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EU - Viet Nam Dialogue and Experience-sharing on Religious Diversity and Freedom of Belief and Religions

Ha Noi – A one and a half day international seminar, entitled "Religions and Religious Life in Viet Nam – Sharing Vietnamese and European Experiences in Assuring Freedom of Beliefs and Religions" convened today. The seminar is organized by the Delegation of the European Union to Viet Nam in cooperation with the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, under the EU-Vietnam Strategic Dialogue Facility.

The seminar provides analysis of Vietnam's achievements in promoting and ensuring freedom of belief and religions, the state of play with the definition and the implementation of a legal framework on belief and religions and Vietnam's international commitments in protecting and promoting human rights in the area of freedom of religion. It also shares experience of the diverse religious affairs and secular models in Europe as well as the EU Member States’ efforts in protecting and promoting religious freedom and values.

In the opening speech, Dr. Pham Dung, Vice Minister of Home Affairs- Chairman of the Government Committee for Religious Affairs (GCRA) states that: "Vietnamese Government always respects and assures the freedom of beliefs and religions for citizens, which has been recognized in the Constitution and in legal documents on religions system and has been implemented successfully in life. In recent years, religious activities in Vietnam has been diversified and tended to increase. Religious dignitaries, officials, monks and religious followers have been actively participated in patriotic emulation movements and built "good life, good religions", contributed to the development and protection of Vietnam Fatherland for the purpose of "prosperous people, a strong, equitable, democratic and civilized country".

Speaking about the international seminar, the First Counsellor of the Delegation, Head of the Political, Press and Information Section, Ms. Delphine Malard, said “The EU boasts a diversity of religious and secular models but our principles clearly reiterate the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief as a fundamental right of every human being. In line with universal human rights standards, also subscribed by Vietnam, the EU and its Member States are committed to respecting, protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief everywhere and for everyone. The EU is determined to defend this fundamental right as an integral part of our external policy."

This international seminar is a manifestation of Vietnam’s goodwill in engaging active dialogues with the European Union, to enhance the mutual understanding between the EU and Vietnam in the field of religious affairs and to contribute to the promotion of the Vietnam-EU relations under the Vietnam-EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

At the seminar, the international speakers, including Prof. Marco Ventura from the Faculty of Canon Law of Katholieke University Leuven (Belgium) and Prof. Dr Gerhard Robbers, Director of the Institute for European Constitutional Law at University of Trier (Germany) introduce international treaties on protection and promotion of freedom of religion and belief and present the EU member states’ governments’ efforts in ensuring these freedoms and non-discrimination standards.

The Vietnamese speaker include Dr. Bui Thanh Ha, Vice Chairman of Government Committee for Religious Affairs (GCRA), Dr. Hoang Van Nghia, Deputy Director, Vietnamese Institute of Human Rights, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration, Mr. Truong Van Ty, Director General of Ethnic and Religious Department, Central Highlands Steering Committee, Most Venerable Dao Nhu, Chairman of the Executive Board, Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha, Mr. Nguyen Dinh Thoa, Secretary General of the Spiritual Council, Baha’i religious community, Venerable Thich Gia Quang, Vice Chairman of the General Executive Board, Viet Nam Buddhist Sangha, Mr. Nguyen Huy Diem, Vice chairman of the General Executive Board, Hoa Hao Buddhist, Dr. Hoang Thi Lan, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration.
The seminar attracts more than 100 participants from State Government Agencies: the Fatherland Front, the Central Committee for Propaganda, the Committee for Social Affairs (National Assembly), the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Justice, the Government Committee for Religious Affairs, the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs, the Human Rights Office, representatives of the local religious committees and academia. Apart from the government, the seminar was further attended by dignitaries of religious groups, including the Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Hoa Hao Buddhist, Cao Dai, Islam and Baha’i religion as well as representatives of the diplomatic community.

A similar seminar will be also conducted in the Central Highland of Buon Ma Thuot on 29 and 30 September, with participation by more than 60 representatives of the local religious committees and government officers of more than 15 Southern and Central Highland provinces

Background Information
The EU-Vietnam Strategic Dialogue Facility is a three-year program (2013-2016) funded by The European Union, that aims to support Vietnam’s development through the implementation of activities in areas covered by the EU-Vietnam Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed in 2012.

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