

# The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

## Positions for the General Assembly Plenary

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### **I. Determining Solutions for Marine Plastic Buildup and Microplastics**

Marine plastic and microplastic buildup has long been an underrecognized crisis, but the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam is encouraged that the world is taking notice and taking action. The scale of the problem starts with the production of plastic, which has increased from 1.5 million tons in 1950 to over 300 million tons expected to be produced in 2019. That is a 10,000% increase in 70 years. This has also caused a sharp increase in the formation and prevalence of microplastics, with nearly 300 million microplastic particles released into our environment each year. In order for the world to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and particularly to achieve SDG 14 on protecting life underwater, and SDG 15 on protecting life on land, more must be done immediately to halt the rise in marine plastic buildup and the spread of microplastics.

Viet Nam acknowledges that historically it has been a large contributor to the buildup of marine plastics, but the nation has worked hard to change both policy and behavior. Domestically, Decree No. 38/2015/ND-CP segregated and classified domestic and industrial waste in order to more efficiently capture recyclable plastics. Like many other Member States, Viet Nam is also striving to eliminate single-use plastic bags, which represent one of the biggest contributors to marine plastic pollution. Circular No. 07/2012/TT-BTNMT, issued in 2012, attempts to do just that by providing criteria and procedures for the production and import of environmentally friendly plastic bags in Viet Nam. Viet Nam has also been a member since 2006 of the International Coastal Clean-up, which seeks to “mobilize youth to join efforts to reduce marine debris through clean-up activities.” Viet Nam is also involved in a partnership with the Commonwealth of Scientific and Industrial Research Organizations (CSIRO) as well as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Through partnerships such as these, Viet Nam hopes to assist in research about marine plastics and the development of innovative solutions.

Internationally, Viet Nam has been involved in several efforts to try to stem the tide of marine plastic buildup. Viet Nam has worked in a joint effort with Canada, the European Union, and the United States to create the “Code of Conduct” initiative. This program educates school children and adults on the effects of plastic waste and the importance of waste separation. The program also works towards setting precise and tangible goals for eliminating the use of single-use bottles in work settings and assessing and minimizing corporate plastic waste. Viet Nam has been a key member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ (ASEAN) Bangkok Declaration on combating marine debris in the ASEAN region. As of June of this year, ASEAN member states, including Viet Nam, have adopted several resolutions in an effort to meet the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by their respective deadlines. These resolutions promote private sector engagement by offering various incentives, by increasing efforts to research, develop and apply new scientific practices to combat marine debris, and by increasing public awareness “toward preventing and reducing marine debris”. Viet Nam has also been impressed by efforts by Dutch scientists, working with nongovernmental organization The Ocean Cleanup, to develop a device to scrub plastics from the marine environment. Viet Nam is confident that private-public partnerships will be a vital piece of the solution.

Viet Nam proposes the following solutions for consideration. First, Viet Nam believes that the world must invest more in research and development both to find ways to combat plastics and microplastics entering the marine environment, and to clean up those that are already there. Second, Viet Nam encourages Member States to set up seed funds to allow promising basic research, such as that being carried out by Ocean Cleanup, to come to market in an economically viable manner. Viet Nam also encourages developing Member States to allow scientific laboratories access to their marine environments. Third, Viet Nam proposes a summit, to be held in Hanoi in November of 2020, on the topic of breakthrough developments in plastic and microplastic capture. Finally, recognizing that the world must stop further pollution before cleanup efforts can be effective, Viet Nam proposes that Member States commit to eliminate the production and use of single-use plastic bags by 2030. Relatedly, the United Nations should work with relevant non-governmental organizations, such as greenhub and MARPLASTICCS, on education campaigns on the importance of such changes. If solutions such as these are adopted, we can look forward to a future in which our oceans, rivers, and lakes are once again pristine and free of dangerous plastics and microplastics.

## II. Promoting Social Protection as a Means of Eliminating Poverty

The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam is gratified by the progress the world has made in eliminating poverty, though more work still remains to be done. Economic growth offers one potential solution, but social protection programs can provide much needed immediate relief to those still living in poverty. Over the past 50 years, the world has made significant progress in eliminating poverty on a global scale. In 1970, nearly half of the world's population was living in extreme poverty. In comparison, the world today sees extreme poverty levels hovering at around 10 percent. The idea of the use of social protection is rooted in the history of the United Nations' (UN) efforts to eradicate poverty. Viet Nam strongly supports A/RES/62/205, which reiterates the UN's commitment to the eradication of poverty. This message could not be any clearer than in the decision to make the very first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), SDG 1, about "end[ing] poverty in all its forms everywhere." The use of social protection programs such as social welfare and insurance programs, health-care policies, and comprehensive frameworks for labour market policies have already helped millions of people worldwide in terms of poverty relief, and can continue to further reduce global poverty.

Viet Nam has seen rapid economic growth over the past thirty years, and has chosen to reinvest the proceeds of that growth into social protection programs. In 2015, 6.61% of our GDP was spent on such programs. One such program, for example, has already helped over 8.4 million impoverished and underemployed Vietnamese citizens by providing low-interest loans from the Viet Nam Federal Bank. These loans are used in a variety of ways: providing poor students with a means to get an education, providing sanitary and healthy drinking water to low income families, and allowing under-educated people access to vocational training. Viet Nam has implemented a minimum wage to help ensure that people are paid appropriately for their labor. Viet Nam also works to assist the unemployed through its unemployment insurance program. Over the past five years, Viet Nam has also worked closely with the Asia Pacific career Development Association to develop free state-run career advising (SRCA). In addition to employment-related programs, Viet Nam has recently made great strides in other social protection areas. For example, as of 2016, 77% of the Vietnamese population is covered under a health insurance plan. Viet Nam is also implementing resolution 80/ NQ-CP, that focuses upon sustainable poverty reduction towards ethnic minorities that has been unfortunately slowly progressing out of poverty.

Still, Viet Nam recognizes that even with that level of progress, it is unacceptable to have so many of our citizens suffering with the harms of poverty. Director General of Social Affairs, Huong Thi Lan Nguyen, has stated, "In the coming years, poverty reduction in Viet Nam will be more challenging, requiring more effort from the government, the society, and the poor themselves... Viet Nam needs to move forward in a number of important areas..." One of the ways that Viet Nam is looking to move forward in ending poverty is by implementing social protections. According to the UN, Viet Nam has continually been implementing "...various poverty reduction programs, to improve living conditions, increase access to lands, health insurance, etc." As well as seeking to bring more opportunities for education for their children, bring equality to ethnic minorities, and help disabled persons.

Viet Nam proposes the following solutions to help move the world closer to eradicating poverty. First, Viet Nam would like to see broader international expansion of SRCA in all areas with a population of more than 1000 people per 10 square km. Such a program could be conducted under UN auspices, funded by Member State contributions and from World Bank general funds. These SRCA programs would need to be adapted to fit unique Member State circumstances, but offer a strong return on investment for social protection spending. Second, Viet Nam encourages Member States to partner with the World Health Organization and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in the healthcare field to offer free or subsidized non-surgical medical care for children. NGOs such as Children of Vietnam have successfully implemented such programs in Viet Nam and improving the health and well-being of children is both a moral imperative and a necessary step in addressing broader poverty issues. Finally, Viet Nam calls on Member States to consider improving food security for rural citizens as a vital part of the social protection arena. During the 2017 ASEAN summit, leaders pledged to help agriculture companies improve efficiency and yield by providing these farms and agricultural firms with funding and the necessary training to become more efficient. Since that measure was passed, Viet Nam and other ASEAN members have seen steady decreases in the percentage of the populations experiencing undernourishment. Viet Nam encourages other member states to enact similar pledges and policies in an effort to decrease hunger around the world. The funding for such a measure would come from member dues and the Food and Agriculture Organization. Successfully eliminating hunger around the world, having medical care and schooling requirements for children, and/or career advising programs would all help make significant strides forward in social protections aimed at eliminating poverty.