

Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights

PRESS RELEASE

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS (DROI) VISITS TO THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

21-23 February 2017

This week, the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) visited the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to engage in constructive dialogue, to assess the human rights situation, the country's achievements in the field of socio-economic development, to discuss the EU-Vietnam free trade agreement's potential impact in improving the livelihood of the population, including people with disabilities, and also to develop inter-parliamentary dialogue between the EP and the National Assembly of Vietnam in view of sharing experiences.

The EP delegation, headed by Mr. Panzeri, Chair of the DROI Subcommittee and composed of Mr. Lars Adaktusson, Mr. Adam Kosa, Ms Soraya Post, Mr. David Martin and Ms Beatriz Becerra met with the National Assembly's various Committees, government authorities, as well as international organizations, religious groups and non-governmental organisations.

Mr Panzeri, Chair of the EP Subcommittee on Human Rights expressed his appreciation for the open discussions and the hospitality of the Vietnamese authorities and has stated:

"We recognise that Vietnam has made economic and social progress and begun a process of advancing economic and social rights, nevertheless we believe that to be successful in sustainable economic development, it is vital to hold open debates on policy areas, including political rights, freedom of expression, association, religion or belief".

During our open discussion with Vietnamese authorities, we expressed our concern regarding the restriction on freedom of expression. Arrest of bloggers, dissidents, civil society actors, human rights defenders, religious representatives as well as heavy prison sentences and harsh detention conditions go against international human rights conventions as already expressed in the European Parliament resolution adopted in June 2016. We called upon the Vietnamese authority to guarantee fair trials to prisoners, improve detention conditions including by allowing access to their lawyers, families and medical care.

The EU-Vietnam relations are based on the Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (PCA). The PCA as well as the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) are based on commitment to promote and respect human rights. We underscored the strategic importance of these agreements in enhancing human rights of the population and we invited the Vietnamese government to give full attention to the chapter 15 on trade and sustainable development through the adoption and implementation of international Conventions.

We commend Vietnam's ratification of the Convention against Torture and other Cruel and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) while requesting Vietnam to join the moratorium on death penalty as a first step towards abolition.

The delegation has also raised the issue of the global phenomenon of trafficking in human beings and gender - based domestic violence and comment the Government's continuous effort in this regard.

The delegation had a fruitful discussion concerning challenges faced by people with disabilities and on the need to promote a more inclusive society; notably the need to fully implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities.

We believe that NGOs and civil society organisations' activities, covering various issues are an asset as they bring their expertise and grassroots concerns to the attention of elected members' and the government. Fair participation of civil society in public affairs is one of the pillars of a sustainable and democratic society, in line with international standards.

The meeting with human rights activists showed the challenging environment in which they operate, facing harassment, arrests and detentions. In this regard, we reiterate our commitment to support their work and we reiterate the call to put an end to their repression.

We called on the authorities to put an end to religious persecutions and to ensure that newly - adopted law on freedom of religion or belief from November 2016 fully complies with the international standards. We expressed concerns about the registration at the "fatherland front" which excludes independence from the political system ".

He concluded "as our objective is to strengthen a constructive dialogue between the European Union and Vietnam thereby promoting an atmosphere of reciprocal trust for making steps forward in the area of economic cooperation and trade , sustainable development, and human rights, I have submitted a letter to the National Assembly Chair to consider the establishment of a joint parliamentary committee within the framework of the European Parliament Delegation to Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)"