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<th>Media and good governance - opportunities and challenges: perspectives from government</th>
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Mr Chairman,
Distinguished guests and colleagues,

Thank you for allowing me to present my paper at this seminar. Since we convened at the seminar in Phnom Penh last year, there have been a lot of developments in Vietnamese press activities. Media has been the focus of the participation from the government as well as from the people. The National Assembly has approved the amendment of the press law June 1999 confirming the commitment from the Vietnamese government and people. The modified law has enabled the participation of people in media in the coming years.

Transparency: Media is the connection of people

Over the last decades of this century, the leaping advances of science and technology, especially in the field of information, have changed many economies' structure and probably affected cultural and social life of every state. Many of these achievements have been utilized for the sake of humankind, but unfortunately, they have also been misused or abused against humankind.

In Vietnam, along with cultural and social changes, press has actively contributed to wide perspective of people and mutual understanding among nations. As we are entering to the 21st century, there are opportunities and also challenges ahead. The trend of peace and cooperation continues to be enhanced. However, class struggle and national conflicts continue in new formats. The danger of the world war has been pushed back, but arm conflicts occurred from national, religious, territorial contradictions are the unstable factors which seriously threaten security in many areas.

In the meantime, the whole world is facing the globalisation in which information technology develops very fast. Therefore, there must be multilateral cooperation among countries in all domains in the respect of each country national interest and independence.

The side-effects of globalisation

Obvious incidents of the last two years indicated that those impacts could ruin the long and hard-gained achievements and lead to instability. The first victims are countries at lower development level like our three countries in Indochina. At the same time, we faced with greater socio-economic constraints and information explosion as we integrated ourselves into the region and the world. Media, in its capacity, should promote interaction, mutual understanding between peace, security and development to make sure that globalisation will not evolve in the way that is incompatible with the
development needs and levels, specific conditions of each country. Only then media be able to contribute its part to the process of socio-economic development. Only then it can be the painful side effect of this process, namely the widening gap between the rich and the poor, be addressed and equality be secured.

**Challenge: Hunger, poverty and natural disasters are still the biggest in the next century**

By the turn of the century, we have advanced the long way on the civilisation path. However, hunger, poverty and natural disasters remain among the most striking facts and the biggest challenges. Hunger, poverty and natural disasters have not only diminished the living standards of one country or another but becomes an issue of global concern. Hunger eradication, poverty alleviation and natural disasters diminution have become primary issues for the governments, UN agencies, NGO’s and the journalists of these countries.

It is our view that press activities could play an important role in encouraging cooperation among people in developed countries to expand business, to open their own markets and grant preferential trade treatment to developing and less developed countries. Such a contribution from media, it will facilitate each nation’s efforts and gradually and effectively tackle the issue of hunger and poverty.

In this regard, we welcome the idea to organize this seminar in Vientiane. Like other seminars organized in Hanoi and Phnom Penh during in the past years, it is a good opportunity for us to meet again and discuss the role of media in the contribution of socio-economic development in the next millennium.

**People’s participation in government affairs and responsiveness**

People’s participation is not something new. For many years, there exists newspapers in many countries like “People’s Voice”, “People’s Daily” or People’s Radio, Voice of People. In the 90’s, Internet has become the most effective connection of people, journalists and policy makers.

In Vietnam, we have saying “people are the root” and people indeed actively participate in press activities. Many difficulties and issues have been openly discussed on newspapers between people and policy makers. At grassroots level, interpersonal media is also important medium between the government and local people, especially people in the remote areas.

During the renovation process, Vietnam has recorded important achievements. We overcame the economic crisis, which lasted for more than 10 years and gradually integrated into the global and regional development. Annual growth rate from 8-9% in previous years is down by 4 %- 5% in 1999 as economic crisis seriously affected many countries in the region. During this period, Vietnamese press has quickly developed both quality and qualitative.
At present, there are 450 press organizations, 160 daily newspapers and weekly magazines throughout the country. Broadcasting network has also developed. More than 80% of the population listen to Radio "Voice of Vietnam" and 70% of the population watch Vietnam Television. Press technology has been quickly modernized over the past years. By year 2000, 90% and 80% of our population have access to radio and television, respectively.

In face of the market economy, Vietnamese press plays an important role and is the main factor in the social life. Over the last five years, the number of journalists has constantly increased. There are around ten thousand journalists throughout the country. Many of them are young journalists who were formally trained and have good knowledge of modern newspaper technology. They quickly develop their skills and profession. Vietnamese journalists receive formal training from Press Faculty of Ho Chi Minh Political Academy; Press Faculty of Social Science and Humanity University both in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Every year from 300 to 500 people enter these universities. In addition, non-formal press classes are open at these universities or Association of Journalists. Therefore, people can actively participate in press activities. Through media they can express their view and opinion. At the same time, government can assess and review its policy. Media is an important tool for policy makers and people. So it must reflect the policy, law of the government. The objective of media is to contribute to social stability, to improve people's awareness, to safeguard people's tradition and culture. In the recent amendment of press law, we also pointed out the task of journalists. People can rely on media to express their concern and they consider a good source to solve problems. In order to assist people's expression, Vietnamese government has provided good opportunities for journalist in their working environment. As it is clearly stated in the press law that the government has a policy to support budget and create favorable conditions for newspapers to develop. In reality, many local newspapers and broadcasting stations have been established during the renovation process. In this period Vietnamese media has actively and bravely fought corruption and social negative aspects. Vietnamese journalists are more dynamic in the market economy and preserve Vietnamese culture. However, some newspapers publish many sensational stories in order to draw more readers including sensational stories. News distortion and misinformation also happen like in other countries. Advertising is also another issue. Some newspapers publish many advertisements on prohibited products or advertise more than the advertising times according to the regulation. Some of advertisements are not in conformity with traditional value, which can be harmful to the audience.

The participation of women in press activities has been increased constantly since 1990. Among nearly 9000 journalists in Vietnam, there are 2200 female journalists. At present, journalism is considered an attractive profession to many young people. Especially, female students study at journalist schools occupy 2/3 of the students. Women's participation in this aspect contributes to socio-economic development as well as the elimination of negative social aspects. In this regard, the Vietnamese Women's Union plays an important
role in disseminating information to grassroots level, especially in the ethnic minorities areas.

Children participation plays an important role in press activities. The newly established "Young Journalists Club" of Radio Voice of Vietnam involved children from 10-15 years old is very active in expressing children's opinion. Children from this club are able to produce their own radio programs for daily broadcast. This is another contribution to the implementation of the Convention of the Child's rights.

Conclusion

The flow of information is a very crucial factor to the national development. In order to bring the press activities into more effective, it is our task to enhance the quality and social responsibility of journalists. In the Vietnamese context, we are expanding press activities at all levels. Journalists as well as the majority of people are involved in social activities with diversified forms. The flow of information between people and decision makers will bring the success to the national development. It is like two ways communication. Especially, at this stage, we can take advantage of the new and rapid changes in technology and methods and come up with creative applications that can lead to wider communication. People have more access to information and a better view on events happen in the world. Vietnamese journalists wish to maintain international contact with neighbouring friends and the world over. We will strengthen our relationship with colleagues from Laos, Cambodia, China, ASEAN and other countries in the region. Internal flow of information is as important as international flow of information. From this seminar I wish to express our strong confidence in the crucial role of the press in the national development. With this belief, our centre IPCCC welcomes foreign journalists to come to Vietnam. This is our contribution to enhance the people's participation in media and we also pledge to work closely with colleagues in the region to further promote press activities in the 21st century.

Thank you Mr Chairman
Thank you, distinguished guests, for your attention