

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN
IN LIBERATION STRUGGLE, MAINTAINING PEACE AND SECURITY
AND THE ROLE OF THE VIETNAM WOMEN UNION IN PROMOTING
AND ENSURING WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

Vietnam Women's Union

I. The contribution of women and VWU in liberation struggle, security and peace keeping

In the war, Vietnamese women, like any other compatriot, would be ready for joining the battlefield or doing logistics supports with the aspiration of protecting national sovereignty, independence and freedom. The impressed picture of a small and young guerrilla girl, holding high her rifle against the big prisoner of war; the army of long hair soldiers or the spirit of readiness for fight against invader by women etc. have demonstrated the important role of Vietnamese women in peace keeping, protesting against the war.

The Vietnam Communist Party has understood thoroughly the situation of women as well as their role, which stated “women form essential revolutionary force. The struggles could not achieve great success without their participation” and the fact proved that women have promoted their roles, revolutionary capacity as well as the patriotic tradition of Vietnam.

As the war ended, women actively participate in the movements for the protection of national security; reinforcing the national independence; for example “all people's movement for the protection of national security in the new era”. Women's role in peace keeping is demonstrated through the Union activities such as:

1. Exchange with and assistance to military units which base in localities;
2. Learning about the comradeship with the people living in remote areas such as in along the border-line or islands.
3. Raising awareness against distorted allegations and sabotage activities of reactionary and hostility forces.
4. Encouraging the eligible young people to enlisted to military service
5. Detecting problems relating to security in residential as well as border-lines areas; advising on solutions.
6. Supporting families with war veterans and invalids or people who made great service to the nation
7. Condemning behaviors that are harmful or have the potential to harm national security and social order; preventing and combating against social evils.
8. Organizing women clubs or groups by themes such as "Club of Women who do not have husbands or children committing crimes", "Club of Women who do not have husbands or children addicted to drugs", "Club of Women who encourage husbands or children to enlist to rehabilitation center and getting rid of re-addicted", "Club of Women assisting each other with rehabilitation", "Club of the sympathetics", "Peaceful villages and happy families", "Progressive parishes", "Club for Education of Children on getting rid of social evils"...

In the regional and international contexts, as have been suffering many losses and painful experiences of the war, Vietnamese women, more than any one else, fully understand the

pains and difficult-to-imagine consequences left by the bloody war, don't want those devastating consequences happen again to people, especially to women and children in other countries, therefore Vietnamese women express their position and desire to maintain peace and protest against the war through campaigns and call for support urged by the Vietnam Women Union. One example that can be cited here is the movement urging for the end of the blockage, embargo upon the peoples of Cuba, Iraq, and the support for the legitimate fight for peace, independence and sovereignty of the peoples, including the Palestine people and women of the Vietnamese women.

Vietnamese women are actively in extending helpful attitudes towards people and women from other countries that affected by national insecurity and political instabilities; to express the peace and freedoms loving spirit the Vietnamese women has made a 20 metres long piece of fabric with many images expressing the will and love towards peace and live at the Fourth Global Summit of Women held in Beijing, People's Republic of China in 1995.

II. The roles of the Vietnam Women's Union in the promotion and protection of fundamental rights of Vietnamese women

Since its establishment in 1930, the activities of Women's Union and women movements always associated with historical events of the country. And VWU had very important role and made great contributions to the success of the national liberation and development.

As a social - political organization which is founded with historical mandates, that are to mobilize, represent and protect the rights and legitimate interests of women, over the last 79 years, the Vietnam Women Union has improved its significant roles in the promotion and protection of fundamental rights of women in all spheres of live and family, especially since 1975 up to now.

1. Role of the VWU in promotion and protection of the political rights of women:

- Recommends the minimum rate for female deputies to the National Assembly for each National Assembly election, and the recommendation is adopted by the National Assembly;
- Organizes training programs for women on the citizen's rights to vote, to choose the representatives for them and organizes activities to lobby female constituents to participate actively in elections of the National Assembly, of the People's Councils at different levels;
- Actively disseminates legal provisions on the voting of National Assembly and People's Council members, and presents female candidates, recommends the rate of female candidates in campaigning process;
- In coordination with the National Committee for the Advancement of Women to organize training workshops and programs for female candidates for the National Assembly and People's Councils membership, with the focus on those candidates who are running for the membership for the first time. At the same time, organizes training programs for female deputies and female People's Council members after winning the election.
- In coordination with the National Committee for the Advancement of Women, line agencies and international organizations to prepare, print and disseminate materials, and guidance for women to participate in activities of elective bodies, to train the leadership and management skills. At the same time, organize training programs to strengthen the capacity and knowledge for the female staff;

- Organizes every year a meeting of female deputies of National Assembly to report to them the operation of VN Women Union and to gain their support and assistance for those issues relating to women and gender objectives;

Those above mentioned activities have contributed to the increase female proportion in the Party, elective bodies (the National Assembly, People's councils) and in national and local managerial and leadership positions (People's Committees, different ministries, political-social organizations).

2. The roles of the VWU in promotion and protection the economic and labour rights of women:

- Utilizes fundings from bank's credit programmes, poverty reduction projects, national job promotion funds within the inter-agency framework to help women pursue their financial well-being. For poor women, the Union has launched the campaigns "Women helping each other in developing house-hold economy" and "Saving days for women" or acted as guarantors to help women obtain loans. So far, the total funds including those being directly controlled by the Union and trusted funds have amounted to thousands of billion of VND, thus granting loans to over **5 billion** women in the form of collective loans and credits. Particularly, the Union has attached importance to mobilizing available financial resources in the community to provide substantial support to poor women through collective loans, credits as well as rotating loans programmes... About 65% of the women have done successful business. The debt-clearance rate is 95-100%.
- Signed inter-agency agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in technological transfer to help rearrange economic structure and improve knowledge for women in doing business.
- Helps train skills and improve knowledge in business management for female enterprise owners and managers. Assists in establishing networks among female enterprise owners and managers, which have developed from the scale of clubs to Associations. Through projects and cooperation programmes with international partners, the Union has partially granted loans for some clubs to buy equipments, materials for its activities. These programmes have also given opportunities for the Vietnamese women entrepreneurs to promote cooperation with some NGOs, international female entrepreneurs as well as other partners.
- In coordination with the VCCI, the Support Center for SMEs of the Vietnam Cooperative Union, the Consumer Association, the Information Centre of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, nominated some women entrepreneurs to participate in international and national fairs and exhibitions. Some women entrepreneurs have gained access to American, German, Thailand, Indian, and Singaporean ...markets and helped introduce businesswomen to their partners in France, Germany, Canada and Italia...

These activities have helped women and female entrepreneurs to obtain financial resources and knowledge to establish and develop fruitful business. The Union has contributed to ensuring law enforcement and participated in efforts of the State in poverty reduction, job creation, income generation, improving gender equality and women's economic rights.

3. The Women Union's role in ensuring the rights to education and training for women:

- Encourages mothers to have their children attend schools at the right age and assist poor households to enable drop-out girl students resume schooling.
- Organizes basic training courses in various areas to help women improve their knowledge, maintain moral, cultural and traditional values while providing opportunities for them to participate in social activities, thus improving their status in the family and gender equality. Besides, the Women Union has also encouraged women to find their own ways in improving knowledge so as to exercise in a good manner their rights and duties as citizens and know how to protect and develop themselves, their families, contributing to protect and develop the society.
- In coordination with the educational sector and border army forces, organizes illiteracy elimination classes for women and children to provide them opportunities to work for the sake of themselves, their families and the society.
- Establishes vocational centers coupled with employment promotion in three areas and localities; hold vocational trainings to pass on traditional skills at village and community levels; cooperate with General Department for vocational training to train disable women and women in areas that lack agriculture land. At the same time, bring together vocational centers and businesses to promote employment, labor supply.

4. The role of WU in promoting and ensuring the right to healthcare and other women rights

- Closely cooperates with public health sector to hold gynecology examinations for women, disseminates information and organizes activities on healthcare, care for women with pregnancy and infants. Improving the child raising methods was also given much attention. At the same time, establishes a model that incorporate family planning with bank's credit program, club for women with no third child...
- Signed joint agreement with MPS on crime and social problems prevention; cooperates with Ministry of Health, MOLISA and other related agencies to actively implement activities on social problems prevention, especially prostitution, drugs, women and children trafficking and HIV/AIDS prevention. Main activities include organizing media campaign, seminar to share experiences among countries sharing borderline with Viet Nam, establishing women clubs on social problems preventions; taking part in supervising and monitoring of female drug addicts in the community; organizing activities that provide assistance for reintegrated prostitutes and trafficked women to pursue economic well-being through loans and employment creation; uncovering and preventing women and children trafficking. The Union also implements and promotes dissemination, the use of condom to prevent the infection of HIV/AIDS as women is highly vulnerable to and most affected by HIV/AIDS.
- Established foreign marriage support centers and legal adviser centers to provide guidance, support and given priority to women in enjoying their right to self-identity.
- Supports women in pursuing prosperous, equal, advance and happy life. The Union has also launch many emulation movements "Women actively studies, works and builds happy families". At the same time, identified building a prosperous, equal, open-minded and happy family was one of six most important focuses of the Union. The Union at all level has focus on organizing activities to cultivate knowledge on maintaining family life, healthcare, raising children, knowledge on social problems and domestic violence prevention. Thousands of competition on parenting, child's health; happy family were organized at all level for couples and families. Through these activities, the Union has greatly contributed to the campaign to build civilized families.

- Organizes various activities to prevent domestic violence such as media campaign, provide materials, trainings for reporters and community on domestic violence.

To assist in ensuring the rights of women, beside abovementioned role, VWU has clearly demonstrated its representative roles in drafting policies, laws to ensure that these rights are acknowledged in legal documents and are implemented in practice. The Union has proposed to revise, supplement or newly issue suitable for each phase, such as provisions in Chapter X of Law on Labor, Law on Marriage and Family, Law on Gender Equality, Law on Social Security, Law on Health Insurance and guideline.

Through its activities, the Union has actively contributed to the emancipation of women and to enhance their participation in the development of society.

We can say that, the role and contribution of the Union in promoting and ensuring the rights of women in all area has not just assisted women in effectively realizing their rights and fulfilling their obligations but also enhance the role and credibility of the organization in the field of economic, social and national defense and gradually improve the cooperative relations among all level of the union and ministries. Overtime, the role of the Vietnam Women Union was recognized in the society and in international arena.