficial one. Barriers to Australia-Vietnam trade were also a topic of discussion. This international emphasis was coupled with a focus on local strategies to meet the needs of Vietnamese entrepreneurs to help them take advantage of the growing domestic economy.

#### Meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

The country's plan for an environmentally sustainable future dominated the meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.

The representatives spoke of their efforts to educate the public on the most effective ways to achieve sustainability. Sending workers overseas to gain knowledge of what other countries are doing to conserve the environment was just one example of this education campaign.

In 2012, the government committed to a plan to combat climate change after discussions with all levels of government and decisions were undertaken to provide financial support to various programs to pursue that end.

The ministry has put in place programs to manage the country's thousands of kilometres of shore line. It was positive to hear of the assistance the ministry is receiving from Canada and Denmark to develop policies to protect the coast.

Vietnam's renewable energy efforts include the use of solar and wind power and the innovation of turning garbage into electricity.

#### Meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave a general overview of Vietnam's foreign policy agenda in the areas of security, defence, education, trade and the economy.

Both sides praised 40 years of the successful bilateral relationship between Australia and Vietnam, evidenced by the fruitful trade and investment that is taking place and the 24,000 Vietnamese that are studying in Australia.

High level visits took place in Australia between various ministers last year and the outcomes from these discussions will hopefully further advance the good relationship the countries share.

The representatives did touch on what they saw as the possible misperceptions about human rights in Vietnam, encouraging those concerned to visit the country to see for themselves and stating that there has been a recent review of the protection and promotion of human rights in Vietnam.

In terms of trade, Vietnam is currently focused on ties with Laos and Cambodia which the Minister sees as very important, along with economic cooperation with Japan and South Korea. Trade with Australia continues to be very productive and the Ministry would like to develop trade ties further.

Vietnam aims for a consistent and transparent approach to regional stability and faces similar issues to Australia in terms of people smuggling.

When discussing the South China Sea and the disputes over that territory, the representatives spoke of ways to reduce tensions when discussing international law and to strengthen cooperation via bilateral and multilateral channels. The disputes over the South China Sea remain an ongoing issue for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Other issues discussed also include the role of foreign investment in achieving the country's 2020 goals and both countries' involvement regarding the United Nations Security Council.

The delegation was also given the opportunity to answer questions about Australia's foreign policy regarding the current unrest in the Crimea and Australia's relationship with China.

### **Wednesday 9 April – Hue City**

#### Visit to Hue City

The city of Hue offers visitors a rich source of Vietnamese culture and history. The Nguyen family lived in the area for hundreds of years and in 1802 the city took on a new significance when it became the seat of the Nguyen dynasty. Hue was the capital of imperial Vietnam from this time until the emperor's abdication in 1945.

Among other cultural sites in Hue, the delegation visited the imperial citadel, Dai Noi, located beside the Huong River and enclosed within walls that stretch 11 km around the compound. The citadel, including the Forbidden City inside it, is an important part of Vietnam's history and houses a number of cultural artefacts from imperial times. After our visit to these sites, the delegation was treated to a performance of traditional music on the Huong River.

The cultural sites in Hue sustained a lot of damage during the Vietnam War, given the city's proximity to the North-South Vietnamese border but continuing restorations are helping to ensure that these sites will remain for the enjoyment and education of future generations.

### **Thursday 10 April – Hue City**

#### Meeting with representatives of Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union of Hue Province

The delegation was given an overview of the structure of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union as well as its aims and objectives.

Discussions with the Union were very informative, particularly regarding the organisation required to run such a vast organisation of 95,000 members. The representatives spoke of the challenges in dealing with so many members, including communication concerns and the ability of the organisation to focus and clarify the views of its substantial membership. 'Ideas contests' on various topics (such as tourism or the environment) have proven to be very effective in this regard and have given direction to future policy development. The Union is also embracing social media in addition to its more traditional forms of communication (meetings, events).

Training, employment support and social skill development are offered by the Union to foster education above and beyond the regular educational opportunities available through the school system.

The next generation of Vietnamese entrepreneurs are also supported by the Union through the young entrepreneurs association.

When asked about the level of cooperation among the youth group system in Australia, the delegation indicated that groups could work more closely but organisations like the Australian Political Exchange Council certainly offered a wide range of opportunities for young Australians to develop their skills and build networks among other like-minded young people.



### Visit with Leaders of Hue Province

At the time of our meeting with the leaders of Hue province, the area was preparing for the Hue Festival. The first festival in 2000 was organised with France and celebrated the Hue region. These days the festival also embraces and celebrates cultures from around the world.

Discussions with the Hue leaders provided the delegation with a valuable insight into the inner workings of a local Vietnamese authority.

1.2 million people live in Hue province which contains two towns, six districts and the largest lagoon system in south east Asia.

Tourism is the spearhead economy of the province with two million local tourists and one million foreign tourists visiting the region each year. Sustainable development is a key focus in order to balance tourist demand with the maintenance of ancient architecture and other important historical sites. The area is home to UNESCO world heritage sites such as the Royal Court building and other historical monuments. The leaders spoke of a need for the authority to have a long-term vision for the area to protect the historically and culturally significant sites. They are very aware of balancing conservation with modern development. Part of their strategy is to avoid heavy industry in the province.

The area hosts a sea port that plays an important role in the country's trade with Myanmar, Laos and Thailand. Lighter industries and agriculture (rice, peanuts) also contribute to the area's economy. Hue province is rich in educational and cultural centres (Hue University, University of Agriculture and Forestry, the University of Fine Arts) and boasts the third best health centre in Vietnam.

The leaders also gave the delegation an overview of the political system in the province, discussing how members are selected (by voters of the province) and how often the authority meets.

### **Friday 11 April – Ho Chi Minh City**

#### Meeting with representatives of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union of Ho Chi Minh City

A slideshow by the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union of Ho Chi Minh City supplied the delegation with a useful summary of the Union's activities which included volunteering, social activities and business interests. The Union is financed through membership fees but also receives government subsidies.

Discussions centred on the Union's work with youth employment. The representatives told the delegation about their work with shareholder businesses to help provide jobs for young Vietnamese, as well as the online job search system and small business start-up assistance. Australian government support for the small business start-up program was raised with the delegation in addition to Vietnam's willingness to embrace Australian foreign investment.

#### Meeting with representatives of Youth Newspaper

For almost 20 years, the Ho Chi Minh Community Youth Union has distributed a newspaper that covers everything from the economy, politics and sports to fashion, music and cooking.

Over 500 people work at the newspaper (including 130 contributors) across 19 content departments, along with a dedicated marketing team.

The newspaper has a number of regional bureaus centred on Vietnamese communities in countries like Thailand and Singapore. It is distributed within both the rural and metropolitan areas of Vietnam and its

expatriate readership is substantial; over 800,000 people in places like North America, Australia and the European Union.

The newspaper's online presence is growing, involving an integration of multimedia platforms and bringing in one third of its revenues.

Outside of the office, the newspaper runs charity programs and organises fundraising events. The paper also has a strong focus on youth through its promotion of youth candidates and provision of scholarship support for students.

#### Visit with Leaders of Ho Chi Minh City

The meeting with the leaders of Ho Chi Minh City focused on education and tourism in the area.

The city is very proud of its university, Vietnam National University (one of the largest in the country), which offers many courses including trade, law and economics plus a medical school. The approximately 800 students in the medical school study for six years and then undertake one year of training in another province.

In 2013, the city hosted over four million tourists; an 18 per cent increase on the previous year. Cooperation between the various tourist sites in southern Vietnam provinces has proved very effective in providing the best opportunities for local and international tourists to visit. The challenge remains to provide quality goods and services at a reasonable price.

#### **Conclusion**

The delegation sincerely appreciated the opportunity to be able to take part in such an informative and worthwhile visit to Vietnam. It allowed us to learn more about an important partner in Australia's economic and international relations, knowledge that will no doubt inform each member's experience as they continue their work in Australian politics.