

PRESS RELEASE

NEW DELHI – February 19, 2008 – A Vietnamese delegation led by Mr. Nguyen Thanh Xuan, Vice Chairman and seven other Members called on the National Commission for Minorities, today.

2. In his opening remarks, the Chairperson drew attention to India's secular ethos and unity strengthened by the common thread of peaceful co-existence and communal harmony despite being a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-racial society. India's policy of religious freedom, equality of rights to all citizens of the country and non-discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth was emphasised. The Special Rights and Safeguards for minorities conferred by the Constitution and unique to this country, were highlighted.

3. The experiences of the Commission as recommendatory body to the Government and its role as the protector of the rights and interests of religious minorities and facilitator of their socio-economic development were shared. The grievance redressal mechanism in place and its efficacy in securing justice and the rights of the minorities in the country also formed part of the discussions.

4. The leader of the visiting delegation gave an account of the religious policy in Vietnam and similarities between India and Vietnam on equality of rights and secularism. He mentioned about the institutional mechanism of Religious Committees to cater to the religious needs of the people.

5. In Vietnam, roughly 15% of total population is of minority communities and there is a specific law on religion and religious freedom. They recognize, nurture and encourage positive values of religion to overcome problems. The Religious Committees play an important role in recommending or giving advice to the Government on religious affairs and implementing State policy. Preservation of cultural heritage and identity of ethnic groups and their development is given priority by the Government.

6. The discussions were held in a cordial and congenial atmosphere and were fruitful. Needless to say such interactions help in strengthening human bonds and relations between nations despite wide disparities in languages culture and religion.

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