REPORT OF VIETNAMESE DELAGATION AT THE FOURTH CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION OF BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

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As soon as the President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity in October 1994, Viet Nam has actively been carrying out its work programmes relating to the implementation of the provisions of the Convention and: coordinated these programmes with other actions to respond to relevant Conventions to which Vietnam has committed as a member country, such as:

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (RAMSAR)
- Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage;
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

At the regional level, Viet Nam also signed the ASEAN Agreement on the Conservation of Biodiversity.

In order to strengthen the national legal framework of the conservation of biological resources, the National Assembly of Viet Nam has issued a number of fundamental laws, as follows:

- Law on Forest Resources Protection and 'Development;
- Law on Land;
- Law on Environmental Protection;

- Ordinance on Fishery Resources Protection;
- Ordinance on Plant Quarantine; and
- Ordinance on Veterinary.

In accordance withthese laws, the Government of Viet Mam has issued many statutes which direct line ministries and authorities at all levels in the adoption of stricter measures to control: the over-exploitation of biological resources and the illegal trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora.

The Biodiversity Action Plan for Viet Nam was approved by the Government of' Viet Nam in December 1995. This is the Plan on which different national economic sectors could. build up a partnership to protect natural resources important for the country. In order to implement the Plan, Viet Nam has carried out:

The conservation -of terrestial biodiversity resources (forests):

* Strengthening and expansion of existing protected areas of forests:

A project of protected area expansion is being under consideration by the Government. This project would in&ease 87 existing protected areas of **952.822** hectares by total (or covering 3% of the national land area) to 101 protected areas of 2.297 571 hectares (accounting for 7% of the national land area).

During field surveys for the expansion and increase of existing protected areas, some more regions with high values of biodiversity which were previously unknown were just discovered by scientists. The Government of Viet Nam. has applied to the UNESCO for the recognition of the two protected areas of Phong Nha- Ke Bang (The Quang Binh province) and Ba Be (The Bac Kan. province) as the world's natural heritage.

Additionally, since 1994 Viet Nam has discovered 4 new species of wild fauna, contributed to au increase of the number of the world's mammal species : Saola (Pseudoryx nghetinhensis) and the Giant muntjac (Megamuntiacus vuquanggensis), the Truong Son muntjac (Canimuntiacus truongsonensis) and the Pu hoat muntjac (Muntiacus puhoatensis).

Recently, the 3 previously extintive thought species of endemic lophura pheasant were found after several decades in the region of the Bach Ma

National Park (the Thua Thien- Hue Province). The 3 endemic species include the white tailed pheasant (Lophura hatinhensis), the black crested pheasant (Lophura imperialis), and the white crested pheasant (Lophura edwardsi).

The scientific discoveries also means that Viet Nam's environment and ecosystems are partly being rehabilitated and that the country's many values of biodiversity could be much potential than previous thought.

Along with the development of the forest protected areas, the Government also has enacted its policy of investment in socio-economic developments in the buffer zones with a view to achieving the stability of focal inhabitants' life and the involvement of their participation in the protection of protected areas. This work is just being implemented in several protected areas and lack of effective experience in the buffer zone management and organisation is facing. Viet Nam on the other hand, thus learning by doing is an option to accumulate the experience.

Halt of lugging in natural forests within the most territory:

During the past many decades, Viet Nam exploited between 1.4 to 1.6 M cubic meters of ground wood to meet the demand of its national economic development, and about 24 M steres of firewood (equivalent to 14,4 M cubic meters of wood) annually. During the 1990s duo to natural forest cover which was dropped to 28,2 percent of the territorial area and because of the roles that natural forests play in the protection of living environment in general and in the conservation of biodiversity in particular, were increasingly aware of by local authorities at all levels, the Government decided to gradually reduce the production. of wood exploited in the natural forests from: 620.000 cu.m in 1996 to 52Q.000 cum in 1997 and to less than 300.000 cu.m /year by 2000. This projected volume of wood is expected to mainly satisfy the demand of wood by local people in regions where forests exist.

Coupled with the measure on reducing loggings from the natural forests, the Government has enforced the substitution of wood by other materials, the halt of timber based comodity exports, and encouraged the consumption of fuel substitues rather than firewood and the utilisation of planted forest products.

- Rehabilitation of some significant ecosystems :

Because of various socio-economic reasons, several sensitive ecosystems were already over-exploited and part of which were seriously damaged, leading to a rapid decline of economic resources and the loss of their watershed protection and environmental protection functions as well. Typically, the mangrove systems of the provinces of Ca Mau and Soc Trang were over- exploited by converting land use for purposes of shrimp culture and wetrice farming. During a period of 5 years, the areas of mangrove forests were reduced from 73.500 hectares in 1990 to 34.700 hectares in 1995 (accounting for about 40% of the 1990 area of mangrove forests).

In order to rehabilitate the over-exploited mangrove forest system, The Government of Viet Nam has approved. the implementation of a socio-economic development project With the goals aiming at rehabilitating the lost forest areas, planning the nearshore watershed protection belt of 27.028 hectares, and building up a buffer zone of 23.708 hectares for purposes of human settlement stabilization and sustainable agriculture development including shrimp cultures, by giving the technical guidance to local farmers. Within the framework of the project, investments are given to five protected areas of wetlands with a migratory bird community.

During the period of 1976-1990, the areas of evergreen broad leaved and semi deciduous leaved forests were also declining rapidly. In 1976, the area of these forests remained 8.337.700 hectares, but it dropped to 5.759.500 hectares in 1990. These types of forests rank the richest level of biological diversity. The rate of natural forest loss generally accounted for about 1.7% per year during this period.

Since 1991, the rate of forest loss has rapidly dropped, accounting for one fourth compared to that of previous decades. The Government has launched a reforestation programme in the watershed protection forest lands and around the protected areas (It is known by the Vietnamese as the 327 programme). Within the programme, every year between 200.000 and 250.000 hectares are afforested. In November 1997, The National Assembly of Viet Nam passed a national programme on reforestation of 5 million hectares of barren land for a period from. 1.998 to 2015. This strategic policy of Viet Nam would contribute to the recovery of the living environment in general, and to the conservation of significant biodiversity values across the country.

Also, since 1991, the Government has approved a national programme on the five year review of forest resources by establishing about 1500 located cells throughout the country in order to track changes in the forest resources as well as to assess. changes in the: terrestial biological resources. This programme has helped the state management agencies follow and make

necessary decisions to respond to the conservation of the forest resources and their biodiversity values.

Conservation of Marine Biodiversity Resources:

Viet Nam has a coastline of 3,200 km, streching within 13 latitudes, and a territorial water of approximately 250,000 sq.km. The nearshore fishery is rather well developed and the production accounts for more than one million tonnes per year. The inland fresh water surface accounts for a total, of 1.400.000 hectares, of which 26% of this surface is already put into use, producing about 200.000 tonnes of fresh fish per year. There are totally 2470 fish species identified.

Due to constraints of technical capacity and investment, fishing mainly relies on nearshore waters leading to the decline of fishing production and the lower bio-productivity per hectare in aquaculture.

The over-exploitation of coastal nearshore waters is coupled with increasingly marine pollution (caused by estuary sedimentation, oil spills from maritime activities and pollutants from industrial wastes, etc.) which have led to the decline of fish production and the loss of habitats or feeding nurseries of several fish species which are threatened to be depleted. But an assessment of this degradation of biodiversity has not yet been implemented.

There is a list of 12 marine protected areas identified and proposed to establish by the; national scientists. These proposed marine protected areas will be considered and approved by the Government to establish as a national system of marine protected areas in 19.98.

Conservation of Wetlands Biodiversity Resources:

Viet Nam endorse many different types of wetlands, including flooding lower lands, estuarine swamps, coastal lagoons, reservoirs, natural water bodies on high mountains, etc. with diverse types of ecosystems where, are habitats and feeding nurseries for a large number of aquatic animal species including fish, amphibians, reptiles, and molluscs, etc. Taking into account the southern coastal swamps of Viet Nam, 60 species of fish, 146 species of molluscs and 107 species of crustaceans are found and many species of waterfowls are not identified.

These wetlands almost occur along the coastline which is closely associated with the territorial planning for coastal economic developments. Several significant wetlands protected areas were already established such as

The Xuan Thuy (Nam Dinh Province) wetland protected area for the conservation of. migratory birds, The Tram Chim (Dong Thap Province) protected area for the protection: of E. Sarus Crane species, and the Dam Doi (Ca Mau Province) protected areas for the conservation of waterfowl and migratory bird species. In order to conserve the wetlands biodiversity, there is a list of 60 wetlands with a 'high value of biodiversity identified and proposed to be the wetlands protected areas by the national scientists. In 1998, a wetlands conservation plan will be submitted to the Government for its consideration within the in&grated national programme of the protected areas.

Conservation **of Genetic** Resources:

Viet Nam has developed a national system of genetic resources conservation_ This system involves 30 scientific research institution and production units in carrying out the conservation of agro-plant and animal, medicinal plants and forest trees genetic resources. So far there are 16 colonies of agro-plants conserved (including crops used for food and foodstuff , industrial plants of short or long day species) with thousands of sample varieties regionally represented and naturally distributed throughout the country.

Viet Nam possesses 3.200 plant species used traditionally for medicines and their usefullness is well known, but of which only 500 species of commercial and medicinal values have been conserved so far. Loss of valuable medicinal herb or plant species is under threat by continuing loss of natural forests that is of a great concern.

For a group of forest trees, the conservation of their genetic resources concentrates in native species of reforestation potential and fast growth, or in extinction threatened species. But others are mainly in-situ conserved in the protected areas.

For a group of domestic, animals, the conservation of their genetic resources focus on the native species of domestic animals and poultry and on preventing the depletion of these species due to their lower productivity and the ignorance by local people.

Though the Government has given due attention to the conservation of genetic resources, but the constraint of financial and technical investments, the lack of a contingent of high qualified staff and the incomplete technical facilities make it impossible to meet requirements for a modern conservation of genetic resources.

Public Awareness Promotion of Biodiversity Conservation :

Since the Law on Environmental Protection came into effect (in January 1994), the public education and awareness of biological diversity value conservation and development have been promoted in the integration with other measures developed for the public education and awareness programmes of the environmental protection. Through mass media, the prorogation of biodiversity conservation has been usually carried out.

Other forms of the public education and awareness include seminars or workshops and short-term training courses with respect to topics of biodiversity conservation, which were organized in different provinces across de country, with a view to strengthening the biodiversity conservation capability of the local scientists and managers.

Most of universities with environment science schools or biology related curricula, have included topics of conservation and sustainable exploitation of biodiversity values in their curricula, or have developed deeply specialized curricula. At initial stage, the conservation of biological diversity is being introduced to the secondary educational programmes.

Much limited awareness of biodiversity conservation is facing a large part of ethnic minority communities living in mountainous areas. The greatest challenge is the lack of an appropriate policy on actual interests shared among communities of ethnic groups living inside or in areas adjacent to the protected areas; and the determination of the rights and obligations that local people are eligible when they involve in the conservation of valuable components of biological diversity for the country. Viet Nam is clearly short of methodologies and practical experiences to address this issue although the Government has more considered and promoted the buffer zone socio-economic developments which recently started and require further experimental time., and moreover' these developments are not expected to cover other issues relating to the short term benefits of local residents and the long-term ones of the country.

International Cooperation

Viet Nam has usually exchanged relevant information with the Secretariat of the Convention and has satisfied all common activities relating to the Convention.

Viet Nam has also strengthened its bilateral and multilateral cooperations with other countries and the international organizations and agencies, such as UNDP, EU, IUCN, UNEP, WWF, FAO, ADB, WB, and GEF, etc., in order to make full use of their financial and technical-~ supports to serve for the purpose of its biodiversity conservation.

Viet Nam has received the GEF's financial assistance funding for the VIE/93/G31coded Project on the training of protected area management staff, the development of Viet Nam Biodiversity Action Plan, and the formulation of biodiversity conservation curriculum for the College of Forestry. The Project has actively contributed to train the management staff at all levels-for Viet Nam. The VIE/95/G41 coded project (Viet Nam PARC) is being under consideration.

At the regional level, Viet Nam has promoted its scientific research cooperation of, exchange of information in and coordination of biodiversity conservation with the ASEAN countries and especially with the two countries, Laos and Cambodia which share boundaries with Viet Nam, where many values of biological'diversity are not discovered.

As previously presented, Viet Narn has been identified as one of the average level of biodiversity in terms of species if compared to other regional countries, but its wildlife is highly endemic and it possesses many values of biological diversity which are still undiscovered in different territorial areas of the country. Viet Nam therefore expect to receive further assistance from the Secretariat, other countries, the international organisations and agencies to strengthen its capability in the conservation of biodiversity through the development of protected areas and the management of the buffer zones, as well as facilitate its surveys, additional evaluation and 'discoveries of new values of Viet Nam's biodiversity through necessary technical. facilities and support.